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RELATIONS



TUNISIA’S REVOLUTION: WOMEN’S ACTIVISM AND THE
REALIZATION OF PROGRESSIVE IDEALS
MASTER'S THESIS

NAOURES GHOZLANI

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Thesis Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Zafer ÇELER

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The defense date of the thesis titled “Tunisia’s Revolution: Women Activism and the Realization of Progressive Ideals” prepared by Naoures Ghazlani was made on 17/01/2025 and it was accepted as the Master’s Thesis of the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the Postgraduate Education Institute of Istanbul Kent University by unanimous vote by the jury given below.

Jury Members Signature

Advisor

Assist. Prof. Dr. Zafer Çeler

Member

Prof. Dr. Ozan Örmeci

Member

Assist. Prof. Onur Yamaner

Approved by the decision of the Board of Directors of Istanbul Kent University Graduate Education Institute dated and numbered

.....

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bülent DEMİR

Director of the Institute of Postgraduate Education

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NAOURES GHOZLANI

17/01/2025

PREFACE

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFTR	: The association of Tunisian Women For Research on development
ATFD	: Tunisian Association of Democratic Women
CEDAW	: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CREDIF	: The Center for Research, Studies, and Documentation on Women
CNFPA	: The Tunisian National Council for Women, Family and the Elderly
CSO	: Civil Society Organization
FEDETT	: Federation of Tunisian Women
FIDH	: International Federation for Human Rights
HAICA	: Audiovisual Independent High Authority for the Establishment of Media
HRJ	: Human Rights Journal
HOR	: The House of Representatives
ISIE	: The Independent High Authority for Elections
IGCF	: Intergovernmental Cooperation Framework
LGBTQI	: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex
MFFE	: Ministry of Women and Family Affairs
MENA	: Middle East and North Africa
MFES	: Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors
MoJ	: Ministry Of Justice
MWFC	: The Ministry of Women, Family, and Children
MP	: Prime minister
NCA	: The National Constituent Assembly
NOW	: National Office of Women
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization
PSC	: Personal Status Code
PR	: Proportional Representation
PSL	: Private Status Law
UNC	: Tunisian Constitutional Union
UNFT	: National Union of Tunisian Women
UGTT	: Tunisian General Labor Union

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ABSTRACT

Istanbul Kent University Postgraduate Education Institute

Tunisia's Revolution : Women's activism and the Realization of progressive ideals

Naoures Ghozlan

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The Jasmine Revolution of 2010 was launched by widespread government corruption and socio-economic issues, and it was also a call for reform in the political sector. Mohamed Bouazizi's tragic death on December 17, 2010 is the catalyst behind deep frustrations over unemployment, gender inequality, censorship, human rights violations, and cover-ups. Public unrest followed from free expression stifled by the control of the Ben Ali regime over social media. It gave power to the revolution, and one of its central cries was 'bread, liberty, national dignity.' In this thesis, there will be a study of the Jasmine Revolution's effect on democratization and women's political participation. The research applies feminist institutionalism to study how the revolution influenced gender equality, women's autonomy, and political involvement in Tunisia. It examines disruptive barriers to true gender equality from the historical power structures and social norms that prevented real progress and the revolution's ability to break down such barriers. It is about how the revolution refurbished the debate over gender roles and women's empowerment, changing constitutions and women's involvement in politics. It analyzes how gender politics, political institutions, and policy reforms in Tunisia have reshaped women's role in Tunisian society. This research explores the bond between entrenched gender norms and political institutions and their repercussions on policy-making and female's political participation. The study adds new theoretical insights to an appreciation of the gendered contours of the Arab Spring, especially in Tunisia. It locates both gender and democracy as central factors in political change. By providing insights into the problems and progress of gender equality in post-revolution societies, these formulations have significant repercussions for the Arab world.

Keywords: Democracy, Feminist Institutionalism, Modernization, State feminism, Tunisian Revolution, Women Activism

ÖZET

İstanbul Kent Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü
Tunus Devrimi: Kadın Aktivizmi ve İlerici İdeallerin Gerçekleştirilmesi

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

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2010 Yasemin Devrimi, yaygın hükümet yolsuzluğu ve sosyo-ekonomik sorunlar nedeniyle başlatılmış ve siyasi sektörde reform çağrısında bulunulmuştur. Mohamed Bouazizi'nin 17 Aralık 2010'daki trajik ölümü, işsizlik, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği, sansür, insan hakları ihlalleri ve örtbas edilen sorunlara duyulan derin hayal kırıklığının tetikleyicisi olmuştur. Ben Ali rejiminin sosyal medya üzerindeki kontrolü nedeniyle ifade özgürlüğünün bastırılması, halkın huzursuzluğunu artırmış ve devrime güç kazandırmıştır. Devrimin temel sloganlarından biri "ekmek, özgürlük, ulusal onur" olmuştur. Bu tezde, Yasemin Devrimi'nin demokratikleşme ve kadınların siyasi katılımı üzerindeki etkileri incelenecektir. Araştırma, devrimin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, kadınların özerkliği ve Tunus'taki siyasi katılımı nasıl etkilediğini incelemek için feminist kurumsalcılığı uygulamaktadır. Tarihsel güç yapıları ve sosyal normların gerçek toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini engelleyen bozulmalarını ve devrimin bu engelleri aşma yeteneğini değerlendirmektedir. Devrimin toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve kadınların güçlenmesi konusundaki tartışmayı nasıl yenilediği, anayasal değişiklikler ve kadınların siyasete katılımını nasıl şekillendirdiği ele alınmaktadır. Çalışma, Tunus'taki toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları, siyasi kurumlar ve politika reformlarının kadınların toplumdaki rolünü nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini analiz etmektedir. Bu araştırma, köklü toplumsal cinsiyet normları ile siyasi kurumlar arasındaki bağlantıyı ve bunların politika yapımı ile kadınların siyasi katılımı üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Çalışma, Arap Baharı'nın toplumsal cinsiyet boyutlarına, özellikle Tunus'ta, yeni teorik bakış açıları sunmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet ve demokrasiyi siyasi değişimin merkezi faktörleri olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Devrim sonrası toplumlarda toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin sorunları ve ilerlemesine dair içgörüler sağlayarak, bu değerlendirmeler Arap dünyası için önemli sonuçlar doğurmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, Feminist Kurumsalcılık, Modernleşme, Devlet Feminizmi, Tunus Devrimi, Kadın Aktivizmi

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Jasmine Revolution, characterized by the series of democratization following the authoritarian regimes across the MENA region, became a great hope among those seeking reform and realizing their progressive ideals. The hope of the autocracy crumbling and leading to Tunisia as a leading country was a remarkable example of the bankruptcy of autocracy. Despite the significant challenges women face in the quest for a democratic and peaceful society, the future of such a society should be shaped by them. Amid the Tunisian uprisings of 2011, specific calls for women's participation were made early on; this placement had the effect of both mainstreaming and legitimizing the demands for political change, which raised critical questions: did this transformative moment truly lead to a lasting change? or did the entrenched barriers surfaces with the new forms?. In this sense, the research will go deep into the position that women hold within the process of democratic state-building, one of the central pillars constituting the creation of democracy in Tunisia through women's participation. For instance, This research seeks to answer: What are the changes and developments that the Arab Spring has brought up in women's political participation in Tunisia?. There are interrelated areas on the multiple dimensions of women's rights and democratic governance that experience differences, even though they are interrelated. This research will also reveal the transitional phase, which will alleviate barriers and opportunities that would facilitate the establishment of a democratic society. In another sense, it helps to produce discourses on political equity with a spotlight on the impact of women in making progress in social justice. The findings of this study in Tunisia and around the world will help women in politics and feminist initiatives. This research has an extraneous backdrop of being a catalyst to the Arab Spring, an upending of entrenched power structures. This case highlights the importance of addressing gender inequality as a crucial step towards achieving stable and long-lasting democracy. Despite that, this work seeks to offer a broad investigation of women's citizen engagement both in the formal arena and in grassroots organizations after the revolution in Tunisia. Thus, gender equality has been facing a tumultuous process, and the beginning of jubilation after the Arab Spring is witnessing how, despite benefits such as the thawing of patriarchal norms restricting women's effective participation in politics, women continue to face barriers. Therefore, it tackles the interface between societal attitudes, laws, and biases that maleate gender inequality in Tunisian politics. This thesis aims to convey the progression in Tunisian women's politics in the years of the Arab Spring through comprehensive analysis and evidence. The key intention of this

research is to examine women's liberties and electoral empowerment in Tunisia after the revolution. This study aims to guide policy changes and endorse advocacy for women's equality by analyzing women's political participation since 2011. It will use data from previous studies. The literature on women's rights and political participation in Tunisia recounts a complex interdependent interplay between the state policies of managing politics, radical social activism, and legislative reforms, heavily shaped by the broader political dynamics of the Arab Spring. Valentine M. Moghadam and Mounira Charrad discuss the 'state feminism' model of Tunisia under the Ben Ali regime, where women's rights progress was positive but often occurred for a minority of women aligned with state interests. The form of feminism represented by this top-down, state-led reform helped advance some. Still, it limited the wider autonomy of grassroots feminist movements and neglected important parts of women's rights. For Tunisia, the Arab Spring was a historic moment, leading to structural change that allowed more women's political activism and the opening of social reforms. According to Moghadam, an opportunity for gender equality advocacy opened in the post-2011 era, but new obstacles to this goal uniformly have also emerged. Amel Grami and Susan Waltz go further, describing how the revolution and the revolutionary momentum it gave Tunisia created a wave of reforms that are still progressive but remain contested over questions of gender parity, inheritance laws, and political representation. This literature is focused on the Personal Status Code in Tunisia and the legal reforms that followed. Central to understanding the historical roots and more recent developments of these reforms are Mounira Charrad's studies of family law and its implications for women's social status. Waltz and Grami offer a careful analysis of enduring debates and challenges regarding the rights of inheritance and equal representation, observing that while Tunisia's approach to women's rights is by no means secure, less than a quarter century after the revolution, their approach to women's rights remains a contested space where traditional and progressive forces continue to make contradictory contributions to the outcomes. This literature highlights both the achievements and the ongoing struggles in advancing women's rights within Tunisia's political framework, setting the groundwork for exploring what the Arab Spring has brought about in terms of the political participation of women in Tunisia and what changes and developments they have brought. This study is particularly relevant to understanding Tunisia's emergent gender politics in the context of evolving democratic development and within gaps in existing scholarship on grassroots participation and institutional obstacles. The content will be divided into four main sections to appropriately and simply explain the topic in detail. Chapter 1 will place women's modernization and rights in Tunisia in a historical context that traces from the era of the first

president, Habib Bourguiba, to the Ben Ali regime. This chapter first analyzes how the initial steps to modernize women's place in society laid a base for further progress while they were severely challenged. These reforms show the double effect of women's status advancement on the one hand and the imposition of restraint on the other. The chapter also analyzes the relationship between democracy and gender parity as a mutually reinforcing process and the effects of the Tunisian Revolution on women's rights. It then discusses to what extent social class impacts Tunisian women's availability to rights, showing how the uneven economic and social distribution between women of diverse levels of social and economic classes also creates differences in the realization of these rights in different strata of Tunisian society. Chapter 2 will examine women's political participation in Tunisia, with attention to how they have been able, as well as forced, to participate in politics and with a lack of legal frameworks and rights. It reviews the institutional and constitutional special provisions that secure women's right to engage in political processes and to hold positions and sets forth the current situation and the continuing obstacles women face. Moreover, the chapter evaluates Tunisia's electoral laws comprehensively, ranging from voting age, eligibility requirements, and the design of electoral systems to mediating women's political participation. Moreover, the chapter describes important socio-cultural, socio-economic, structured gender stereotypes and effective social norms that prevent women from participating in politics. Introducing cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and educational and information access all combine to block women from politics. In this way, the chapter illuminates the dynamic relationship between policy, social expectations, and the unfinished business of gender equality in Tunisian politics. Chapter 3 will deal with the question of state feminism in Tunisia and how the history of its development relates to gender justice and the empowerment of women. It grabs attention towards the benefits of state feminism, such as more gender equality and empowered women, coupled with the protection of women's rights by law. However, the chapter also examines the limitations and criticisms of state feminism. It is limited in scope, sometimes used instrumentally to further political gain, fails to be intersectional, and marginalizes some groups. Moreover, the chapter analyzes the contribution of feminist movements at the grassroots level in promoting gender equality and challenging state-led initiatives. This discussion explores how grassroots movements can complement rather than replace state feminism and how they critique it, enacting alternative perspectives and calling for greater inclusivity. This chapter delivers a well-rounded perspective on the achievements and criticisms of state and grassroots feminism in Tunisia. Chapter 4 investigates how women are transforming Tunisia during the Arab Spring and the difficulty of and progress toward women's leadership in the post-Tunisian Revolution

political landscape. The first part of the analysis traces the historical background from the pre-revolution era to the aftermath of the independence period until the Jasmine Revolution. However, this background allows us to analyze the influence of the Dignity Revolution on fostering female political engagement, giving prominence to the emergence of various institutional frameworks such as the key body for the Ministry of Women, Family and Children and the Tunisian National Council for Women, Family, and the Elderly. Then, in the chapter, the tangible outcomes of the Jasmine Revolution for women, namely political rights and representation and the persisting challenges, are also explored. Despite these gains, various sociopolitical barriers and scant support of women's political agency remain obstacles to full participation. Chapter 4 also analyzes the complex legacy of the Arab Spring for Tunisian women, demonstrating both which struggles were overcome and which remain to be achieved. In the concluding chapter, this study will show how democratic progress is stimulated through inclusive political participation and will concentrate on the relationship between democratic progress and gender dynamics in Tunisia. This concluding chapter reflects on the evolving relationship between Tunisia's democratic experience and women's political participation during the Arab Spring. Because of the fluidity of Tunisian democracy, we propose new directions for research that confront contemporary challenges and strengthen gender equality. This chapter also discusses progress and setbacks in women's political life post-Arab Spring through a gender lens, building on the findings and analyzing success and change by key indicators.

Specific actions are outlined to support sustained progress toward greater gender equality in Tunisia's democratic framework, including practical recommendations for improving gender equality in the country's democratic framework. This chapter also reflects on opportunities to further our understanding of Tunisia's specific political landscape and the forces shaping women's role there. Focusing on transformations and progress in women's political engagement in post-Arab Spring Tunisia, the study draws on feminist institutionalism as a framework. Before delving into the analysis of gender dynamics within political systems, it is necessary first to discuss two prominent feminist theories: liberal and radical feminism. The answers provided by different feminist approaches are likewise different lenses in which gender inequalities in the international relations arena can be seen. According to liberal feminism, individual empowerment and equal access to resources greatly help us achieve positive change. And they fight to ensure girls are educated, to uplift women's reproductive rights and economic empowerment, and the abolition of all culturally discriminatory practices. But the most critical of all is radical feminism, which sees the international system as inherently

patriarchal and seeks to overturn it. Militarism, capitalism, and the global power orders in which a hierarchy of power is built perpetuate male dominance, so they argue in favor of abolishing these structures, reorganizing exploitative economic models, and the proclamations of feminist values. In contrast to liberal feminism, which seeks to achieve equality within the present social and political systems, or radical feminism, which demands a radical change that abolishes patriarchal structures, institutional feminism insists on adopting existing legal and political frameworks to challenge gender inequality. Institutional feminism is another form of liberal feminism, which, like the incremental approach, works to change the status quo within current institutional structures. However, it differentiates itself by dealing directly with institutions to change policies and practices without necessarily demanding the wholesale change that radical feminism does. Institutional feminism is a builder leveraging the power of built systems to make lasting changes in built systems while being flexible to systemic constraints. They analyze international institutions, treaties, and customs law as generators of security, trade, and development inequalities. They call for reform through gender inclusion, gender-equitable policies, and female participation in decision-making. These disparate approaches, which aim at institutional reform, individual empowerment, or system change, all work toward the same goal: gender equality. Understanding the different dimensions of these complex realities will enable more accurate analysis and an even more effective and longer-term strategy for change in international systems. This is because feminist institutionalism can illuminate the complex mechanisms at work within institutions during political upheaval and leadership feminization. In particular, it provides a detailed look at gender dynamics in formal and informal institutions that are spread in society, such as government bodies, political organizations, laws and norms, and civil society groups. On the other hand, a feminist institutionalist considering the power of intersectionality for narrating social changes such as gender equality and disparity in revolutions enriches our frame and detail of the study. It demonstrates how various factors, such as poverty, ethnicity, religion, and geography, influenced women's roles during the revolutionary period. It's worth mentioning that this thesis will look from the lens of Feminist Institutionalism. Above all, This theory focuses on how institutions, like laws and social norms, can change in ways that give women more power. Moreover, according to the aforementioned theory of feminist institutionalism, the developments post-revolution in Tunisia are analyzed, which include legal reforms, the formation of institutions catering to foster gender equality, and also changes to the trends of social attitudes. The research relies on feminist institutionalism and conducts a comprehensive study of women's transformative functions during the Jasmine Revolution in the context of

evolving institutions. The Tunisian Revolution is one of the exceptional cases that required investigating how capable the pioneering female modern ideas, specified early in the Republic period, were in handling the change into real instruments. Feminism broadens our perspective on the intersection of societies and institutional mechanisms, whereas feminist institutionalism directs our investigation into those conventions. In the following chapters, our academic period begins with a broad and detailed examination of several facets of Tunisia's historical landscape. This research will explore the process of evolution of feminist movements, analyze the complicated political system that followed the Tunisian Revolution, and scrutinize how some crucial policy adjustments have further shaped the status of women at all levels in Tunisian society. This research project's essence consists of the creation of a detailed considered view of political transition and social evolution, though all the emphasis is on how women's empowerment will be enhanced during the revolution; it necessitates a mixed methods approach both because of the multifaceted nature of the post-revolution Tunisia landscape as well as the need to manage the awareness of the humanitarian crisis that threatens to undermine a better future of Tunisia. The intricate details revealed by a comprehensive documentary and the ability to quantify trends through qualitative and quantitative methods strengthen the methodological foundation. These methodologies facilitate gaining breadth and depth of understanding of the issue that would be hard to obtain simultaneously with either method alone. In short, qualitative methods will enable this research to explore the intimate narratives, reasons, and subtleties of women's involvement in the issue. Statistical surveys will allow us to spot outlines, correlations, and linkages among more respondents, making the hypothesis more relevant and the data collected more solid. After all, the Tunisian Revolution has initiated in women's lives; a mixed-methods regime helps to show both sides of the coin, the detail of the lived experiences and the relevant quantitative data required for meaningful conclusions. Therefore, this research will offer a complete and clear analysis of the attempts to relate theory and practice regarding women's roles and political labor in post-revolution Tunisia. This study provides valuable insights and contributes to the public's comprehension on the status of Tunisian women in the Arab Spring. It examines women's employment experience, which comprises struggle, social constraints, problems, and prospects in the face of the instability of the political environment, barring societal expectations and feminist movements. Based on collective documentary data and influenced by feminist political functions and institutional frameworks, it emphasizes the relevance of institutional support for women's participation and the advancement in states and roles after the Arab Spring in all fields, as it also helps to boost more female political participation and a deeper connection to the labor force integration,

Thereby diminishing patriarchal attitudes and values. An investigation into complex relationships involving these two essential constructs in the situation of Tunisia, this investigation makes a highly original contribution to the field of gender and democracy dynamics. Despite this, it is unique in its design, which concentrates on Tunisia in the capacity of a key player that ignited the Arab Spring and later was at a transforming stage in the direction of a democratic system. This study provides enticing information that is different from the books already written by looking at Tunisia. This country is placed at the crossroads of the MENA region, gaining a deeper understanding of Tunisia's democratization and the significant effects this has on the development of gender dynamics. Moreover, the work addresses recent legal changes, including abolishing Article 13 of the CPS and introducing equality in inheritance, proving its timeliness and novelty. The legal transformations are wide-ranging regarding gender parity, politics, and social relations, and this research offers valuable insights into the transformations. Also, this study applies strategies for addressing and mitigating the existing study limitations, including time limitations and data deficiencies, which point to its novelty and the author's commitment to offering a comprehensive evaluation. It is the ongoing deficit in current scholarship that the research conducted aims to address: One knows that the roles of women in Tunisia have expanded since the Jasmine Revolution of 2011, which radically changed the political and societal frameworks of the country, but it is only when the research investigates how these roles evolved from 2011 up to 2022 that one can offer more than just interpretation of Tunisia's gendered democracy; one gets valuable insights that would assist in disseminating more knowledge about the equivocal nature of gender relations and democratization. equality demonstrates its current relevance and originality. This study offers a timely perspective on the far-reaching consequences of these legal changes for gender equity, political representation, and societal dynamics. The uniqueness and commitment to complete analysis are reflected in the study, which also seeks to address and correct existing research limitations, including time constraints and the exclusion of relevant data. The research aims to explore how women's roles in Tunisia have developed since 2011, when the Jasmine Revolution shattered its political and social landscape; through analyzing how these roles changed between 2011 and 2022, we not only get a better picture of gender roles in bringing democracy to Tunisia but also learn lessons that can exceed the borders of this country. It will expand understanding of the complicated association between gender dynamics and democratic procedures. Moreover, the revolution in Tunisia resulted in the fall of an authoritarian regime. President Ben Ali 2011 changed Tunisian women's engagement from passive to active and from political roles only to civil society. What has been lacking is an in-depth analysis of this

process, an effort that this paper makes to investigate the history of this transition from the foundation laid by the ‘Liberator’ of Tunisia and advocate for women, President Habib Bourguiba. It is worth mentioning that Tunisia has offered more personal freedoms to its women than most Arab countries since it gained independence in 1956; however, political activism was not allowed to Tunisian women fully because of state vigilance. Nonetheless, the Arab Spring and the collapse of President Zine Al Abedin Ben Ali's regime in 2011 produced chances to engage in active participation in politics and social life. This transition was made even easier by electoral laws enacted in 2011 and 2014, which initially formally incorporated gender parity and women's rights through the constitution, a significant accomplishment. Women's rights have witnessed considerable progress in Tunisia, but full equality hasn't been achieved. This study focuses on the challenges and consistent barriers to women's political participation. This scrutinizes pivotal occurrences and their mark and seeks to picture the steadily changing position of ladies in Tunisia's nascent majority rules system. The research seeks to illuminate the primary outcomes of the Arab Spring on women's rights and position of social roles while acknowledging continuing inequalities that impede women's fullest rights and participation. Ultimately, this research aims to provide lessons and insights beyond Tunisia to understand the effects of democratic transitions on gender dynamics across the MENA. The choice of Tunisia as a case study for this thesis is first because Tunisia is considered a feminist writer. Moghadam said, *“The one success story of the region-wide events was a nonviolent uprising leading to a democratic transition. Something else that sets the Tunisian revolution apart was the key role played by the country's strong feminist movement, which has set an example among Arab nations for decades”*(Moghadam,2019). The same goes for Tunisian females' participation in the Jasmine Revolution, and there is no way one can break the link between the country's historical importance and the pioneering attempts to ensure female participation in the Arab Spring period. It's worth mentioning that Tunisia was the birthplace of the Arab Spring. One of the flames sparked pro-democracy movements throughout the Arab region. That period was incredible for female activists over there to be leaders, organizers, and activists, and in the end, it led to the downfall of the dictatorial rule of President Ben Ali. For instance, Tunisia's revolution trajectory is similar to the post-effect of advancing gender equality and enlarging women's rights. As a demonstration that Tunisia is committed to inclusive advancement, Tunisia has implemented progressive constitutional reforms and laws aiming at fighting gender-based violence, and more recently, the increasing political involvement of Tunisian women underscores their key role in bringing democracy forward in the country. They overcome ever-persistent challenges, yet their never-breaking resolve moves

the movement for their rights forward. This research examines the complex reciprocal relationship between political changes and societal transitions with women's activism in Tunisia. The lessons from Tunisia's experience offer a sense of what opportunities and barriers women face during revolutions and democratic transitions, with implications globally for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. In contrast, the nexus of French colonization with Tunisian women's rights is multi-layered, characterized both favorably and unfavorably. To truly understand the complexities of this historical era, we must understand the intricate factors that contribute to a woman's societal position and opportunities. Education was one of the biggest areas of change for Tunisian women under the French protectorate. While education was not compulsory for Tunisian children until 1958, the French fostering of a model of primary (and later, secondary) education allowed a great number of Tunisian children, both male and female, to receive a more formal education than their ancestors. This had the effect of opening the door for the redefinition of women's role within Tunisian society. Higher education for girls was pushed as the new education system began to be in place, and by 1942, there were 300 girls in the university primary level school. The advent of more formal schooling for girls changed the mindset of what a girl's social future would entail and what would be expected of them. It was a more or less accepted societal norm that, until this point, the role of a Tunisian woman would have been taking care of the household and eventually getting married. This education allowed girls to learn skills that would prepare them to work in more intellectually demanding professions. This would lead to a new class of working women and a delayed marriage age (Hima,2020). Moreover, despite the oppressive nature of colonialism, it brought forth novel ideas, such as Western feminist movements, which may have indirectly impacted local discussions on women's empowerment. For all early Tunisian female rights movements like the Tunisian Women's Union, however, increased movements for educational opportunities and legal reforms emerged in what was otherwise limited by colonial governance. However, this situation should be considered in terms of its limitations since educational opportunities were largely limited to well-to-do urban women, particularly country women. In addition, some legal reforms were made, but patriarchal systems remained intact, creating evidence that the colonial developments had not had more effect on women's rights. Certainly, the positive results of colonialism, potentially unintentional, must not be ignored even within the context of exploitation and marginalization inherent in colonialism as a whole. While colonialism ultimately brought greater diplomatic involvement in affairs of which imperialism previously excluded the Western world, it was posted post-independence what they refer to as the "emancipation period" that marked the true progress in the push for

women's rights and the abolition of polygamy, women's suffrage and the ability to vote, and greater equality. Nevertheless, there remain challenges, namely, economic participation, political representation, and intervening gender-based violence, indicating that Tunisian struggle for gender equality continues. However, the result was a legacy of French colonization of Tunisia's gender dynamics, one which was a mixture of progress and restraints and in which the advance of women's rights truly only took place in post-colonial Tunisia after sustained activism and reforms. For instance, the swift formation of Tunisia's Union Nationale Des Femmes Tunisiennes (UNFT) after independence and its rapid growth to 40,000 members by 1960 illustrates how political regimes can co-opt women's rights movements. According to Moghadam (2021), the UNFT's mandate to *"mobilize women as a social base for the Neo-Destour Party and to carry out Bourguiba's modernizing projects"* suggests that the organization served as an extension of state power. While women's rights may have been advanced in some areas, the UNFT's connection to the ruling party highlights the potential for women's movements to be used as instruments of political control rather than vehicles for genuine liberation (Moghadam, 2021). For instance, thanks to President Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia arrived at a critical juncture of deep decision-making. An enduring patriarchal past and charting a new path for this youthful nation, an age besotted with the modernist promise of a future in which advancement had brought a light, was something that this nation, the first nation of the subcontinent, was so enthusiastic about. In this sense, Habib Bourguiba, the leader of this emerging republic, as he was, is considered an iconic figure whose ideas not only brought new knowledge into the field of politics but also whose ideas sparked the revolution of gender equality, which, in the end, echoed throughout the Arab world. Bourguiba was a big supporter of women's rights and understood that true independence of female citizens was required. For example, his promotion of gender equality was part of more than political strategy; it also was a key part of his program for a modern, secular Tunisia. Tunisia wanted to be modern, and that fact should bear repeating. Like a tidal wave, this legal upheaval washed away centuries of restrictive norms and rights, providing women voting right, pursue political positions, and navigate themselves in marriage and family life. But Bourguiba has left a liberation that is not limited to the country of Tunisia but is a formation springing out of the whirl of Arab civilization. For instance, the first experience of the Tunisian Republic president Habib Bourguiba reveals the facts of this story, which is one person's voice and the determination of a leader ready to withstand the winds of change. Tunisians would have a shimmer of hope in the blackness of a lonely existence; things can change even if the world does not seem so then. As it is important to introduce him as a fighter for women's rights, it is equally important to

know that he fought not only for women to gain rights but also to struggle for a new day, a new dawn where women and men dance and sing. However, his narrative cheers and resounds simultaneously in encouragement that advancement is not always a linear ladder. The cyclones of defiance remain in force, questioning the spirit of the rebellion of his disobedience. But there it is still burning the fire that Bourguiba ignited in the heart of his people and the passion, the passion of new generations that do not let themselves be put out. They are the daughters of his dreams, the architects of his uncharted future, forever echoing his message: it is alright to make a wish, to be brave enough to search for a new day in their darkness. Thus, one might argue that the strong relationship between gender phenomena and democratization processes could be considered one of the most important themes for the theoretical and empirical plans of modern scholars and other social and political actors. These elements have intermingled across different regions and cultures, leading to even further extension of arguing and thinking in the intellectual premises of societies. Therefore, it would be possible to indicate that the gender perspective could be considered very special and highly valuable regarding the relationship between gender and democracy, not only from the philosophical discussion but also from the political, social, and even economic processes. As scholars, they are very much preoccupied with the complex relationships between gender relations and the workings of democratic institutions. It has emerged as a subject of primary concern and, as a result, has attracted numerous studies on the fascinating and significant link between the two. Between those inquiries is Tunisia, a significant North African state that sparked the Arab Spring and the subsequent change to a democratic system. This was, therefore, a rare incidence that had not been witnessed before the Arab Spring of the 2010s, which was just anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions occasioned by the incidences of use of social media and its unique ability to disseminate information in the face of repression and internet censorship. In December 2010, it was initiated in Tunisia. The reason it spread so fast around the country and then so quickly through the following month's change of power in Tunisia is that Mohamed Bouazizi burned himself to death protesting against police corruption. Women did an important job among different Arab Spring parties; they participated in the demonstrations and actions, civil wars, and agitation in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen; they performed for their demands and higher education and used cyberactivism through social networking sites. Such engagement was prompted by the development of political and social transformation, social networks, economic concerns, the struggle for women's rights in Tunisia, and history. In this aspect, women of the Arab Spring were rather different from men. They were among the journalists and activists involved in organizing the protests, resource mobilization, and cyber

activism. While they were exposed to such wars and conflicts, the same gave them post-revolutionary issues like relegation to the periphery and political marginalization and exclusion, as seen in the Egyptian case. It is rather ambiguous to discuss the impact of the Arab Spring on women's rights. Thus, the women's revolution broke the stereotypes and agitated the desire to improve their position in different countries, but the results differed. Indeed, Tunisia, with its commitment to democracy and progressive laws before the revolution, was somewhat successful in advocating for women's rights after the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was followed by counter-revolutions and the emergence of extremism in such nations as Egypt, by which women's rights and liberties regressed. The rollback happened after the uprisings when women's political representation fell from 12% to 2% in the first post-Arab Spring parliament, and women lost previously won rights to conservative values.(Sadiqi, 2014). Things have gone down negatively, and extremist groups have hijacked harmful sexist views and used them to promote their cause, portraying assertive women as a threat to safe values. As a result, women's participation in civil society and politics is being undermined by an escalation of violence against women, including sexual harassment and gender-based violence. But these problems are only that much larger in the presence of economic disparities, where education and opportunity are not even available to women, many of whom are forced into early marriage because there are no options or because societal pressures are forcing them to do so. During the period of the revolution, Tunisia became one of the most successful examples of improvement, preserving liberal legislation before the revolution and stepping up the fight for women's rights after the Arab Spring, while some nations did not show constant progress. Similarly, women engaged themselves in the Arab Spring; they fought for it and demanded change in other areas of society. However, the extent to which the revolutionary movement threatened or advanced women's rights significantly differed between the countries, highlighting how the complex interplay of socio-political and historical factors defined women's experience in the region. Arab Spring is a story of liberation, change, and struggles that women continue to go through while seeking their right to be heard and involved in the Arab region. Furthermore, in the Arab Spring transition, women transitioned from traditional forms of participation and the domain they were active in. They did more than merely observe the status quo but actively supported, organized themselves, and demonstrated together with men for a different kind of society. When subjugated to some kind of oppression, they sustained, assuming the roles that needed to be done as representatives of a group in charge of organizing such basic things as food and medications. Also, they employed proactive activism on the social media platform to provide information, coordinate people, and advocate for

change. Lastly, women also used their ability to offer food, take care of the injured soldiers, and engage in other ways for the cause of the war. This active participation helped eradicate stereotyping greatly and benefited the movement known as Arab Spring across the region. For instance, the effort undertaken in this paper's context towards understanding the deep connection between gender and democracy in Tunisia becomes more meaningful. A discursive journey merely denotes an analytical vantage from which each aspect of gender relations in this emergent context, encapsulated within the barely articulated framework of democracy in the making, is viewed through surgical disaggregation. The people of Tunisia started the 'Arab Spring' of 2011, a historic shift in political authority, civil liberties, and human rights. Theoretically and contextually, we can safely say that this is the best time to rethink gender, representation, and participation of the democratic and in the democratic. Democracy is ascribed to keywords such as equality, liberty, and inclusiveness, while gender bias, norms, and the existing reality of inequality are not. Rather than fixating on the simplicity of a 'gender and democracy' relationship, examining the Tunisian case in enhanced detail presents a more intricate and developmental process that has impacted Tunisia's democracy. The multi-stranded Tunisian socio-cultural context, including liberal policy strings and conventional cords, provides a rich context to investigate gender and democratization. This nexus is important because it helps expose the transformations that are activated by policies regarding gender, the amplification of female voices in leadership, and an unabated search for gender-based activism as a penultimate for supporting the strength of democratic institutions. A rigorous analysis of Tunisia's democratic changes discloses to what degree the feminine division of labor has been acknowledged and alien voices heard, concluding that the discourse on democratization and democratic empowerment is very relevant to the whole discussion of equality. As a case, Tunisia has been seen as an example of academic scholars and policymakers investigating together, and they use it to find out how two things, gender equality and democracy, can work together. Jasmine's revolution was the beginning of the democratic path of Tunisia, and it encouraged many changes, including ushering in a new government that saw the end of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's autocratic reign. It has acquired the spotlight worldwide since it allows for the concentration of the intricate amalgam of the interplay between democratic governance and gender equality. Tunisia's democratic experience is at the heart of a crucial revelation about how to close those narrow historical gender gaps and empower marginalized communities to create truly representative and inclusive democracy. Importantly, Tunisia's national progress toward gender equality and democratic inclusion, although inspirational, is also a model to which other countries can draw in efforts

to construct just and equitable societies. Over the years, many researchers have studied this pivotal topic of women's participation in Tunisian democracy to show how their involvement strengthens and preserves the democratic essence. The Tunisian people have overcome many difficulties transitioning from an authoritarian regime to a democracy. Within the transition, coordinated initiatives have been to deal with historical gender inequalities and solidify women's rights. Thereupon, the Tunisian Revolution evidenced the ongoing political dilemmas women had to tackle and spelled out the imperative to overcome these obstacles to achieve gender parity in societies reconfigured following the revolutions. This thesis pursues an inquiry and an estimation of women's activity in the politics of Tunisia since the Arab Spring. But, to find the true trends, it should be possible to use them for internal changes. The Arab Spring has been a turning point in the Arab world and has touched several aspects, such as women. By confronting these issues head-on, this study hopes to be one of the founders of a more inclusive and fair world in the future, when women's voices and actions will be noticed and integrated into the political fabric of countries. Hence, Tunisia is considered a progressive Arab country, especially for women. However, there are still some unresolved issues regarding women, which have become more complicated in recent years. After the Arab Spring, and reminiscent of the tide of change taking place across the Arab region, it is clear that changes in Tunisia can have long-lasting implications for both women and the rest of the Arab world (Sayin & Ortay, 2020).

Methodology

The thesis research design is structured to systematically investigate the impact of the Tunisian Revolution on the streamlining of progressive ideals about female modernization. This study opted for a mixed-method approach. It employs an interdisciplinary approach using historical research, qualitative interviews, surveys, and content analysis of legal documents and media reports, beginning with an introduction that provides the research questions and hypotheses and emphasizes the significance of understanding the complex association between the Tunisian Revolution, gender dynamics and democracy in Tunisia. The historical context section of the study discusses key events preceding the revolution and the creation of these progressive ideals of female modernization in early Tunisia. The effectiveness of mechanisms introduced post-revolution on women's political participation in Tunisia, utilizing interviews and content analysis. In the case of the Arab Spring study, the paper then moves on to the Arab Spring's impact on women in Tunisia by proceeding into the events that led to the Arab Spring, the motivations behind it, the outcomes, and how diverse women are involved. The success, the failure, and the broader social effect are examined to provide a full picture. It consists of focus groups, policy analysis, and expert interviews to answer challenges and recommendations, with input from Tunisian policymakers and gender and civil society experts. This section addresses structural, cultural, and socio-economic barriers and proposes pole change. Finally, the concluding section synthesizes all findings to research questions, evaluates the hypotheses, and provides implications for gender equality, democracy, and modernization in Tunisia. The research design guarantees ethical concerns, practical timeline, and resource allocation to avert in-depth and systematic inquiry into the entangled complexities of the Tunisian Revolution, gender modernization, and participation in Tunisian politics. Tunisia is a beacon in its own right and a distinctively unique one in the Arab world and North Africa. Leading the pack as the first in the region to successfully navigate the difficult ground of democratic transition following the historic wave of uprisings. Tunisia's course is an exceptionally essential case study. To enter this research on Tunisia, a country in great political metamorphosis, underscores a crux of inquiry, for my work would illuminate the groundswell of scholarship. This study focuses on how gender interacts with democratization. These focal areas are the intricacies of political transition, the dynamism of gender dynamics, and the intricacies of democratization that arise in the larger context of the Arab world. This unravels how the Tunisian Revolution affected women's political involvement and societal roles. On the one hand, it contributes new air to ongoing scholarly conversations concerning the

interrelationship between democratization and gender equality, and in doing so, it extends the previous literature on gender and democratization in important ways. Gasping into the implementation domain, it examines how the practical applications of female modernization, first theorized, turned into actual steps given the force of the revolution. The investigation into the trials and triumphs of translating gender-related policies and reforms under a post-revolution milieu yields rich and ringing insights beyond the confines of Tunisia. This research also takes a deep dive into women's empowerment during a momentous shift in political upheaval, and it begins by looking at to what extent the revolution empowered women to realize their rights and its effects on decision-making. This essential article is a great addition to the literature on women's empowerment, gender studies, and dynamics of social change. This study has also played a pragmatic role in outlining challenges and offering conclusive recommendations. These recommendations directly relate to policies and advocacy efforts, which this research aspires to contribute to policymakers, activists, and organizations work to achieve gender equality and democratic reforms. In an era of increasing effect of the Arab Spring and rethinking of women's role in political and societal change, this work is at the center of contemporary discourse. It provides a timely assessment that discusses significant issues and provides timely illustrations of the transformation and challenges women have faced since the turmoil of the Tunisian revolution, which is a welcome addition to the broader academic literature. It stages an intricate and contextually focalized yet nuanced exploration of the dynamic and intersubjective relations between political transition, citizenry, and democracy in the Arab world. Tunisia is a unique place of singular experiences that serve as a focal point and are of great value to theoretical discourse. It also provides practical policy and advocacy insights that may help shape policies and agendas elsewhere in Tunisia and beyond its borders.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

1. Historical Context

The Ottoman Empire's legacy on Tunisia is a classic example of how the power of the imperial government affects the story of regional history, leaving an imprint on Tunisia's political, cultural, and economic geography for a long time. It is clear that the Ottoman Empire impacted Tunisia from the late 16th century up to the time of the arrival of French colonial rule in the 19th century. The consolidation of autonomy within imperial oversight following the capture of Tunis in 1574 marked a period. The real power lay with local leaders called beys and pashas, who generally answered to the nominal authority of the Ottoman Sultan and practiced a great deal of independence. In this era, it began integrating into different administrative and cultural elements for the Ottoman. Turkish became the language of administration, and Arabic was the people's language. Such a bilingual environment promoted a cultural exchange, braiding Turkish influences into the Tunisian dialect and that of local customs. As well as leaving their mark on the judicial landscape, the Ottomans also contributed to this landscape by bringing the Hanafi school of Islamic law to Tunisia, as well as upholding the position of local Maliki jurists while maintaining this hybrid of legal systems, in turn, affected Tunisian governance (*Ottoman Tunisia*, 2022). It brought new dynamics economically and politically, such as reliance on Barbary corsairs that brought wealth, but it also caused the international war, like more European powers. Modernization in the 19th century, inspired by Ottoman reforms, was unsuccessful due to increasing foreign debt and pressure from European nations. Tunisia became vulnerable to external domination, which was finally realized through the French protectorate proclaimed in 1881 (Ottoman Tunisia). Though functioning as a relatively decayed remnant in the second half of the 20th century, the Ottoman legacy remains discernible in both Tunisia's demographic composition, as well as its political and cultural practices, not least of all, through the historical trajectory inaugurated by centuries of Ottoman interference along with local and colonial ones. By the early 1950s, the worldwide process of decolonization had already started, encompassing the public's view of gender stereotypes across the North African region. Over this time, many countries undertook state-building processes, beginning with India in 1947 and Ghana in 1957. On March 20, 1956, Habib Bourghiba issued the withdrawal of the French protectorate period from the liberated Tunisian terrain. However, the fact that French rule lasted affected all Tunisians and their way of life. France had been through military occupation in the Enforcement of the protectorate, as well as internal resistance from Tunisian

nationalism, which physically and financially exhausted it; thus, when it sought to ‘renew capital,’ it began implementing specific changes to modernize Tunisia. This interaction between France and Tunisia has often been viewed in terms of the French and the colonized. However, a more telling tale is evident in how the French were forced to adapt to a lifestyle in a foreign land and the subsequent effect on the colonizer and the colonized. French influence has been a theme throughout Tunisia's history since independence, where external actors have influenced Tunisians yet remained in a position of dominance whereby they can adapt foreign cultural elements to their benefit (Broene, 2023). Tunisia was administered as a French protectorate from 1881 until 1956. Residency began in 1882 and was established in 1883. The Treaty of Bardo, which extended Tunisia on still more favorable terms than any other Maghreb country and provided for the still-respected holy status of the Husainid Beys, was threatened in 1884 by a landing of Italian forces at the port of Bizerte. France declared its interest in occupying Tunisia, and a political struggle between representatives of France and Italy over the country's political future ended when both countries agreed to a joint protectorate over Tunisia. This informal agreement was implemented by a convention signed by France and Italy at La Marsa on June 8, 1883. But the sudden death of the bey caused the convention to be replaced by an act of the Beylical government inviting France to recognize a more invasive protectorate, even though after seven and a half decades, France officially considered Tunisia under protectorate status rather than annexed. This change was approved by a French military mission to Tunis in 1883–1884. Although the Bey remained the nominal head of the country, the prevalent system of the protectorate put colonial power in the hands of a Resident-General sent by the government to Paris. The French-imposed financial policy plunged the country into complete dependence on French loans, which negated the economic autonomy Tunisia had experienced until the French occupation. In the wake of recurrent uprisings, this rule also saw the creation of a standing army to keep the peace. Economic and social changes that resulted from 60 years of colonial rule deeply affected Tunisia's future both during and after the years of the protectorate. (Çoban, 2021). From 1956 on, it was thus the Tunisian elite, spearheaded by the founding father, Habib Bourguiba, granted gender equality paramount status in the state-building process. For that reason, Tunisia has long been perceived as the most progressive among Arab countries regarding women's rights because, throughout history, Tunisia, under the legacy of the previous president Habib Bourguiba, was able to enjoy various rights. As Mehdi Sellami says in his work “In the Development of Women's Rights,” he compares the two central presidents, Habib Bourguiba and Zin Abedin Ben Ali, who made a difference in Tunisia concerning women's rights. Mahdi Sellami gives an overview of the situation of

Tunisian women after independence, which authoritarian rules by the BEYS characterized. Still, things changed entirely with Bourguiba in favor of the Tunisian women. In this sense, Bourguiba brought modernization to the system, which made Tunisia succeed in controlling its population growth with a family planning program implemented since the 1960s, “ *While speaking to the crowd, he explained that “unless we control births, we will never succeed because in spite of our efforts (at raising the standard of living) we risk finding ourselves at a level below that at which we started”*”(Johnson, 2018). He offered a “*free modern healthcare system, a literacy campaign, administrative, financial, and economic organization, building the infrastructure of Tunisia, and especially making significant efforts in protecting and promoting women’s rights*” (Sellami, 2020). According to Mahdi Sellami, During that period, Tunisia was the first country in the MENA to be fundamentally women-centered, and that is due to several reasons and several rules, one of which is the CPS, which is about gender equities.

1.1. The First President Habib Bourguiba

Habib Bourguiba became the nation's first president. He was counted among the most well-known supporters of women's rights. His idea of "state feminism," in which the government enacted laws to protect women's rights and improve their standing, gained popularity. For instance, “ *in 1956, Bourguiba ended polygamy by interpreting the Quran’s provision for multiple wives as conditional on equal treatment, which he argued was impossible, thus justifying monogamy.* ”(Arfaoui, 2024). He also introduced The Code of Personal Status (CPS) in 1956, which gave Arab women exceptional advantages such as the ability to vote, work without their husband's permission, and access to education; it was one of the approach's most notable successes. Tunisia's postcolonial era has seen both successes and setbacks in women's rights, fueled by European colonial influence. One of his first and boldest post-independence moves was his Code of Personal Status (CPS), which altered families by upending centuries of tradition. It was a watershed in Tunisian gender relations.

Bourguiba's intent behind the reforms that comprised the CPS was based on his view that Tunisia could not progress if it kept on regarding women as “half the potential workforce” and restricted to the “stereotypical role” of a mother and a housewife. It consisted of the abolition of polygamy, the introduction of legal procedures for marriage, divorce, and familial disputes, restrictions on repudiation, the fixing of the minimum age for marriage at 17 for men and 20 for women, and the requirement of the husband's economic responsibility for the family. Although the reforms are viewed as somewhat of an unequal compromise to women's rights,

the attempt to shift Tunisia from Islam to a more modern civil law was significant in that women legally gained increased power in family life alongside greater economic independence. The Tunisian government established the National Office of Women (NOW) in 1957 as a semi-government organization and the first of its kind in the Arab world. Its main concern was maternal and child health, yet it was also an advisory organ to the President, advocating women's interests. The head of this organization, Wassila Bourguiba (his second wife), was a “feminist” and wanted to enhance the overall status of women in Tunisia. NOW did have some successes in legislating reform in the early years; the most significant was a revision of the 1956 nationality code, allowing Tunisian women to pass on their nationality to their children from foreign spouses, giving them greater rights than women in France. However, political interference and high levels of corruption made NOW much less effective in later years. Despite Wassila's struggle to maintain autonomy, it became an instrument of the ruling party (Wing & Kassim, 2023). Women's rights in Tunisia blossomed under the direction of Bourguiba. Yet his method was attacked for its politically patriarchal groundwork, putting its advantages out of reach, in particular, for the most impoverished and helplessly susceptible women in society. The Code of Personal Status (CPS) abolished polygamy, gave the woman the right to file for divorce, and set a minimum marriage age. This CPS gave women in the Arab world hitherto unheard-of rights, such as the ability to vote and access to abortion (Irakoze, 2020). Men in Tunisia under President Habib Bourguiba are controversial. During his administration, economic modernization, in association with progressive reforms in prescriptive feminism, fitted a model of state feminism. This strategy did more than suppress and co-opt independent feminist activism; it defined women's rights as the essential patriarchal interest of the individual that trumped a political cause to be fought for by women together, the template for future feminist movements. An example of this strategy can be noted in the dissolution of various pre-existing women's unions and the establishment of the state-sponsored and coordinated National Union of Tunisian Women/ UNFT. The UNFT, affiliated with Bourguiba's Socialist Destourian Party, was mainly functioning more as an instrument of state demonstration of the state's patronizing of women's cause than a means for women's liberation through the exercise of autonomous struggle. In addition, there was a limitation on women's organizations during Bourguiba's rule in the country. They lacked the freedom to express their opinion regarding state policies or the freedom to take some independent actions. Nevertheless, the legal changes could not introduce women into the upper house or any other administrative, political, and business positions in great numbers. In the government, women were aligned with the Ruler's party and assigned cosmetic positions that did not contribute to

decision-making. Patriarchal political structures remained prominent, preventing women from actively participating in governance and business. Skepticist community states that Bourguiba's policies used women's liberation to serve the Tunisian state-building function rather than leading to women's emancipation. Equating women's liberation with his political doctrine, Bourguiba hampered the emergence of ground-up women's activism and kept politics patriarchal. Thus, the CPS provided women with new legal rights, but it became clear that these changes were symbolic and did not cover social and economic discrimination against women. Gender stereotypes were maintained in the country; people's ability to act independently was still restricted. The state even curbed independent feminist groups, and people's dissenting voices were further oppressed. Bourguiba's initiatives for women's rights in Tunisia were sharply contrasted with those of the rest of the Arab world, particularly when we compare them to the other regional leaders at the time. These policies, too, were relatively progressive. During Bourguiba's rule, women were also permitted to work, move, open bank accounts, and launch businesses alone. They were also allowed to vote in 1959, before most of the world's history existed. Bourguiba's legacy is key to the emergence of a post-independence state where women enjoy revolutionary rights; therefore, it is important to acknowledge. Tunisia's feminist movement, based on Bourguiba's legacy, has campaigned for more rights and gender equality since the revolution from further legislative reforms.

1.2. Ben Ali Era

After Bourguiba's efforts to liberate Tunisian women, Ben Ali's era started, and significant changes happened as he put an end to the era of Islamism Extremism that was based on segregating women and undervaluing their roles according to Sharia Law. Instead, Ben Ali started his solidarity policy, in which women were active members by giving them rights such as voting, education, and the right to work. During Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's presidency in Tunisia, significant strides were made in expanding women's rights through progressive policies. The one notable reform was when the Ben Ali administration granted women the right to pass citizenship to their children, divorcing this right from men in the past. In addition, measures were taken to promote the rights of women to receive alimony if a marital separation occurs and for such a right to be supplied with economic assistance. One major leap forward was that women were given the right to decide on caring for their children should their marriage dissolve or their husband's death. This law helped them become the head of the family and allowed them to make decisions independently. Also, in the year 2007, the legal age for marriage for men and women was raised to the minimum of 18 as a preventive measure to

ensure young girls' well-being and prevent forced or premature unions. Indeed, thanks to these positive changes, it should be noted that Ben Ali's regime was criticized for its hyper-authoritarian rule and the instrumental use of women in politics on its incline. However, these represent some important steps in how women's rights have developed in Tunisia during his presidency. Furthermore, during Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's period in office in Tunisia, several important policies were implemented to support women's rights, representing important milestones in the fight for gender equality. One of the biggest reforms during Ben Ali's time was when they finally allowed women to pass on citizenship to their kids, which demonstrated a huge way for them to expand their voice as opposed to family issues. In addition, measures taken by Ben Ali's administration expanded the sphere of women's alimony rights as they privileged their right to be granted necessary financial support in the event of divorce and eased women's financial independence. Within this framework, in cases of divorce or the death of their husbands, women received legal custody over their children and obtained greater control over decisions within the family unit. The purpose behind raising the legal marriage age to 18 for men and women in 2007 was especially to protect young girls' rights and reduce the number of forced and early marriages. In addition, measures were taken to promote the rights of women to receive alimony if a marital separation occurs and for such a right to be supplied with economic assistance. One major leap forward was that women were given the right to decide on caring for their children should their marriage dissolve or their husband's death. This helped them become the head of the family and allowed them to make decisions independently. These are positive changes, but it has to be recognized that Ben Ali's regime came under attack for its authoritarian rule and for how women were condescendingly used for political ends. However, these represent some important steps in how women's rights have developed in Tunisia during his presidency. Furthermore, several important policies were implemented to support women's rights, representing important milestones in the fight for gender equality. In addition, measures taken by Ben Ali's administration expanded the sphere of women's alimony rights as they privileged their right to be granted necessary financial support in the event of divorce and eased women's financial independence. When the revolution began, women could go out and fight for their rights and liberties due to the violations of the CPS laws. As reflected in the Human Rights Reports 2011 (issued in 2012), most relevant laws have been maintained following the January 2011 revolution, where women have taken a distinctive role. The general legal framework established before the revolution remains in place and is characterized by the following elements: first, the right to vote; second, personal status (which was manifested in marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance): polygamy and repudiation; added to that, the

fixed age for marriage is 18, and abortion was legalized as well as an equal rights in the working environment. These laws were not always applied under Ben Ali's rule: Women engaged in political action could be arbitrarily arrested, and 'personal status' issues were, in fact, often practiced by Sharia-based customary law. Simply put, Ben Ali continued to make the liberation of women with his wife, Leila Trabelsi, who was called "the first lady" because of the work she was doing to liberate the Tunisian women. She also participated in women's activism during her rule, which she led as part of women's leadership. While heading the Arab Women's Organisation, she campaigned for women's rights across the Arab countries, emphasizing education, health, and income. Also, she was the chair lady of the BASMA Association, which aimed to find jobs for them.

Her passion for health issues was evident when she started SAIDA in 2010, a non-governmental organization whose role was to enhance combating cancer disease in Tunisia. However, her accomplishments are almost entirely overshadowed by severe corruption and lascivious behavior. Leila also symbolized the corruption and misuse of state funds that sparked the Tunisian Revolution in 2010-2011. Some saw her charitable work as a facade for misconduct at the root of the regime that the increasingly unpopular government continuously pursued. However, the Progressive People's Party's liberal policies, as well as the extravagant and corrupt lifestyle of the woman and her husband, led to her enforced exile. There were a lot of violations against the rights and freedoms of the citizens. Nowadays, and in the post-revolution period, changes concerning women started to be put into practice just after the revolution. In this sense, women's participation in politics has increased. Some notes should be taken into consideration: first, the percentage of female parliamentarians is higher than the critical mass of 30% set by the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union; second, For 2014, Tunisia has a higher level of female representation in parliament than any other country in MENA (Chellali, 2022).

1.3. Women's Modernization : Progress and Challenges

Tunisia's interest in women's modernization stems from the country's distinctive perspective on women's issues and active participation in the public sphere since independence. The recent phase of interest in women's issues in Tunisia is tied to a wider process of contested social and political change. Before and after the revolution, many processes preceded the situation in Tunisia, putting it on the path of liberal and progressive positions on female roles and rights. The evolution of a relatively modern view on women's place and rights has been tied to

Tunisia's development as an independent nation-state. The Bourguibist state, led by Habib Bourguiba, who was president from 1956–1987, enacted a major code of personal status in 1956, which changed the nature of family law, removed many inequalities towards women, and placed restrictions on polygamy. He undertook wide social changes, including a push for women's education and employment; by and large, women began to enter public spheres and find more economic independence. These changes took place in an environment of heightened state authoritarianism and a closure of political freedoms. But despite this, these changes and women's relative status and rights are often compared to many women in other Arab countries. The research on the status and functions of women in Tunisian society was conducted based on the background of its democratic experience, considering the modern-day struggle and gender restrictions. Tunisian women's liberation began within the country, and their active involvement in public life has contributed greatly to the nation's modernization process. The growth of Tunisian society has been a complex process, and resistive forces have fought with progressive ideas from reform thinkers. Different facets of social transformation in Tunisia evoke a critical era of reform, which, despite conservative opposition, pioneered the path to Tunisia's more modern and just social structure. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Arab progressive Tunisian intellectuals and activists intervened to show that Tunisian women should have more equality and rights. Inspired by enlightenment values of liberty and civilization, these reformists sought the positivism of such cultures in the Tunisian region, thereby initiating a process that shaped the dispersion of modernism among Tunisian women. Khadija bint Ahmad al-Kubbah was one of the main representations in this early stage of women's modernization; she was a Tunisian educator, writer, and also a leading pioneer of women's education. One of the most famous is the opening of the first Arab girls' school in Tunisia in 1897. A movement was established to spread such values within the Tunisian culture that contributed greatly to modernizing Tunisian women. However, one of the earliest known role models in the movement of modern women is Khadija bint Ahmad al Kubbah who is a Tunisian-educated writer and the first woman who called for education for women. One of her famous achievements was the foundation of the first Arab girls' school in Tunisia in 1897. Besides, she wrote some significant essays and articles on the importance of women's rights and education for women. Tunisia continued to be liberal in its social policies when it gained independence in 1956. Among many changes, the situation of women has been changed by the administration of Habib Bourguiba, the first president of the country, regarding the rights of women through societal reforms like education and employment. These reforms did work as these radicals managed to increase the percentage of women in public life. Women in Tunisia

today have more rights than their male counterparts, as they can vote, divorce, or even own property. A new era Dawn at last broke with this legislative achievement. Nevertheless, opposition from the right wing in Tunisia changed women's legal status in the country as brought by the Code of Personal Status. This legal setting placed Tunisia ahead of other Arab nations at the forefront of Arab countries in advancing women's rights. In this sense, Professor Moghdam said, *"The only place in the Arab region where women's roles were so significant and consequential was precisely Tunisia... Tunisia had the conditions that enabled women to participate and make a difference."* (Moghadam, 2024). Over the past few decades, Tunisian authorities have made slow but uneven progress in improving women's rights. It has always been striving for improvement in women's position. The period following the Jasmine Revolution of 2011 brought new opportunities, and the increased pace of change has put women in an active position in the future of their country. Women's rights activism was major in Tunisia's political change post-revolutionary period. Nonetheless, through their activism for women's issues, these key activists have positively impacted the nation's democratization process. Domestic violence and sexual rights, excessive patriarchy, and unfair systems of inheritance were few such complex problems in which they were able to play a core role in prevention and solution. As a result of their activism, now there are legal provisions to protect women, such as an anti-gender violence law passed in 2017 and an inheritance equality bill under process. Initiating the movement in the electoral process fostered women's political participation, reversing the societal culture of women's subordination. This time, however, thanks to the constant activism of feminist organizations, radical rights attempts were less successful than expected: the precedent of women's political activism in the region has been set. Consequently, Tunisian feminists have effectively played a vital role in the fight for women's rights and gender equality in the post-revolutionary period. The following are some of the policy changes that Tunisian feminists have fought for after the revolution, including the anti-sGBV law (sexual and gender-based violence) of 2017, which criminalizes all forms of physical, moral, sexual or economic aggression against women as motivated by sex discrimination. Another major policy change was the release of the proposed law in support of equal inheritance, as was in support of women's inheritance rights in men (Voorhoeve, 2015). Tunisia elected its first female mayor in 2018, Souad Abderrahim, and women have been appointed to key government positions due to the feminist movement's active promotion of women's political participation (Souissi, 2018). Moreover, the movement has been able to attack traditional gender norms and reduce women's subordination as personal status law reforms have granted greater individual legal rights to women. Advancing these achievements,

gender discrimination remains a major issue in Tunisia, and the feminist movement continues to advocate for further policy change to advance gender equality. This is a considerably important section in this research. It is almost self-explanatory that when a country undergoes modernization, some groups welcome and others oppose it. In the instance of Tunisia's women, the modernization process has had both positive and negative consequences for their status. This occurred as there was widespread rapid social change. During colonization by the French, the elite's wives and daughters were introduced to French education. From 1956, the independence of Tunisia increased the number of Muslim women in higher education and professions, resulting in a decline in literacy rates among Tunisian men compared to Tunisian women. Cause and effect connected to Tunisia's modernization with the West (i.e., French modernization) led to many profound reactions, mainly the CPS law. This was, in fact, a direct translation of Islamic Sharia law into a modern context. During the '60s, '70s, and '80s, the backlash against this code, with many groups of women attempting to cause change, often resulted in academic discussions on women's rights in Islam that would involve some of Tunisia's female elite mentioned earlier. The president of Tunisia is probably one of the first legal regimes that began the process of change in Tunisian society, granting some degree of rights to women. Among these reforms, they excluded polygamy and forced marriage and gave women the right to divorce. Tunisia started to be called the pioneer of women's rights within the Arab world. However, these changes elicited a lot of resistance, especially from what I would personally call fundamentalism, which viewed the CPS as an anti-Islamic culture and an enemy to that already entrenched patriarchal structure. The state sought to introduce gender equality and references to its modernization, and on the one hand, this was attempted; on the other hand, the predominant state subculture and religion continued to oppress women. However, even where the law has been reformed to allow women to protect themselves, they have been limited through social aspects that ensure that the Patriarchal dominance in marriage continues. This period of reform also had its shade contradiction when while it did grant women rights in the course of work, political participation, and marriage, stuff like woman abuse and discrimination on wages was still felt, showing that, indeed, legal reforms were not enough to eradicate the culture of male domination (Ben Azouz, 2022). Indeed, the dogged stand of men when women were severally called for full emancipation. In this period, it came to realize that the type of state-led modernization in this post-colonial Muslim society in the Global South is not necessarily accompanied by social change because certain legal reforms might not be enacted in a way social transformation takes place. However, the struggle for women's rights in Tunisia continued even in the 1980s decade as social and cultural barriers delayed the full

protection of women's rights. It is worth noting that the CPS code directly translated Islamic Sharia law into a modern context. The next important event in this causality chain was increased exposure to how women live in the West. Due to the emergence of social media and the internet, we are now mostly dismissive of the influence of the human eye. This idea ruled the government in the 80s and the 90s to bring forth tourism and foreign investment. The greatest part of the expatriates that would show up in Tunisia would be in the position to discover the treatment of women, where some of them would make their attempts to improve the status of women, causing an unfavorable reaction from the conservative elements of society. An obvious comparison of life standards between Tunisian and Western women was the primary reason behind the actions of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women in organizing the World March of Women in 2000, which is a march that drew participation from many groups of women in Tunisia (Salem, 2020).

1.3.1. Progress and Challenges

After an initial progressive start for women's rights in Tunisia, the way forward was blocked by severe economic difficulties. Education and employment gained ground for women and encouraged increased female presence in public life. However, weak and inconsistent economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s led to worsening poverty and unemployment, reducing women's participation in labor. Again, opposition to women's rights was on the rise because of the emergence of Islamism in Tunisia in the 1990s. For instance, This resistance placed many restrictions on women's freedom, including restrictions on women to certain careers and professions and restrictions on the clothes that women wore. Despite these obstacles, Tunisian women have significantly progressed in their political representation since the 2011 revolution. Women now constitute 47% of local government. Tunisia is one of the very few countries in the world, among these instances of advanced democracies, that have done so through the electoral law, that is, and in practice, both in terms of equal as well as down the candidate lists, vertical parity alternating men and women through the list. More work is needed, however, to support horizontal parity, as women accounted for only 29.6% of party list positions (UN Women, 2018). More importantly, it is important to note that women have been equally participating and present in Tunisian politics, but lately, this has been discouraging. The gender composition of parliamentary representation dropped to 26.2%, down from 35.9% after the 2019 parliamentary elections (UNWomen). As a result, gender equality in politics, the voting processes, and elected seats continue to be a huge Vice for

women in Tunisia. However, despite constitutional commitments and electoral law measures designed to increase and safeguard Tunisian women's rights, substantial political, social, and economic barriers remain (UNWomen). For instance, Tunisia has achieved a major step forward in universal education thanks to public policies that help advance economic participation and enable women's economic empowerment. In this regard, women comprised 37% of those working in the public sector and 46% of the total workforce in 2016, a low percentage compared to the G20 countries (Chékir, 2012). Nevertheless, their representation in civil society continues to lag. Most Tunisian women are economically inactive except highly educated professional women, with educated young women being particularly hit by joblessness. According to Chekir (2012), Women's policies and family rights in Tunisia continue to be based on ambiguities that face opposition from conservative groups. Despite these impediments, Tunisia remains a shining example for Arab countries striving for gender equality. Another example could be that despite women receiving a better education than men today, they are under-represented in key-making bodies in government or corporate organizations and, thus, are limited in their ability to influence policies and decision-making processes among these processes. The issue of the lack of women in senior government posts, corporate boards, and decision-making management positions in various fields. Tunisia began to appear with certain progressive changes in the legal system that emphasized women's rights, given that Beji Caïd Essebsi began to rule from 2014 to 2019. A key reform to the inequality of inheritance rights, a cause that most women's rights activists had propagated. Despite that, the effort made by Essebsi to pass a law promoting parity in inheritance rights failed when the parliament rejected it because bringing change didn't come easy. What's more, Essebsi played an important role in the passage of a groundbreaking law that allows Muslim women to wed non-Muslim men, a great deal for women's rights and dialogue between faiths in a country where such alliances were forbidden (France 24, 2019). Also, Tunisia passed the law on the political starrng of women to offer a fifty-fifty split of new quotas between male and female aspirants to political seats during Essebsi's presidency. These reforms point to the government's commitment to redressing the imbalance of gender and the participation of women in different facets of life. For instance, throughout Beji Caïd Essebsi's presidency between 2014 and 2019, the fight for women's rights in Tunisia encountered a setback. One obvious difficulty was met with opposition by conservative forces, such as during the debates over the drafts of the law for gender equality of inheritance rights designed to grant equal rights to women and men (Al Jazeera, n.d.). Unfortunately, this progressive effort met with lots of resistance from the right-wing stakeholders and ended up being voted down by the parliament. However, some

inconsistency spikes are apparent as well. The example of President Essebsi, who supports equal inheritance rights, was viewed with much skepticism by some of the party's members and others who believed Essebsi's call for equal inheritance rights was far from being a part of a genuine desire to fight for equality of women. According to Al Jazeera (n.d), President Essebsi's proposed changes were fought with a religious and cultural tradition because the current inheritance law on the Quran rejects double the rights of men to women. This clash with traditional beliefs led to resistance from conservative groups and religious authorities.

1.4. Tunisian Revolution And Women's Modernization

The Arab Spring is a region-wide set of protests and upheavals that started in late 2010 and early 2011, splashing across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), representing a kind of cultural revolution in the face of long-standing traditions. This wave began in Tunisia and spread quickly to the adjacent countries, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. What ambitions started with Tunisian failure resulted in various successes and outcomes. All sorts of factors made the Arab Spring possible, from old complaints about politics, inequality, and corruption that the authorities practiced to the absence of opportunities and demographic problems coupled with the increase in youth. *"Youth unemployment has also suffered since that time, climbing at an ever-increasing pace and currently sitting at 36.5%."* (Horowitz, n.d.), and the social media spread worsened the situation. It's worth saying that the last thing that sparked the revolution was the tipping point when Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor, immolated himself to protest the government's corruption and very annoying behavior of members of the state. Subsequently, he became a symbol of the movement against the country's dictator. For example, the Jasmine Revolution, a combination of popular unrest and social media platforms that enabled the mobilization of the people, eventually forced Ben Ali out of the country in January 2011, ending the 23-year authoritarian rule of Ben Ali. Tunisian uprising victory has acted as a role model for the people from other countries in the same region, inspiring the political transformation and democratization of Arab countries. The Tunisians started to have an unstable transition to democracy, as the reveries by deposed Ben Ali's regime amounted to a new constitution, free and fair elections, and democratic institutions. However, the transition period has been hard due to the emergence of political polarization, security problems, economic shackles, and institutional defects inherited from the software of the old regime. With the alertness of these hindrances, Tunisia has achieved the art of leaping in the path of constructing Democratic Governance and political stability and acknowledging and

safeguarding human rights. The recognition of Tunisia as a democratic state in the Arab area was granted. Besides that, Tunisia's democratic transition process features some setbacks and challenges, such as resurfacing authoritarian tendencies, enduring corruption, and rising extremist associations. The cases of killing well-known adversary leaders, which claimed the lives of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, marked something fundamental; on the one hand, this tragedy manifested the ongoing battle between the competing political powers that have been taking place in the country since the revolution had started, on the other hand, this tragedy showed the fragility of the Tunisian democracy. In The same vein, “ *the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi reminded us of the genuine and deep depth of violence in our society. The activists strengthened the community's solidarity and resilience after these incidents.*” (Grami, 2024). Furthermore, economic problems such as widespread unemployment, uneven economic growth, and lower economic activity have weighed heavily on the democratic mechanisms and societal understanding, hampering it from functioning properly and causing the society to turn hostile. The participation in the Tunisian revolution has contributed to understanding the challenges the democracy transition faces in general and Arab world politics in particular. Its worth noting that , the aim for using Tunisia as a case study in this work is to highlight the diversity of factors contributing to the process of democratic consolidation, including the role of civil society and social movements as well as external regional/international influences, and ultimately identify the ways how these factors are linked to the long term development and implementation of inclusive governance in post-authoritarian countries. Tunisia is considered one of the democratic stars, as evidenced by its efforts to understand the link between gender and democracy. On Tunisia's side, the encouraging news is that Tunisia is an inspiration in the Middle East by including equal rights for both male and female citizens and by having gender equality written as it is in their constitution. Tunisia made important strides, particularly in providing more options to women regarding education, employment, and politics, and some of those steps put her a step ahead of others regarding gender equality. Nevertheless, Tunisia is still battling difficulties to achieve one hundred percent equality between the sexes in these achievements. However, the trajectory toward achieving gender parity is not exempt from challenges. Tunisia grapples with persistent gender disparities, particularly evident in leadership roles. At the same time, an enduring patriarchal culture presents a formidable impediment to women aspiring to assert their rights and actualize their complete capabilities. Despite the challenges mentioned above, Tunisia continued to implement democratic ideas and gender equality, which resulted in successful outcomes. For example, in 2014, Tunisia made a real breakthrough in introducing gender

equality into its constitution, which created the base for radical transformation. On the other hand, educational achievement has never been higher, as girls practically became the majority of university students (52%) in 2017, which undoubtedly means that education is considered a way to develop personally. In addition, the Arab Development Portal has provided some concise information about women's unemployment and literacy rates post- and before the Arab Spring. The data about the literacy rates of Tunisian women is about 63.21% from 2011 until 2014, with only a 0.09% increase. Nonetheless, the unemployment rate statistics for women in Tunisia began in 2011 with a total of 17.8%, and a subsequent increase was noticeable in 2014, with a total of 22.9% being the level of unemployment. The total literacy level of Tunisian women was observed to be raised on average based on the data. At the same time, this increase is relatively moderate compared with the heightened unemployment rate among Tunisian women after the Arab Spring. (Glas & Alexander, 2020). New technologies like the Internet and social networks were crucial to coordinating activities and ensuring women's participation in political debate. Thanks to technology, women have transformed Tunisian politics and social and economic systems. Similarly, the Tunisian Constitution was adopted following the revolution, and there was enshrinement of women's rights and gender equity. In that regard, promulgating this constitution was a positive development for female equality, legal safeguards, and regulations prohibiting gender-based discrimination and violence, for instance. Like Tunisian civil society, and in many respects directly, the vibrant character of Tunisian civil society has enabled women's rights organizations to flourish and encourage reformation. In this vein, this new constitutional reform enshrined a high degree of women's rights and equitable representation of the sexes on electoral lists, concomitantly fostering significant female involvement in the arduous political transition process. The Jasmine Revolution increased women's participation in Tunisia's municipal and local elections. There were many difficulties like high unemployment and wrong inflation rates, unappreciated fiscal steps, and vagueness about corruption. Though the unemployment rate has fallen slightly, it continues to be high without significantly improving access to higher-skilled job opportunities. Those who had obtained a higher education degree faced more hurdles to climb in their quest to get their jobs than the other women. Most of the government's concern had focused on logistics of employment that had a low skill level and low wages that continued to follow traditional sexism in the workforce. What further emphasizes this is that Tunisian society has yet to overcome the barriers to society and promote gender equality. In this respect, women have also fared better in the political sense in this administration than after the Jasmine Revolution four years ago. Tunisian women emerged and appeared as candidates on ballots this year in political parties as

head of election lists. In the past, in Ben Ali's era, women comprised 7% of the head of the list of political parties in the election; in 2014, the percentage was 11.26%. Nonetheless, only 47% of parliamentary candidates were women; many women felt that the political parties only wanted them to generate more votes from women, but once these votes were cast and counted, no one cared about the issues of women (Carter et al., 2022). The changes that regard women's rights in Tunisia were majorly influenced by the need to 'settle' rivalry and to gain approval from outside financiers. The Islamist democratic party Ennahda, which portrayed itself as moderate and willing to compromise to give its women voters more rights, also received many votes from women. Consequently, women's rights organizations were used to put forward the image of the Tunisian state as emancipated for women. This state-orchestrated approach to women's rights led to the relative de-feminization of women's activism as The Islamists wanted women to be a mirror image of men, but feminists refused that paradigm. In this sense, take the example of Professor Khadija Arfaoui, who said, "*I remember it was Ramadan, and we walked in the streets of Tunis, Habib Bourguiba Avenue, and men and women were standing calling out loud التونسية ليست محرزي*" means the Tunisian woman is not Mahrizia. And we refused this idea of complementarity. We won. We had parity. " (Arfaoui, 2024) . Although the concessions proved advantageous to women in many ways, their views were not fully considered when formulating those policies. The fact that women participated in the Arab Spring was not confined to their actions in the streets protesting; it also involved cyber activism. It is pointed out that the media, including the Western media, paid special attention to the participation of Tunisian women in the 2010–11 anti-regime protests (Yaakoubi, 2016). Women became leaders as organizers, journalists, and political activists, popular with the help of social media platforms. Arab women's participation gave them a voice to change and policed the thoughts of the oppressors, which was the key to creating new attitudes. Women had been more active in the last quarter of 2010 and the first few months of 2011, mobilizing thousands of citizens against this regime's injustice. Women raised social concerns throughout and after the Jasmine Revolution to campaign for equal rights and freedom. Although the general attitude of security forces was that those women were harassed in a violent manner for overthrowing patriarchy and negating gender roles, Tunisia roared. These developments have contributed greatly to the promotion of women in Tunisia and, by extension, helped the nation to create itself as one of the pioneering countries for the democratization of women and female political rights. Some great female leaders and activists actively played their roles during the protests and struggles for democracy and human rights. During the Tunisian revolution, President of

the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) Souhayr Belhassen pushed for gender equality by encouraging women from all backgrounds to strike and march. A 32-year-old journalist and activist joined fellow protesters to show solidarity with Tunisia and, more importantly, affirm that women were involved in the Arab Spring movement. Like many other women, these women came out in Tunisia advocating for change, equality, and social justice. In their struggle for women's rights, women's organizations in Tunisia went out on the streets in large protests when the first version of the constitution was published. The abovementioned changes have given women greater influence and impact throughout Tunisia's politics, society, and economic growth. Comparably, the year 2017 witnessed an increase in women's workforce participation. That continues to be the case even though a comprehensive strategy is needed to mitigate the persistent gender gap and the entrenched cultural norms that bolster men and underestimate women in leadership roles in both the private and public sectors in Tunisia. That is changing gender stereotypes, making a more balanced society, and strengthening women's rights. With such a spirit, Tunisia will continue its road to gender parity, in which citizens and the state must work jointly to ensure that all have a fair chance within a strong democratic framework. Throughout history, the women of Tunisia have always been important in shaping the evolution of society. It's important to note that the foundations of this approach to the role of the woman were reflected during the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, which shaped Tunisian foreign policy and implemented the foreign influence of the Tunisian state with another dimension of earnestness in the international arena, especially towards its European counterpart. In this context, The 2011 social burst in North Africa marked the last decade with a drastic shift in human rights in the country. At first, the movement started to take shape due to the popular rallies that demanded the ousting of the Ben Ali regime due to the multiple transgressions, which led to radical reconsideration on the local level. It marked the highest form of political and ideological despotism in southern Mediterranean. In this context, women's roles can be understood within the liberalization wave, as they have been enhanced and granted more and more attention throughout the years. The year of 2011, sparked a nationwide chain of demonstrations to demand justice in political and economic spheres. In these circumstances, women at the forefront of women's demonstrations to demand rights and end discrimination helped launch the Tunisian Revolution. In keeping with this, they coordinated protests, spearheaded marches, and employed social media to rally support for the revolution. More women would be noticed and more often forced into leadership positions in the public sphere. The revolution has also increased awareness of gender equality and the need to fight gender-based prejudice. A backdrop of long-standing socioeconomic and political tensions existed

before the Tunisian Revolution. The Tunisians had plenty of money, but a high unemployment rate, massive corruption, and limited political freedom made many people in Tunisia furious. During his presidency, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's government silenced dissent and repressed liberty with relatively little provocation. Pre-syllabic tension among Tunisians before the revolution was escalating in the pre-revolutionary years. These unhappiness factors include political disengagement, lack of options for the young generation, and increasing economic polarization. The problem was that the government often counteracted these complaints by consolidating its power further. Women's liberation movement has played roles in discussing sensitive topics like civil battery, sexuality, and equal division and has remained clamoring for women's emancipation in the post-revolutionary era (Moghadam, 2019). With the new democratic process, women have gotten more opportunities in society. Changing the law of personal status for women has allowed them more rights and less reliance on their husbands or relatives. For example, after the Tunisian revolution, women's rights grew in post-revolutionary Tunisia, exceeding initial expectations and granting women an opportunity to begin organizing politically in the area in response to rising conservatism.

1.4.1. The Tunisian Revolution and Beyond

The Dignity Revolution, is considered a game-changing history for women's rights in Tunisia, undertaking the breakdown of the autocratic regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The breakthrough moment opened up previously unavailable options for women to influence society's development. Importantly, it is critical to recognize that the revolution opened the door for massive reforms relative to women's rights, such as more political engagement and representation, landmark legislation combating violence against women, as well as women who had marital ties to non-citizens being given the power to automatically confer citizenship to their children without the consent of the father. Besides that, the pace of women's advancements into women's progress and freedoms in Tunisia has decelerated in recent years. The lessening of female participation and representation in politics and removing gender equality in the revisited electoral law can infer this. Although women still face many obstacles today, the relentless spirit of civil society in Tunisia ensures that its members continue fighting for and protecting women's rights. Some measures taken include establishing legislation protecting women from violence and discrimination and a constitutional framework emphasizing equality between men and women. In this sense, women have progressively challenged the male domain by participating in politics and assuming more government and

civil society roles. Despite these developments, challenges remain. That's the case of women often experiencing discrimination in the workplace and education, as well as poverty, which affects them more. Moreover, violence against women is an issue that needs to be addressed. However, in the last few years, Tunisia has recorded positive achievements in women's rights development, which shows a sense of implementing a more just and equitable society. It is the role of women in the Arab Spring that is not confined to physical demonstrations but consists of cyber activism where they act as organizers, journalists, and political activists through social media, which is deemed as a significant actor beyond the public demonstrations. The instrumental contribution of Arab women as part of the Jasmine Revolution towards the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 broke the taboos and had a collective stand against the regime's injustices, revealed the social problems, and finally advocated for equal rights and freedom. Women may have experienced brutal violence from state forces at other times. Still, they did manage to upset the patriarchy and challenge some of the gender stereotypes that were typical in Tunisia. Although recent political liberalization in Tunisia has fostered democratization, the economy continued to test the citizens, and the security situation worsened while political turmoil accelerated towards the end of 2016 (Carter et al., 2022). Since January 2018, the gridlock and economic stagnation challenged the only working democracy of the Arab World, which culminated in the second wave of protests reaching the end of 2018. This was the right time for women to head the protest to show the world and the government how unhappy they were. This election of President Kais Saied in 2019, with massive popular support, revived the hopes of many Tunisians because he was an orange card representing the civilian population's voice and pledged to fight corrupt elements of society. On the other hand, his authoritarian steps recently have led the country to a breakdown. By the time Saied's popularity had given out, opposition and civic society were not strong enough to come out against his authoritarian move. Through its growing popularity as a solution against the slow dying of Tunisian democracy in darkness, women have the resilience and vision to make Tunisia more democratic. The revolutionary period was positive in some aspects, with the law exceeding what had existed before. First, the new law on the vote ensures equality between women and men, and the political parties in their lists involuntarily alternate between men and women. However, women barely led any of the parties. Perhaps only 49 women out of 217 seats were elected in the Constituent Assembly. In 2011, three of her 41 members in the new cabinet were women. We could notice women's activism in the political field. Second, the Caretaker Government lifted previous reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Tunisia was the first country in the region to do this

in this framework. Tunisia was always a source of inspiration for all the arab countries that showed respect for her decisions, accepted her involvement as a sort of diversity, and represented her country on various occasions. In addition, the country has adopted her CEDAW Optional Protocol (a protocol that allows individuals to give complaints about violations of women's rights to her CEDAW committee) in the MENA region (Ben Amar, 2016, p140). When Tunisia signed on to the CEDAW the country stated that it would not abide by the standards and requirements of the Convention because it wanted the organization to make its own independent decisions. The nation's constitution names Islam its official religion in its first chapter. The reservations that have subsequently been withdrawn predominantly focus on the topics of the Convent about family relations such as marriage, divorce, and granting nationality to children. 2011, there was a major shift in Tunisia in women's rights. A female can have her picture taken for her ID card while wearing a headscarf; hence, she was imprisoned under a rule by officials in the previous administration of President Ben Ali. Similarly, multiple amendments to the Citizenship Act permitted a woman married to a non-citizen to transfer her citizenship to her children without his formal consent. Moreover, the 2011 period did not cover all the changes in politics in Tunisia, especially the rise of the Salafi movement and some alliances that were believed to have formed with Salafists within the moderate Ennada party. They would be subjected to their laws guided by traditional dress and experience difficulties in workplaces and political organizations. Hence, many academics believe that the actual influence of the renovation on women's situation cannot be assessed at this moment. providing the cases of women activists after the arab spring was Ishrak Rhouma, who concentrated on establishing Aswat Nissa, a nongovernmental organization of Tunisian law. Established in 2011, it is not affiliated with any political power. It should act, consequently, as an integrationist factor, bringing women into public policy in Tunisia, where they can speak for themselves and be proportionally represented in public and political platforms. Our program is known as "Aswat Nissa" in Arabic or "women's voices." The mission of "Aswat Nissa " comes in four areas: Struggle against all types of women prejudices; Develop an equitable culture in society; Help women to get an active role in politics through their skills development and support of women leadership; Create women's role in policies.

1.4.2. Democracy And Women's Wights : A Symbiotic Dance

Democracy can be described as a multi-faceted quilt made out of every single piece that makes up every other piece, and every single piece mirrors the values of equality, citizenship, and

empowerment. The parts are woven together to tell the story of women's progress as they unfold. First and foremost among them is democracy's commitment to diversity, which is the idea that a wide variety of voices, including those of women, should have an equal voice in building the society in which they live. For that reason, women become more involved, serving as voters, leaders, and activists. For example, they vote, hold office, and advocate for change through political means. This embrace of democracy permits women to have a say in policy and help construct an otherwise fairer society. In a democratic system, women's rights are legally protected within a structured framework. In simple terms, laws outlaw inequality, unfairness, and violence. These laws enable people to get jobs, healthcare, access to education, and, most importantly, reproductive rights, which are components of a good life. Civil society, which constitutes a democracy-fueled society, also acts as the driving force for transformation. By holding governments accountable for their promises of gender equality, these organizations are so important. Traditional gender and stereotypes are challenged during open discussions and debates as part of democracy. This environment encourages women to ask why conventional thoughts and societal norms do exist. There are no gender boundaries; equality and inclusion are alive in a culture. Investment is needed in women's education, health, and opportunities to participate in the economy. Democracy increases overall social and economic well-being and, most importantly, increases progress by empowering women. Additionally, removing barriers contributes to everyone's future under democratization. Women's rights and democracy are two inseparable things. They are intrinsically linked; they complement each other in a lovely dance of mutual reinforcement, in which you can't talk about one in isolation. Women's constituency is raised since democracy favors them. This has made women see their worth, empower themselves, and contribute towards a world that promotes justice and inclusivity. Through democracies, therefore, society is shaped to be inclusive, fair, and equitable; hence, women's rights and democracy are interconnected. Women's rights are thus an integral element within wider human rights, which cover various aspects of democratic functioning. Democracy guarantees human dignity, self-determination, and welfare for all, regardless of gender. As such, participation in political processes by promoting women's rights enhances democratic governance by introducing new perspectives, priorities, and experiences. Including women in politics, policy-making, and leadership enhances democracy, becoming more responsive, accountable, and representative of its people.

It is important to realize that improving women's access to education, health, employment, and resources can alleviate poverty, improve health scales, increase productivity, and enhance

economic strength and the progress of more prosperous societies. Also, the reduction of gender disparities is important when aiming at a decrease in social and economic inequalities. For example, democracies can provide a fairer and more inclusive track in development trajectory, addressing inequity in resource access, opportunities, and decision-making authority, which would benefit anyone with an economic background. Democracy can also help protect women from all types of abuse and exploitation by creating legal systems, policies, and institutions aimed at protecting women's rights and eradicating gender-based violence. Essential measures to ensure the safety and equality of women and girls need to be implemented. However, the measures include strengthening protections and holding perpetrators of violence accountable. For example, the promotion of gender equality and women's rights has been linked to an increase in the degree to which societal cohesion and stability are achieved. Studies indicate that societies with higher levels of gender equality experience more peace and stability with women's involvement in decision-making processes that contribute to conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. Female participation in peace talks, post-conflict reconstruction, and community reconciliation processes may help address the root causes of conflict and establish more long-term peace treaties. The correlation between the rights of women and democracy illustrates core principles of human rights like democratic governance, social equity, and lasting growth. Progressing women's rights within democratic structures allows societies to optimize the capabilities of every person, promote collective prosperity, and establish more durable, comprehensive societies for future generations. Throughout history and ideology, women have encountered repression, bias, and exclusion in various global societies. Over time, gender-based subjugation has shown itself in many forms, reflecting cultural, religious, and political conceptions. Patriarchal ideologies are a system that is rooted in the oppression of women as well as a system that favors men. This system gives men control over women's lives and bodies, which creates a social order where women have lower positions in families, communities, and society as a whole. Processes such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and dowry are some of the cultural practices that inhibit women from making their own choices in life, and so are some of the ways they oppress women. And religion can also be used as a weapon to justify female subordination. In many places, religious teachings are interpreted to favor men and restrict the rights and freedoms of women. The law can be unfair to women. This includes laws that have denied them the right to own property, inherit wealth, and participate in government. This leaves women on the outside of society and puts them at a disadvantage. Women are paid less, are excluded from getting an education and the right to work, and are not only exploited but exploited in what is unofficial and in what is official work.

It keeps them financially dependent on men, so they are limited in their choices. For illustration, Violence and abuse, like domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking, keep women down. These acts reinforce a system where men have more power. Even though people fight against unfair systems, women still face inequality everywhere. This requires the development of strict measures, including effective causative human rights, social justice, and women's empowerment policies in education, health, employment, leadership, and laws. To this end, there is no single approach to stop these inequalities. Specific structures, laws, and cultures safeguarding women's rights and empowering them in all spheres of life must be created. Legal frameworks are important in protecting women's rights from gender-based biases. Such reforms include legislation prohibiting gender-related violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination in employment and education. These laws should also address unfairness in property ownership and inheritance. There is also a need to see more women in positions of power. In addition, it has been known that education is key to changing attitudes. By giving girls a good education, especially one that tackles sexuality openly and honestly and teaches them from a perspective that respects both genders, we can tackle the root causes of why women are held down. Economic opportunities are essential to women's freedom to achieve financial independence. Small loans and job training are essential for giving women more economic power and choices and programs that help women own businesses; women's empowerment requires access to comprehensive health services and protection of women's reproductive rights. Political participation and representation are essential for achieving gender equality and confronting patriarchal power dynamics. Reservations, electoral reforms, and political empowerment programs, to name a few, can remove the barriers that inhibit women from participating in politics and bring them forth at the policy-making and public agenda-setting table. Gender equality commissions and gender-specific government agencies, for instance, are instrumental in facilitating convergence among the already existing initiatives and devising new measures to overcome women's subjugation. They do not work to bridge the equality overtly divide in policy matters but to promote mainstream gender equality in every walk of life in the country. Community engagement and social norm change interventions to challenge 'unhelpful' gender norms and promote more equal attitudes and behaviors are important. Dialogue, education, and advocacy can dissolve oppressive systems that deprive women of full realization of their rights, potential, and aspirations, and societies can be dissolved. In many ways, the uprisings were certainly about fear and hope, but the Arab Spring's impact on the feminist movement in the region is less clear. There have been modest gains regarding women's rights with little real progress. Taking the example of Egypt's

elections in late 2011 yielded no women in the appointed parliamentary council, and women, as well as men, fear the rise of Islamist parties in their countries. Tunisia's secular laws that greatly advanced the status of women in the 1950s and 1970s and granted them some of the most progressive legal rights in the region have evoked fears of receding along with Islamist party Ennahda's victory in the Tunisian elections. In the short term, women will fear that the unrest that has consumed their countries will threaten their security and the recent advances in their rights. However, the Arab Spring has encouraged many intellectuals and feminists to revisit the interpretations of certain Islamic texts, which have greatly demanded the status of women in the Middle East in the past few decades. The emergence of Islamic feminism in the region has primarily drawn upon reformist readings of the Quran and Islamic Shariah for the treatment of women and all forms of gender injustice in Muslim-majority countries. This is an ongoing process, but at the very least, the Arab Spring has fostered a climate ripe for discussion on women's rights in the region (Crittenden et al., 2020).

1.4.3. The Role of Social Class in Women's Rights

Women's campaigns for human rights and gender equity continue to pose problems like any other within the human rights structure. The fact that women are the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged group in patriarchal societies has been the main reason for the actions of the international women's human rights movement. Sometimes, women's rights movements are part of complex developments involving society and are led by women who aspire to secure justice for all genders (Simmons, 2002). In the most recent 10 years, many international efforts have been held to support the promotion of women's human rights all over the globe, with the UN-sponsored Decade for Women (1975-1985) and other gender-related meetings and forums being held within the international community. These campaigns have led to the construction of international human rights instruments that are dedicated to fight against gender discrimination and to secure gender equality. 1979 marked the year that the United Nations General Assembly passed CEDAW, also known as the International Women's Rights Convention. This has been hailed as the world's women's bill of rights, and after its approval, the document was ratified by 173 countries, including Tunisia. The basis of the treaty is to get rid of gender-based discrimination and to attain gender equality. After signing this treaty, the states must apply every reasonable measure, such as legislation, to ensure that women won't be discriminated against. They should also give women the same rights as men, allowing them to be free in politics and the public domain.

The Convention went into force in Tunisia in 1985 (Schulz et al., 2022). The social structure and hierarchy of a society influence any change. These organizations include governments, corporations, financial institutions, and those that write laws and standards. These organizations together make the laws, standards, and institutions that regulate how people do business. There are various social classes, each with different wealth, income, and resource access. These differences are manifested in ownership of material items such as land, capital, and electronic equipment, as well as in the areas of education, skills, and social connections in an old capitalist economy. The ruling class is constituted primarily by capitalists who control production. At the same time, there are two main groups among workers: capitalists who own the means of production themselves and workers whose livelihood depends on selling their labor. Yet this class divide also takes account of social circumstances beyond just economic terms; race, gender, and location are factors that decide inequality status in society today. This is not to deny the role of economic institutions in reproducing these social divisions. Policies influence economic institutions and social classes; these can benefit the powerful or strive for a more equitable environment. Globalization and the new orientation of free-market policies force these institutions to make changes. This has also resulted in great profit for some and worsened social and economic gaps for others. Therefore, we have to study economic systems and social classes to revitalize the stagnant economy, end widespread hunger and unemployment, and undo the ravaging of the earth. The same knowledge is also needed if more equitable and sustainable development models are to be developed. Today, the State further deepens this thinking by injecting Capital into the Market Economy. In the Mid-Twenties, total revenues soared to hundreds of thousands from levels years ago. Stage one of this new system is for the state to regulate industries on behalf of redistribution: reforms have been instituted to set up six big companies with inclusive objectives covering agriculture and light industry (first steps towards an interventionist strategy). Several of these structures, however, were largely designed to benefit the urban elites at the expense of powerless rural populations. They exacerbated regional imbalances and social strains. Economic reforms in the 1980s and the 90s were pushed forward by international financial institutions, with one result that Tunisia privatized its state-owned enterprises. At the same time, it opened up trade and cut back on government subsidies to achieve economic stability and attract foreign investment. As a consequence, although these policies initially aroused economic growth and economic integration with global markets, they also worsened income disparities and undermined social order, especially for the middle and lower classes and rural peasants, so that liberalization meant exceptions rather than rules, criteria of classification standards but nothing more than

frameworks to be used merely as comparative postures between similar objects. Wherever it happens, the societal classes of a whole society will tend firmly to their existing wealth, resources, and connections with one another, making it impossible for any group that is worst off financially to raise its standard of living; meanwhile, society as a whole develops into something like a battleground or feudal society where everything depends on personal connections. By now, in Tunisian society, some classes have appeared to differ in wealth, income, and status. Among the rulers at the state level, the bourgeois, an outstanding businessman, professionals, and officials used the system to increase their assets and build a network of high-powered personal connections. It had strong ties to governing power and investments in often profitable industries, such as tourism, finance, and real estate. Tunisia faced sophisticated economic and social issues as the new century began. Rich and poor alike, who were once considered models for the region, still lived in relatively great poverty, while those on the lower islands compare how hard it is just to get by every day at home or far afield. Moreover, the bulk of workers with rural household registrations in the primarily overcast provinces made little progress, and everybody felt pressure along all lines; this has given rise to widespread complaints from the masses. The revolution in Tunisia that led to the overthrow of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali could be termed a revolution in Tunisia. Tunisia began a transition to democracy after the revolution, and it improved the economic system to meet the demands of the existing deficiencies in the economy. It was a hard path, but it offered hope for all Tunisians. Despite the measures taken, Tunisia has struggled to achieve prosperity. Political disturbances, security hazards, and, to a lesser extent, an economy that barely grows have been caused by regional conflicts and the global economic downturn. Moreover, corruption and vested interests in the system have worked against efforts to achieve even-handed growth and social justice in this country. The complex relationship between economic structure and social stratification can be seen at work here. Initially, it influences a country's growth path and development rate. Such entrenched dividing lines call for a comprehensive reform to eradicate them and help the economy develop in a manner that embraces everybody. Reform must target marginalized groups first, insist on responsibility, and bring about an equitable sharing of resources and opportunities in Tunisia. It is only by tackling obstacles to development that the country can take off on a broad road to growth; then, it can become a model of that inclusive type. Tunisia can achieve her subjects' dreams of a fairer, more prosperous, democratic society by giving priority to those who are marginalized and promoting development for all segments of society. Similarly, there are also exquisite opportunities to increase the involvement of women of diverse social strata in state organs that actively promote gender equality and

women's liberation. Women from marginalized backgrounds stand to gain a lot from initiatives like these, which often face several different barriers, financial and social, for example. As a result of the introduction of gender-sensitive strategies, their chances of employment and getting promoted within the government will be greater. Hiring women of different backgrounds into government positions brings with it countless advantages. It adds to diversity and inclusion and enriches diversity in decision-making. This increased diversity leads to initiatives and policies that cope with the needs and anxieties of different social strata, with results that are more balanced or fair for all citizens. In government departments, women are encouraged to promote gender equality, and frontiers can only collide with those of other government branches or whole administrative systems. One example of interconnectedness on this level is the relationship of social organizations to classes. These have intricate relationships with each other, and social organizations are a kind of system that governs individuals and groups and groups comprising social classes: groups of people with the same social position and opportunities in society. However, how these two interact and change each other is in continual flux: one result of this process is also a significant aspect: how societal institutions reflect and perpetuate social class differences. In particular, institutions like education, medical care, and law enforcement often play a role equal to or even worse than the forces that give rise to inequalities. They reinforce such false myths as "human nature" nobody can avoid" and cover up all signs of development together with genuine society by generalizing from silently innumerable hidden premises that never see the light of day. People from higher social classes have better access than people from lower social classes to quality education, healthcare services, and legal representation in many societies; thus, which individual among them is right depends upon circumstances accounted for in some way by transcendental factors like fate themselves are simply products of luck. Social classes play a crucial role in shaping the structure and functioning of social institutions. Those belonging to privileged social classes often hold influential positions in institutions such as government, corporations, and media, shaping policies and decisions that impact society. Social class dynamics can influence the capacity to distribute resources and opportunities inside institutions, leading to inequalities in access and outcomes between people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Secondly, social institutions can drive social mobility and transformation, capable of reordering the structure and the dynamics of social classes over time. The inclusion and equality policies and initiatives helped institutions to make opportunities for individuals from social class from marginalized social classes to improve their socioeconomic status and offer more opportunities.

Similarly, social movements and advocacy groups can create an institutional climate for nonconformism to existing institutional norms and power relationships, thus changing social class relationships. Social institutions and social classes almost go together, and both impact each other in strange ways. This helps understand the bonds between these factors in the study of disparities, upward mobility, and societal transformation while developing methods to increase fairness and equality for everyone, no matter where they land on the social status spectrum. Similarly, Social class inequality resonates profoundly in the institutional frameworks that influence women's social and financial independence and well-being. Social class is a framework whereby a society groups individuals into an arrangement of progressive strata per key standards, such as wealth, occupation, and education. The significance lies in how an individual's position inside this framework conveys segment and long-term impacts on their life rate. Engendered by Tierney (2000), women in the middle and lower classes are habitually deprived in correlation with women in the upper class, a statement which is confirmatory in scrutinizing the response of the Ben Ali regime to the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi and the resulting protests which spread nationwide. Preceding these events, there had been clear contrasts in the treatment of women from the inverse ends of the social class spectrum. Upper-class women were not generally impacted by restrictive government practices and were given a choice of whether or not to comply with the ideological or traditional gender roles. Middle and lower-class women, nonetheless, were influenced increasingly as the regime plunged further into a dictatorship. The very same women who were denied the rights that the regime had decided to withdraw and oppose were the beneficiaries of identical rights designed to modernize and upgrade their social class by the state's 1987 10-year plan. This ultimately created a greater gap between the different social classes and didn't accomplish the objective at the cost of the lower-class women who could have utilized these rights to better themselves by not being dependent on the male breadwinner. This infringement of the procedure set out in Article 13 of the CEDAW aimed at eradicating discrimination against women is further confirmed by the total repeal of this plan in 1996. A quote from an interview L'HRJ conducted with a rural teacher epitomizes the purpose of these laws and is simultaneous to the experiences of many women: *"We've worked as a housemaid, and that's what was valuable to our husbands. Why take that away from us?"* (Sipos, 2023).

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TUNISIA

2. Women in Politics: Legal Frameworks, Rights, and The Road Ahead

2.1. Legal and institutional frameworks

The Constitutional Law of August 10, 1998, is a landmark in Tunisian women's history, which has emancipated Tunisian women and equates men and women before the law; it is also the outcome of a constant aspiration since several attempts at fundamental law reform did not take into account Tunisian women issues. Even though the Tunisian constitution has granted assurance about gender equality since 1998, there's a general feeling that women are still politically marginalized within the Tunisian regime. The disjuncture in this law furthers the demand for an in-depth study of the law's effect on particular legislative initiatives, policies, and female politicians' participation in Tunisia. The place that women had in the process of building the constitution cannot be over-emphasized, as evidenced by other players like the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) and The Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development (AFTURD) (Brooley, 2020). These organizations, established during the Ben Ali regime and empowered post-Ben Ali's ousting, emerged as pivotal forces in shaping the constitutional landscape. Unfortunately, few women were appointed to positions of leadership. Yet they served these key positions even though the number still fell short of its proportion. However, even if women have been included in the constitutional committees, they did not dominate the voice. Instead, their voices have been marginalized. All of this thought was overlooked, but their contributions were made. The only committee to have a woman as its head was the Committee on Human Rights and Liberties. It shows the understanding that women's rights are integral to the constitution discussions. The input of women and the role of women's organizations in shaping the constitutional draft was demonstrated through such an illustration. The National Coalition has created a legacy of structural changes due to women's activism in constitutional reforms. Differently, this constitutional structure establishes a legal base of gender equality; however, the realization of this framework depends on the effectiveness of implementation and continuous advocacy. The experiences of women of both Tunisia and South Africa play a critical role in women's movements in designing constitutional agendas and the complete realization of women's rights.

2.2. Constitutional Provisions

Ultimately, the case presents Tunisia as a nation based on a constitution encouraging women's political involvement. The constitution emphasizes gender equality, implying the absence of discrimination based on sex. It also mentions equal opportunity: everyone should have a fair chance to hold elected office and be represented in all parts of Tunisian society. It is also a basis of the provisions concerning women's political participation. This has been explicitly made in the electoral code by providing a quota of seats allocated to women. To allow women to participate in politics, laws that created barriers must be amended. The revised legal framework supports the strengthened legal framework to promote increased women's political participation. Since the 1950s, legal, constitutional equality between men and women has been a constant theme in the laws and legislation of Tunisia. The Tunisian code of personal status was adopted in 1956 and has been implemented relatively comprehensively, though meeting with resistance from elements of Tunisian society at different stages. Despite its reformist nature and intent to promote gender equality, some consider the code too radical and claim it has detracted from its effectiveness. Nonetheless, the goodwill of the code and its reforms, and the reform itself, promoting access to education and public life for women, has contributed to women's political participation in Tunisia. In the same sense, *“The CSP and women's representation and participation in the political process in the country was, in fact, a victory for the government in securing a reformist interpretation of Islam”* (Gadzhimuradova & Rabat, 2020).

2.3. Women's Right To Vote and To Hold Public Office

Women's political rights have been afforded in Tunisia for a long time: they held boulevard gatherings and demonstrations before World War I (1914-1918) to claim several rights, including access to universities and civil and political rights. In 1956, then the new regime granted women political rights. Still, it reversed in 1959 the Tunisian Code of Personal Status, which had replaced the Sharia Law with modern law and consequently abolished several rights that Tunisian women had been granted in 1956. President Habib Bourguiba's Defense Speech on the Personal Status Code in 1961 indicated that the Code was an act of national independence, and this did not please the detractors of Tunisian women. In 1983, the consecutive publication of new successive texts confirmed the progressive evolutions produced in the framework of the Personal Status Code, which was taken as a significant argument to advocate for the superiority and universality of the Tunisian model, as stated by Bourguiba.

Women's rights have been enshrined or abolished in the context of political power. President Habib Bourguiba enshrined women's rights within the Civil and Personal Status Code; however, President Ben Ali and President Essebsi adopted provisions abolishing women's rights. Unlike power, the judiciary has been neutral or guaranteed the permanence of women's rights. Additionally, it is significant for social actors to note that women are constantly engaged in remarkable fights for women's commitment, notably in the Popular Front movement. Take the example of “ *different women participating in this process. It's not the elite, but what we call the ordinary women who are motivated to participate in building a new identity* (Grami,2024, see interview.2). This reflects a new form of female activism, essentially characterized by the association of politics with feminism. Female legal activists organize sit-in demonstrations, workshops, conferences, and seminars to defend women's rights. The Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights lists amongst Tunisian women an important contribution to the rights that Essebsi's law set back: she has filed a constitutional complaint, and she has presented the recommendations of the CEDAW. For the first time, Tunisian women became active players in the nation's life by joining ranks with male counterparts in the election of the members of the Constituent Assembly in 1957 following Tunisia's independence on the 20th of March, 1956. Similarly, Bourguiba “ *appointed a prime minister who in turn appointed three well-known women to his cabinet: Khadija Cherif, in charge of the ministry of women and the family, Latifa Lakhdar (formerly a vice president of one of the 2011 Haut Commissions), in charge of culture, and Salma Elloumi Rekik, in charge of professional training and employment.* ”(Moghadam, 2018:12). Their participation was also noticed in other essential milestones, such as in the first elected municipality in 1957, where they were delegates at various conferences and symposia. Furthermore, women were elected members of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry or co-opted as members of the Chamber of Agriculture, trade union leaders, and joined as magistrates of the Judicial Service in 1958 in academic institutions and sports associations. This situation is part of the overall will of the state, initiated by President of the Republic Habib Bourguiba, defending the equality between men and women, enshrined in the Personal Status Code, representing a groundwork for Tunisian society at the time.

2.4. Current Status

Tunisia's past parliamentary and presidential elections took place in 2014 after implementing a new constitution. This was succeeded by enacting Law No. 2014-16 on 29 July 2014, which

stipulated holding the elections on October 7, 2014. This law amended and supplemented the Electoral Law of March 16, 2014, dated August 1, 2014. Additionally, several implementing decrees were issued. This election marked an essential stage in the completion of the process (*Tunisia: New Election Law Changes Parliamentary Election Process*, n.d.). The constitution of Tunisia provides for Article 1, which states that the mother of a Tunisian living in another country, if their national origin is undefined for any reason, cannot marry or establish a relationship. When a child is born, it is the mother's responsibility to declare the child's identity. However, this situation has negatively affected natural people who are unable to marry and become parents, thus limiting their access to a large number of services in Tunisia, which discriminates against Tunisian mothers. In addition, Tunisian women living abroad can simplify the procedure of the scope of the nationality of their children born to a Tunisian mother using the Tunisian residence card (inversion number) with priority. Unfortunately, the draft decree failed to deal with the complexity of the Nationality Statement, resulting in different issues with its application. This has caused problems in the technical units and various authorized services responsible for elaborating the Nationality Statement. For instance, The policies and actions that Kais Saied has taken in his term since becoming the president in 2019 have affected Tunisian women in different ways and, in most cases, received adverse reactions from women's rights activists. Some fundamental changes included sealing a new electoral law in September 2022 and eradicating the concept of gender parity in the elected assemblies. This change even turned around the gains made to ensure that women featured in parliament, a feat achieved after the revolution of 2011. The new law provides that the candidates must collect 400 signatures of the registered voters, and there is no provision for campaign finance where the state provides funds for campaigning; thus, it is a barrier to women in politics. However, Saied did attempt to integrate women into leadership positions during the period under analysis. In 2021, he appointed the first female prime minister in the Arab world, Najla Bouden Romdhane; the first woman was also appointed as his chief of staff. Also in 2023, on National Women's Day, he launched the first women-led Communitarian Enterprises, a new organizational form designed for rural women, especially agriculturalists, to empower rural women economically.

Nonetheless, Saied's government has been accused of not focusing on matters of substantial importance, such as the reforms on inheritance rights of women and, generally, socio-economic rights for women. Some worry that Al-Baji's advocacy of gender inequality in inheritance shows Tunisian religious authorities are turning back the clock on women's rights. Feminists

and activists claim that Saied not only failed to promote women's rights but even worked on the contrary, rolling back what has been achieved. These changes in electoral laws and the omission of socio-economic rights are feared to roll back women's gains in Tunisia. Overall, women's situation in Tunisia has worsened due to President Kais Saied's policies, despite some progress in appointing women to leadership positions and launching economic reforms. These are apparent causes of concern for women activists since the government has removed the gender parity provisions in the electoral laws and has not implemented the Bill of Rights provisions on the inheritance issue.

2.5. Challenges And Future Outlook

The realization of the gains made under the constitution, the fundamental laws, and the conventions that ban discrimination and guarantee equal political and civic rights for all citizens, regardless of sex, requires the existence of other legal, social, and political conditions. Legal constraints are considered evident and include thorny problems a woman may face when contesting or assuming a single desirable position; to date, various restrictions formulated by the laws in force accentuate women's integration into the local and regional political arena. Women still represent a small proportion of elected officials for various reasons, including traditional, economic, and political factors. The main problem of low local political participation of the female category is closely linked to the resistance of the political and traditional sphere. Although women have obtained the right to participate and represent, even before the end of the transitional period, in local affairs, legal progress has taken a long time to become a reality because of the traditional mechanisms and political parties that still exclude women's will, involvement in decision making, and economic potential within the local councils or the candidate's lists. Smoothly, all these facts lead, in general, to the continued alienation of instead or rather to the reinforcement of traditional male domination structures. For instance, due to these factors, the legislative provisions that guarantee the exclusion of the discriminatory political paradigm appear superficial. In addition, it is also a male institutional mentality that reinforces women's inefficiency and, thus, precarious political participation. The 1959 Constitution provides women the right to vote. However, it was practically rendered impossible under the juridical system before the 14th January 2011 revolution. To ensure parliamentary representation, Tunisia has implemented a system of proportional representation with a system of closed party par lists. In 2011 Tunisian electoral law, Article 16 stipulated gender parity in elected assemblies after the 2011 Tunisian revolution. The 2014 constitution

enshrined it under Article 46. According to the law, Tunisia's electoral commission for each political party provides equal quality and quantity of female and male candidates for Constituent Assembly elections. It also provided that on the list of candidates nominated by political parties, men and women should be interchangeable from top to bottom (Gender Parity Legislation: Tunisia, 2024). Affirmative actions negate the effectiveness of the positive discrimination measures and are likely to lead to the same male dominance. This is expected again in the upcoming October elections. Entry into public life before the revolution was designed as a male affair, and women were only expected to employ themselves in activism. In its 1959 Constitution, the government of Tunisia established a system of government based on the universal application of civil law. In principle, the constitution guarantees gender equality, "enshrined in Article 21, which states that *"All citizens, male and female, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without discrimination."*(Tunisia 2014 Constitution - Constitute, n.d.). This right can be seen as the genesis of women's right to hold public office since it was the first step in enabling women to participate on equal terms with men in the political sphere. However, articles 6, 27, and 46 of the 1959 Constitution only guaranteed women's eligibility to hold certain positions as it spoke of 'male' ministers and only referred to candidates in parliamentary elections as 'he.' Such provisions were contradictory to the guaranteed principle of gender equality, and thus, in effect, women were relegated to second-class status in the political arena (*Tunisia 1959 (Rev. 2008) Constitution - Constitute*, n.d.).

2.6. Overview Of Electoral Laws In Tunisia

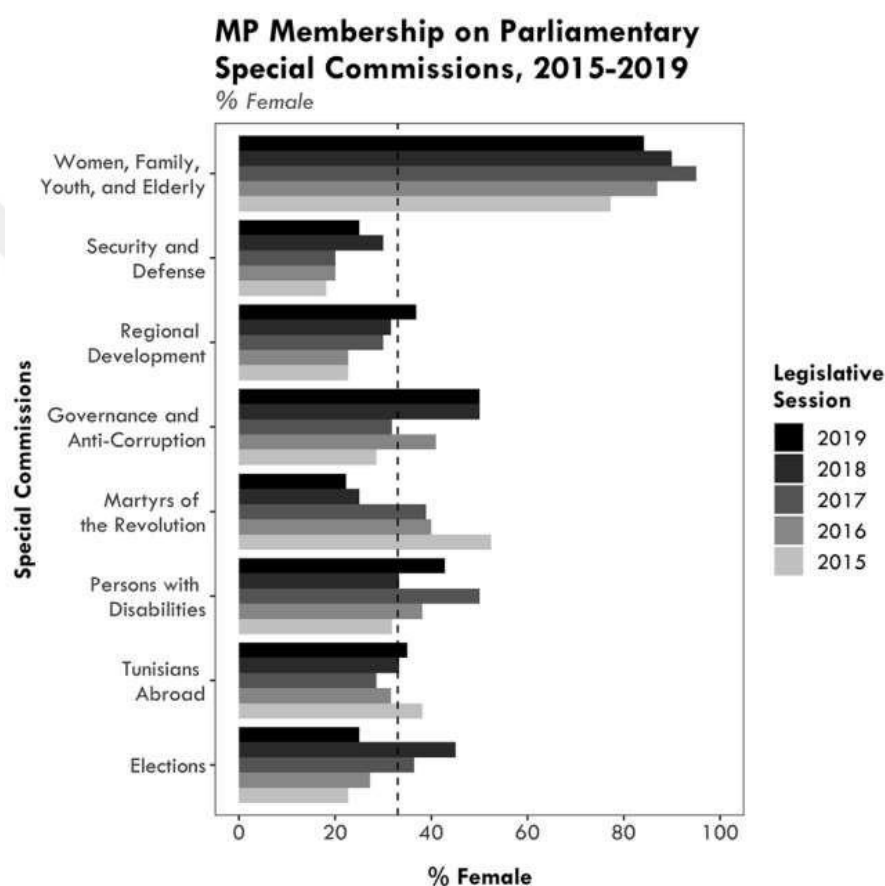
Tunisia has had the opportunity to explore various aspects of the relationship between the electoral system, parties, and their actors, the institutions it houses, and the quality of the democratic life of the nation since its independence. It is interesting to try to understand how the malfunctions of the previous voting systems eventually led to their reform and why the reform, in turn, was made with the absolute majority system, inaugurated in Tunisia in 1990. Since this decision, the system proved practical and functional "beyond all expectations," according to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in September 2001. Since its independence, Tunisia has organized eight elections in which the citizens have consistently chosen the national authority according to the principle of universal suffrage. However, the electoral systems through which elections were conducted have changed several times since 1959. Like any other country, Tunisia has undergone specific natural changes, particularly concerning its

electoral system, mainly because of evolved political approaches. Since the first general elections of Tunisia in 1989 after the disposal of the Bourguiba regime, Tunisia has gone through certain variations in PR systems until the current one, which is the party list PR using the D'Hondt method Since 2014 (Yerkes & Al-Mailam, 2022). While this method was influential in protecting large parties, it paralyzed the parliament. However, in 2022, a new electoral law was implemented by President Kais Saied in which the party-list PR system replaced the single-member district system, making it very easy to defeat political parties and difficult, if not nearly impossible, for the opponent to form a coalition. The legislative changes of 2022 also regressed many of the advances in gender diversity: Since 2011, the measures that concerned the gender quotas for the lists of candidates were in force and played a specific positive role in the representation of women. In addition, they changed the rules governing campaign finance; first, the new law killed public funding of candidates, and it doesn't require this measured spending, which may benefit the wealthy candidates who can tap their coffers to finance their campaigns without constraint. New candidate qualifications emerged, which barred some government officials, dual citizens, and people with a criminal record, thus adding to the president's means to dismiss competitors. Suffrage rights were also restricted, which, among other things, meant that detainees who could vote under the 2014 law would no longer be able to cast a ballot. For instance, Tunisia's changes in the country's electoral law in 2022 have diminished party functions, expanded the presidential authority, and put women's issues and representation regression. Furthermore, societal attitudes towards women in politics have significantly changed across generations. For example, the older generation was less inclined towards women taking part in public life and preferred separate gender roles in an economically difficult situation due to high unemployment. In comparison, the younger generation had greater acceptance of gender equality and less concept of definable gender roles. With these differences have come varying attitudes towards women in politics. For example, older people's views are influenced by the heavily veiled and segregated older generations of women when there was no concept of gender parity. This led to the absence of any role models for women in that period. Younger people, on the other hand, are less accepting of today's low female political participation and seek to find a role for women in politics that mirrors their expectations of gender equality at home (Blackman & Jackson, 2021). Similarly, the data shows that the percentage of female MPs on parliamentary special commissions in Tunisia increased steadily from 2015 to 2019. In 2015, the rate of female MPs on commissions was lowest at around 20%. By 2019, the rate had risen to nearly 40%. While there is an overall increase in female representation across all special commissions, it's important to note that the

progress is uneven. For example, the Security and Defense Commission has deficient numbers of female MPs. The reasons for the rise of female MPs in Tunisian parliamentary special commissions are likely multifaceted and complex. Other factors could be changes in electoral quotas or a heightened understanding of gender equality issues.

Figure 1

Percentage of Female MPs on Parliamentary Special Commissions, 2015–2019.



Source: Blackman, Alexandra & Jackson, Marlette. (2021). Gender Stereotypes, Political Leadership, and Voting Behavior in Tunisia. *Political Behavior*, 43.

2.6.1. Key Features Of Electoral Laws

The uprising of the 14th of January 2011 and the new democratic system derived from a new constitution may be regarded as the turning point of electoral law in Tunisia. First, they abolished the electoral commissions, such as the former ISIE. Instead, they created new commissions: the Independent Authority for Elections (ISIE) and the Audiovisual Independent

High Authority for the Establishment of Media (HAICA). The election of assembly members was to occur according to the highest administrative and legal standards to such an extent that the head of the ISIE, Kamel Jendoubi, declared to the media that "the election would be the most transparent in the history of Tunisia" (*Fin à La Campagne de Diffamation Contre l'ISIE et Son Président Kamel Jendoubi*, n.d.) .To be more specific, the current elections were governed by different election laws, which are the following: the electoral law of 25 July 2014, the political parties' law of 26 May 2011, and the association acts. Indeed, one of the components of the electoral law that serves to translate the legislative framework for the holding of elections is the political party law itself, as well as the horizontal and specific provisions of the various parts of the electoral law, in particular on the funding of campaigns, the allocation of seats, or the exceptional decisions taken during the various electoral tours. Another aspect of elections, mainly relating to the institutional material for the organization of the Electoral Act, lies in setting the texts governing the establishment of the election management body that will supervise the elections. Most countries use electoral laws to guide the creation of new electoral structures, as it is through the drafting of these laws that specific required structures are created. In times of change, as has been the case in most Arab Spring countries, a complete change is often possible. This is the case with Tunisia, the country under examination in this work.

2.6.2. Voting Age And Eligibility

In Tunisia, situations requiring early elections involving other groups of people do not occur. Municipal elections require a minimum of two years of residency from the date of announcement of candidacy. For municipal elections, anyone entitled to pursue higher studies, starting at 23, can only stand if they are disfranchised. In Tunisia, individuals cannot stand as candidates if they are functionally incontinent, have been bankrupt or received a money judgment or default, have been convicted of a common-law offense, have been found guilty and sentenced for an electoral offense with a three-year ineligibility decision by the election tribunal, or have been condemned for a crime of terrorism. Tunisia's legal validity age is 20 years, which is the voting age. Similarly, many people under 20 are already in the productive age bracket. The law reserves a three-month space between the time registration of a voter stops and the voting day. This is to provide an allowance for every person who wants to register as a voter; in effect, everyone should be aware. For the legislative elections, the following are required per Article 19 of the electoral code: an individual must be a voter who has held Tunisian citizenship for at least the last ten years. In addition, the individual must be at least

23 years of age on the date of candidacy and also cannot be legally barred from such candidacy or membership.

2.6.3. Electoral System Design

Rules that are used to translate citizens' views into public policy are called electoral systems. They consist of two main components. One is determining the type of votes that individuals are permitted to cast. At the same time, the other is the aggregation rule that determines how these individual votes are added together to produce collective outcomes. Electoral system literature primarily focuses on the most crucial institutional aspects of the vote component. This is connected to the incentives of individual voters to express a preference associated with valid preferences for their most preferred candidates. This issue is also related to the adequate number of electoral choices for voters when they vote. When the number of options increases, the electoral system's ability to minimize the proper number of choices also increases. The specific characteristics of the design of specific electoral systems determine which party is likely to achieve a majority in Parliament. Features of the electoral system, such as threshold requirements, compensatory mechanisms to deal with minority parties, and provisions for seat allocation, can crystallize fundamentally into the party system. Therefore, understanding the relationship between the array of potential electoral systems and essential variables, such as the fragmentation of voter preferences, ethnic, religious, interest group, and political incentives for conflict, participation rates, and the resultant legislator behavior, are integral to country building and the function of electoral systems. Democracy promotion has increasingly become a fundamental objective of the foreign policy of advanced industrialized states as a legitimate and desirable goal for a more significant number of countries. Political transitions in Tunisia offer a significant rare opportunity to study the electoral system in a post-conflict nation or "Arab Spring" country. At the same time, several electoral systems are available to enforce the rule of law, often chosen based on little more than current fashion. The lack of clarity regarding the conditions during which different electoral systems will be beneficial implies concern for the potential for adverse outcomes (Barakat, 2023). Tunisia's situation deserves scrutiny on the question of electoral system choice. Additionally, the developing nature of some new political actors and the specific events have made discussions about electoral system choice especially difficult. First, inherent debates are fueled by complicated discussions of the merits of political representation and plurality and the consequences these election rules have for accountability, voter ownership of policy, and government performance. Second, the specific context in which decisions on

election rules are made, in terms of the prior electoral system and the broader institutional and societal settings, impinge on these debates and potential outcomes (Ozen, 2020). The challenges inherent in institutional design that straddle societal and institutional parameters are known. Electoral system design is among the most crucial political choices necessitating the specification of rules that are characteristic of new democracies. It is therefore necessary to make a compromise somewhere in between, considering the number of people each voter can represent optimistically, the need for stability, and the ease of administration. Concurrently, careful consideration of the socio-political context should be made. Concerning the specific case of Tunisia, the task is all the more complex. As part of the post-revolution transitional phase, the new government has called for constitution building and held parliamentary elections. In this period, Tunisian society saw an open and lively public debate about the democratic institutions it wanted to create. The people have high hopes that the core changes necessary to shut down the primarily former one-party regime will be made.

2.6.4. Representation And Quotas

The Article 15 of the Constitution of Tunisia stipulates that the State shall protect women's accrued rights. This provision seeks to protect the equality of men and women in all aspects and the requirement to reach a consensus between men and women in each stage of the decision-making process and to obtain a balance of women and men among the elected council representatives. Under the 2011 electoral law, there is an overarching principle of parity between men and women. Different types of elections govern this principle diversely by different sets of rules. Parity rules are put in place so that parties respect the lists of candidates presented. Nevertheless, the lists do not have to alternate men and women candidates: either sex can monopolize half the list, and the law is relatively permissive regarding sanctions. It provides a financial penalty of ten thousand dollars for any list that does not meet the requirement of parity between the men and women candidates. Gender equality can only be achieved in practice if each vision for the future of society is presented and the objective of gender equality across society is considered. There is no trade-off between secularism and equality; the absence of equality and the imposition of a single view of society weakens democracy. Islamist movements participate in pluralist and democratic societies, which may include different political views and options. Pluralism is not optional. It is a reality that we have to accept and is guaranteed by the Constitution of Tunisia. Ensuring that the motor of the Arab Spring continues moving forward requires maintaining this democratic space based on

the common bonds of shared values. Participating in advancing these values is a precondition for the good results of the Arab Spring (Belschner, 2022). Even though electoral institutions are key in determining the quality of political representation, electoral law is only one of the factors to be considered in this framework. Factors such as the electoral system and the type of political parties also affect the effectiveness of representation. There is a provision of legal quotas, generally used to ensure that the minority gets proper representation. Some democratic systems have devised two methods for making the procedural rules more amenable to expressing minority preferences. The first is the use of lists, which can and do include women and senior people. Its design allows political parties to ensure the representation of their followers from among under-represented groups, regardless of the size of the constituency. The second legal rule that assists the expression of minority preferences is using quota rules. However, it is necessary to stress that elections have been held in Tunisia in the modern period after its occupation by the French since the independence of Italy and continuing during the pre-independence and post-independence periods. There were always some changes to electoral laws depending on the new political and social conditions and to aid those in the supreme power. The question of what type of regime the electoral laws maintain or undermine is always present. Consequently, any modifications made to the laws must be seen within the wider context. The waves of changes, gradual during the era of President Bourguiba, marked by attempts at progress (at least in appearance) during his last years in power and the first years of Ben Ali's presidency, and then increased centralization and control, certainly mark the path of electoral laws since independence. whether the political system is presidential, as was the case during the Ben Ali regime, or parliamentary, as it is today, the constitution is considered the highest legal authority and the basis for the institutionalization of the electoral system. Since the revolution, Tunisia has held free and fair presidential elections (albeit the first being only partially competitive) and has decided to maintain a semi-presidential system. The electoral stage in Tunisia underwent a significant change over time, with a different framework being applied via the introduction of other constitutional elements like the electoral system, gender parity standards, campaign finance rules, the right to vote, and candidate eligibility. Since 1989, Tunisia has adopted different types of "proportional representation" (PR) systems, beginning with a "party-list PR system" in 2014, which increased the presence of larger political parties with a more fragmented parliament (Martin&John,2022). Yet, the law simultaneously transformed earlier in 2022, which was proposed by President Kais Saied towards single-member Parliamentary elections that curtailed the power of the parties and increased intricacy in cooperation between opposition leaders. While changes have been made since 2011 through

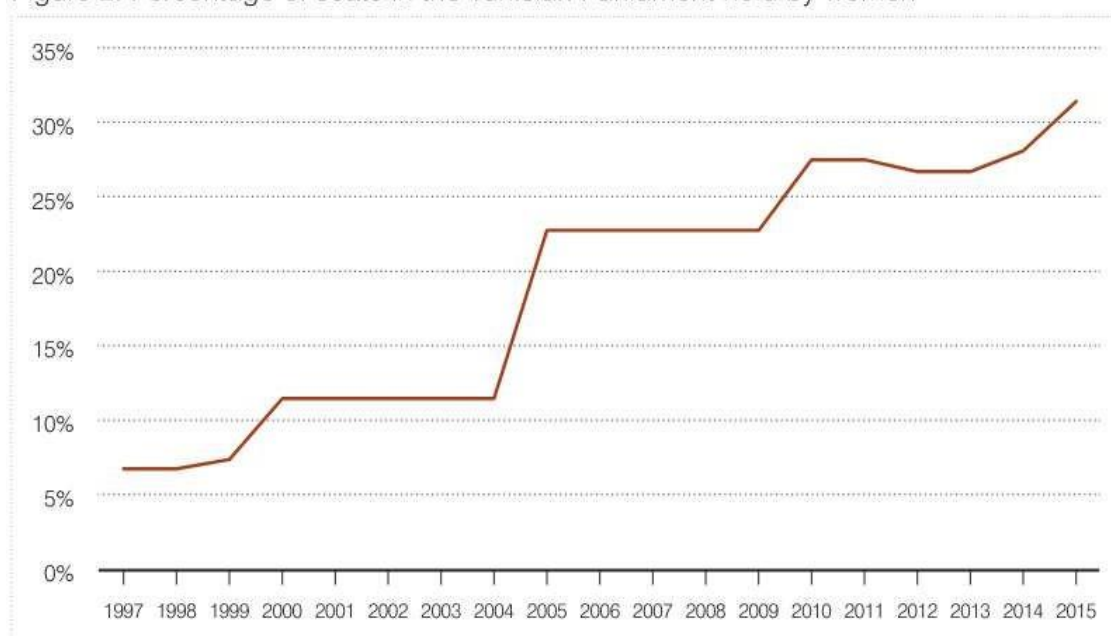
the laws that mandate gender quotas on candidate lists, the 2022 reforms abandoned the quotas, potentially ending women's political role. Also, alterations in election financing laws from public financing in 2014 and spending limits to self-bankrolling candidates in 2022 will make elections more partial. In addition, reexamining voting rights, which let detainees cast a vote in 2014 but prevented them from voting in 2022, may lead some citizens to lose the right to influence the election. In addition, the law of 2022 imposed harder entrance requirements, including the prohibition of government officials and dual nationals to narrow down opponents. It increased the president's power to expel the opponents.

2.6.5. Influence Of Electoral Systems on women's Participation

The introduction of a quota for women as so-called electoral agents of the 1999 election is positive for the representation of women. Even though it was usually their sons who would be the candidate, It was also found to be helping break down traditional gender barriers by encouraging women to be involved in door-to-door canvassing and public meetings; here is the real-type of portal-type apprenticeship," which is of great importance for expanding goals' career in politics, and it verifies that modifying election rules is not the only tool to stimulate women's political participation. They are the gender quotas, the part of the above-said legal norms that one can denominate as a most significant innovation of the present-day electoral legislation about women's political enfranchisement. In the case of Tunisia, there has been a distinction that the percentage of women should be at least fifty percent in the lower Chamber of Deputies set in 1959. This system has only been partially effective as if a woman is elected in a direct constituency, a man will take her place in the reserved seats, and an increase in the number of direct constituencies saw a decrease in the number of women in parliament. Despite this, in the 1995 elections, the number of women in parliament more than doubled from 1990; however, moving back to a more proportional representation saw a decrease in numbers again in 1999. The general trend appears to be that the more focus is on women's participation in electoral systems, the more active women are in running for election and engaging in political activities.

Figure 2
Percentage of Seats in The Tunisian Parliament Held by Women

Figure 2. Percentage of seats in the Tunisian Parliament held by women



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (1 February 2015) 'Women in parliaments'
<http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world010215.htm>

2.7. Challenges And Barriers To Women Political Participation

2.7.1. Socio-Cultural Factors

Some of the most significant socio-cultural conditions affecting women's choices regarding high-profile public roles, such as those of politicians, are found in Tunisia. Social movements and civil society play an important role in advancing the skills that women parliamentarians need to learn, such as negotiation, legislation, and electoral skills, and in advancing equality and promoting women's political participation. Different associations have made multiple efforts preceding, in, and following the elections. Part of the activities will target potential candidates and party lists by educating them, for instance, through the holding of conferences with specialized institutions, and other parts will be targeted to voters to try through the members of the association to shed light on women's achievements in the past, and what shall be achieved in the future, to convince them that the inclusion of women will be a guarantee for

making the needed change of the living conditions of the two components. Domestic training and workshops aimed at giving women the confidence to run for office, as well as support from many civil society groups at the national and international levels whose activities focus on women at the grassroots level. Other groups advocate work to direct government policies toward eliminating discriminatory practices against women in political institutions or at least toward gender equality. The obstacles to women's political activism in Tunisia have long been known. Still, they are now particularly significant and timely to understand better as they can differ significantly during such a financially and politically tricky period for all Tunisians. Among the most apparent barriers presently in the way of women's political participation involve the weight of social expectations to limit women to maternal and familial roles, alongside strong traditional stereotypes that mandate gender-specific behavior and make it socially awkward and sufficiently notable to break them. Tunisian women, in particular, face barriers concerning geographical location and socio-educational and economic placement within their society. Given the patriarchal and religious culture in Tunisia, directed by this perspective, men are encouraged to take initiative and leadership roles in politics, which can be reinforced in male-dominant career paths. Women's jobs are a little more than minimum wage line of simple jobs, like teaching, nursing, and secretarial work, compared to men who can enter political positions with a related college-appropriate job. This career path deters women from entering politics in the first place. Those who pursue a career in politics face discrimination in employment and equal pay issues. Women comprise approximately 24% of the Tunisian workforce income but often work without clearly defined contracts, benefits, or potential for security and advancement (The Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 2020). It is also evident that many women are not otherwise promoted to top ranks, while men of lower or even substandard qualities are encouraged to such positions. Also, many women are sexually harassed in their workplaces. But the fact is that women are even paid worse in political offices; in fact, they earn less than their male colleagues. This implies that there is decreased social intercourse. It is man-dominated, and there is mandatory adherence to laid down cultural norms as far as gender roles in any given society are concerned, hence the impact on women in public spheres and more so on their ability to occupy private domains (El-Mesriqi, 2021). Women are also confined to mechanical jobs and their rights and liberties in the private sphere, as defined in traditional marriage and families. These hierarchies that are evident in the workplace follow women in their Familial and social relations, restricting them from mobility, expression, and even the ability to fight these oppressive frameworks. As a result, all the imperatives of gender prejudice damaging to women's career future also limit them to the family circle. Family

relationships are presumed to be highly hierarchical in traditions. Many standards are not written but dictate a woman's pace while walking. Concerning privacy, such families become illusory since all family members are controlled and supervised concerning all aspects of their lives, especially the gender aspect. Opinions that are introduced from outside or defined by other people matter. Domination by other people or their surrender to limitations leads women to accept other people's decisions and allow little to no self-determination. A woman is to be immune from the kind of labeling that society attaches to her conduct. Women are, in a way, rebellious if they don't abide by the rules and regulations of the patriarchal family system. The current trends of the society are thus legitimized. Thus, a woman who does not conform to such a culture threatens the family's survival, which is considered the most valued unit in society. The family has to make sure that the socio-political frailty of the patriarchal society is revealed. Consequently, women, or family divisions separate individuals from the love of society. Women are told to be submissive, chaste, virginal, respectful, obedient, and compliant to the conventional. When men are granted freedom to dominate the couple's union, they can then whine, complaining that women are intruding in 'men's domain.' Many women in committed relationships where male partners dominate, such as in workplaces where women are subordinates, and the men are bosses/handypersons with complete control of the family pocket, end up being forced into sexual relations, being beaten or threatened. Women with active involvement in civil society organizations mention a significant issue whenever they are left alone; they contribute a lot to changing society, but their husbands constantly interrupt them. In the same way, male partners turn into control factors, forcing women to go back to normal, boring lives according to traditions. Healthy or unhealthy partner interactions should be viewed in the context of the position and the psychological notion of a socially gendered regime.

2.7.2. Socio-Economic Factors Impacting Women Political Engagement

Socioeconomic factors are a fundamental determining factor for the extent of women's political involvement in Tunisia. Besides this, they affect individual capacities and, in doing so, the levels of political commitment. One of the many international conventions and resolutions clarifies that the social, institutional, structural, and relational challenges inherent in the socio-economic environment are significant hindrances to women's political participation. Some progress has been made in a few areas, but women's socioeconomic status differs significantly between urban and rural areas in Tunisia. Despite translating into momentum when trying to ensure participation in public politics, structural and institutional barriers to political

involvement continue to be driven by poverty, and women in rural regions are particularly at risk. Rural poverty means limited access to quality education, healthcare, and other essential services, thus limiting women's ability to become politically active. This social and economic disadvantage then becomes a cycle where women's voices are less represented, and therefore, women have little to no influence over political decision-making. To strike down on this inequity, gender equality could become a fundamental societal focal point, reducing wealth distribution inequality, which would promote greater female political engagement. Tunisia can naturalize these socio-economic gaps by promoting policies that allow more women to assume influential local and national governance positions. There is evidence of a strong correlation between women's economic empowerment and political engagement, with wealthier women almost certainly being more likely to overcome structural barriers and engage in politics. It's worth noting that women are more politically involved when they are economically independent and stable (so to speak), as this frees them to contribute, mainly materially, to political campaigns and initiatives. Since economically empowered women from the middle and upper classes can mobilize and have access to resources, there is a greater probability of women entering politics in Tunisia. Economically marginalized women are also marginalized from finances to finance such political ambitions, representing women in the political arena in an unbalanced manner as they are on the other side. As far as women's part in economic growth is concerned, women constitute a vital active social position, and women are already involved in the Tunisian case, for example. Their economic empowerment could drive the political enfranchisement of women. Tunisia offers a chance to support women's entrepreneurship, access to credit, and financial inclusion. It also allows some women's political entrepreneurship to participate in decision-making processes for a larger group of women. For example, after the 2018 elections, women achieved significant representation at local levels, with 47 percent of municipal council positions held by women (Zolman, 2020). Social and cultural barriers to women's political involvement are conflated with significant economic disparities. For many women, socioeconomic status establishes societal expectations and family obligations that constrain women's capacity to participate in politics. One example is that women with lower mass economic status might be subject to higher cultural conditions to push family and caregiving instead of involvement in politics or the public. Moreover, traditional gender norms are generally more entrenched in lower-resource communities, constraining women's opportunities for participation in leadership. To reduce these cultural and social obstacles, perceptions concerning the role of gender need to change, particularly in economically marginalized populations. Among others, it is essential to establish an environment where

women, irrespective of socio-economic background, can politicize without fear, so to speak, by promoting more equitable sharing of family responsibilities, gender-sensitive education, and militating against stereotyping. The socio-economic standing of women, including access to healthcare, is central to their health and political participation. Tunisian women in lower socio-economic groups may have health disparities that prevent them from fully participating in political activities. Such burdens may eliminate women's availability and ability for political participation through chronic health problems, limited access to healthcare services, and unpaid care work. This socio-economic limitation will be better addressed if there is investment in women's health and accessibility to affordable healthcare services. Women always have a more substantial basis for active social participation, including active political participation, if they stay healthy. This is especially relevant to rural and marginalized women who carry an unequal share of health disparities and, as a consequence, suffer further exclusion from political life. We need to be aware of the intersectionality of socioeconomic factors with other parameters, such as human and regional diversity and oldness. Women living in remote areas, those younger, and women from ethnic minorities face compounded socio-economic challenges to political engagement. Transforming these overlapping inequalities into a more representative political system in Tunisia is imperative. Intersectional strategies are needed to identify the socio-economic barriers for various women so that all women reach the same level of political representation and opportunities.

2.7.3. Gender Stereotypes

Following the overthrow of Zine el Abidine BenAli's regime, students of the younger generation (particularly women) participated in the demonstration rallies. Still, they soon figured out that they had just shattered the men's idealized image of them and fallen ungracefully: the female sex was no substitute for the males' preordained job of transforming the state. Female freedom had certainly increased, but women were incapable of the founding, that is, the foundation of national social and political life. The systematic discrimination that women experience in everyday life is often linked to prevailing gender stereotypes, that is, to widely accepted ideas about women, men, and their respective roles. In Tunisia, gender stereotypes are very much in place and influence not only the stereotypical view of women's life patterns concerning work and family but also the typical environments in which men and women can move freely and autonomously, meet, and mix. Until recently, men's public domain and women's private domain were the points of reference, with the consequence that women

were encouraged to dedicate themselves to traditionally female occupations such as school teachers, nurses, salesgirls, or secretaries (Nillesen et al., 2021). In all societies, social constructions through popular discourse and the media offer human beings ways to make themselves intelligible to others and themselves. In Tunisian society, gender and age are key factors that shape interactions among people. Tensions are ever-present between the perpetuation of the status quo versus the changes required by societies in transition. Several stereotypes freeze social relations based on specific characteristics, including gender. These are not without consequences for the individual. A woman unfairly pigeonholed as unemployable will internalize this self-stereotype to the detriment of developing an empowering non-stereotypical identity, with long-term negative repercussions. Individual capabilities are limited by perceptions of competency, which constitute the contentious intersection of potential, social norms, encouragement, and the environment. Likewise, Tunisian MP Samia Abbou of the Democratic Current said that “while there are some improvements after the year 2011, women are often used as merely ‘prop or as a figurehead or to meet the quota of women in the parties on the electoral lists without fully including women in the party or elevating women to serve as heads of lists” (Blackman & Jackson, 2021). An interplay between multiple identities, values, and social relations governs Tunisian society. These are often informed by Islam, not as a theology, but as a cultural background that informs daily life and social interaction. Many facets of daily life, including intimate relations between men and women, are shaped by this religious-cultural resource. Like other societies, Tunisia is also affected by intricate intersectional power dynamics, and its social relations are steeped in power structures informed by gender, age, class, ethnicity, and wealth. Migration has added to the complexity of this web of existence. If rising migration is testimony to the altered self- understanding often sought through massive displacements, it can be no surprise that the reconstituted self calcifies at the point of identity-defining attributes such as stereotypes. Historically, laws and regulations around equal opportunities for both genders have been slowly implemented in Tunisia. A given example is the common practice of positive discrimination for men to hold higher positions within the government. This has led many officials, assuming more than one limitation, to admit that the power balance plan should be slowed down and they should focus on other activities. This is solid evidence of the inability of female political figures to one day occupy the same positions as men. This means without formal laws enforcing equal positions, women’s chances of advancement are continually hampered, and they are relegated to positions of lesser authority. This issue is followed by a lack of information on how and why to be promoted to more responsible positions, resulting

from inconsistent understandings of the qualifications required for corresponding roles. This has led to deliberate and arbitrary barriers preventing women from taking various positions (Abdellatif, 2023). It's important to highlight that Gender stereotypes are one of the sociocultural factors mentioned in this picture. It explains every aspect of women's abilities and duties and how these are poorly viewed. The report mentions "women's unchanging commitment in informal and after strides of political cooperation, for example, volunteering for activities, supporting competitors, and political pack people.

2.7.4. Lack Of Supportive Social Norms

Although An-Nahda's influence was limited until they governed with the Government of Troika, that rule lasted from 2012 to 2014. They tried to codify their private conceptions as societal norms and established them as ordinary laws. Still, the dress issue should not overshadow the complexity of women's rights and gender adaptations addressed by the population, among which women. The PSC is indeed oppressive, and its family density provides a generous framework for women within the family unit. Women precisely appear to embrace cultural traditions and religions. Political factors developed under the Ben Ali regime have reinforced Islamic tendencies. In Tunisia, it is not compulsory to wear a veil, but the monopolization of the public square venue by An-Nahda, the main Islamic party, marked the population's minds. It noticed the expression of religion in the public sphere, women's attire, and the ethical standards and prohibitions in society (e.g. drinking alcohol, and it is a trend now to forbid wine and strong beer from a moral standpoint). In addition, the state developed a dynamic of shrinking the process of Westernization and expanding the visibility of religion in public spaces. The strict *modus vivendi* distinguishes Tunisia from its neighbors Algeria, Morocco, or even countries in southeastern Turkey, where the control of the public space is looser. Indeed, women in Tunisia are not veiled except for a small minority who belong to peripheral areas of the trusted authorities, such as the coverage of their hair or 'jilbab.' Strict social norms characterize Tunisia. Several cultural, social, and political factors influence these norms. As far as cultural factors are concerned, religion plays a paramount role. The family is the leading institution from which individuals are educated in their social behavior. The family code, the Personal Status Code, assumes a strong state involvement in this process of political construction, and its visibility is more through the state advancement in this field.

2.7.5. Cultural Traditions And Religious Beliefs

2.7.5.1. Cultural Traditions

The current family law, the Code of Personal Status (CPS), is heavily influenced by a conservative and puritanical understanding of Islamic law that historically and ultimately reduced the power of mothers and women in society. Islamic reform has accelerated the demands of women for greater power both in the new regulatory texts and in the practice of rights that activist campaigns or associations claim under the feminist umbrella. This law analyzes some kinds of exercise of the power of women in the high instance related to the family as mothers and future litigants of the rights in the cases of family laws challenging the conventional hegemonic discourse. The anthropological approach used in the field includes interviews with the actors (lawyers, judges, administrators, officers of the employment offices, and the study of the representation of the mother and her interventions in the court decisions. Indeed, the religious or philosophical nature of the references complies with the judicial rule. In that case, its specific operation must adapt to the social changes that this legislation regularly, dynamically, considers in the form of jurisprudential recognition and legal order, which is a place to confide in these mothers whose economic and affective role is increasingly recognized.

2.7.5.2. Religious Beliefs

The roll-back of the Personal Status Code was not the only way the government harnessed these conservative elements of Tunisian society. The regime also received the endorsement of Salafis, who were granted amnesty if they refrained from engaging in politico-religious activities or public demonstrations. Ben Ali found compelling reasons to keep the Salafis content while he persecuted secular opposition. The newly growing utopia was an explosive mix of ultra-conservatism and government authoritarianism. Ultimately, the economy, unemployment, and social inequalities, among other grievances, coupled with political repression, led to the birth of the Arab Spring, the wrath of the Tunisian citizens, who set forth the revolution of 2011. The closing of the political arena to Islamists throughout Ben Ali's rule, coupled with increased oppression, led to a situation in which the fact that the chief domestic opposition and proponents of the Islamist political movement Ennahda are Islamists with proselytizing religious machinery actively working those alternatives through the community and necessitated the authoritarian regime to assume the role of a "protector" of Qiyamah religious legitimacy. With the closure of the political arena to Islamists throughout Ben Ali's

rule, if the "secular repressor" was succeeded and removed, Islamism and conservative forces might seize control and oppress secularists. Islam remains important in shaping the government's totalitarian ideology. Moreover, 98% of Tunisians are Muslims; it is a source of identification for a majority of its citizens. In this sense, Islam remains a strong influence on Tunisian society and, consequently, on gender roles, education, employment, and in general attitudes toward women. From the Islamic point of view, the author Fatima Mernissi says in her book *Beyond the Veil* that she studied the current power and sexuality in the Islamic world and that it's all about gender and sexuality in politics. In addition, she mentioned Qasim Amin, an Egyptian jurist and reformer who can perhaps be counted among the first spokespersons of women's rights in the Arab World. He is regarded as the pioneer of the Arab feminine movement and leader of the female emancipation and education movement in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In this sense, he argues that *"Muslim law, before any other legal system, legalized women's equality with men and asserted their freedom and liberty at times when women were still in the most debased condition in all nations of the world"* (Mernissi, 2011). In 1956, the Personal Status Code was passed, the first of its kind in the Arab world, that guaranteed women's right to divorce; abolished the practice of repudiation, which was a method of divorce that a man could initiate unilaterally; introduced legal guardianship for women without male relatives; created a judicial process for marriage; raised the minimum age of marriage to 17; and introduced stricter measures surrounding polygamy. Unfortunately, these reforms provoked outrage among different conservative parts of the Tunisian society and were quickly ineffective. The Ben Ali and Bourguiba regimes further diluted the Personal Status Code, reinstating judges who refused to carry out its promises, thereby rolling back accessibility to family law courts, further slowing proceedings towards enforcing pre-and post-nuptial agreements. Agreements invalidated by judges who found them clashed with Islamic law were rendered moot as judges continued to strike them down. Additionally, in 1958, the only legally valid form of a bond of nuptials was reinstated as religious marriage. The revival of Islamic law regarding marriage granted authority to conservatives of social norms and values concerning women and led to the negative consequences that impeded us in Tunisia. They coerced women and girls to have early marriages, which set them on a course of no education, little growth, and personal progress in a woman's life. There is little direct evidence to show that women's political participation has been discouraged by society. It is difficult to pinpoint a difference in social norms between men and women involved in politics and make a direct comparison. One might look at the social norms that discourage women from going into the public sphere regarding the issue of quotas. In many places worldwide, quotas for women's

participation in politics have been instituted, most egregiously in Rwanda, where 56 women now occupy 56 percent of seats through the constitution. In Tunisia, however, Even though women have attained 31% of the seats in the Tunisian constituent assembly, the same representation did not prompt corresponding proportionate rights to the leadership roles in the assembly above. While nearly all the constitutional committees and the executive bureau were attended by Tunisian women, all these organizations' presidents were still held by male individuals. Appointing the committee leaders, the political parties kept the presence of women relatively low in the assembly and ensured that the positions of power remained in the hands of men(Tamaru et al., n.d). In addition, there is a general lack of social support for women who take on public roles, as this is apprehended as a transgression against traditional norms and values about women's role in the private sphere. As CEDAW claims, "stereotyped roles of men and women are socially and culturally determined." This becomes less a simple cause than a thread throughout all the factors surrounding women's political participation. Social norms are, therefore, ideas or perceptions shared by people in a society equally or in general. In Tunisia, for instance, the societal cultural beliefs and traditional gender roles reinforce political socialization as a male preserve. These beliefs are taught to children who, in turn, socialize with other such children, and ultimately, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when these children grow up to believe that women do not belong in politics (Moghadam, 2023).

2.7.5.3. Limited Access To Education And Information

While the literacy rates of girls and young women entering primary and secondary schools are tremendously high in Tunisia, education remains the first casualty of early marriage, with families forcing many young women to drop out of school to get married. Poor women are also illiterate; they do not have any idea of what the law provides for them, and hence, they still find themselves defenseless. Education is vital for women in politics because a rudimentary knowledge of politics, economics, and social welfare is vital to an excellent public service. As of 2000, only 35% of women, compared to 80.8% of men, were literate, and only 8.1% of women, compared to 14.4% of men, have a post-secondary degree. (*Tunisia - Literacy Rate 2014* | *Countryeconomy.com*, n.d.). Women are still denied equal educational opportunities despite post-independence efforts to bring coeducation and a higher literacy rate to the people of Tunisia. This severe gender gap in education and literacy is a substantial obstacle to women's equal participation in the public sector and politics. Due to the socio-cultural system, education level, political environment, and economic status, Tunisian women, if they are in rural areas or

coming from a vulnerable group, have some barriers and challenges in getting the information. This may also lead to dependency on intermediaries in issues related to modern communication tools and new information sources. Women's choice of interlocutors should be respected, and their reasons should be heard. Socially alive virtual platforms can also be seen as a space of struggle and dissenting politics. However, women, youth, and those in remote villages appear less involved in launching any virtual, particularly if they intend to voice their dissent. To seek to formally express negative attitudes or possibly risky conditions and contribute possible solutions, one has to attempt not only to articulate their dissent. This makes it necessary to perform the diagnostics, disclose tendencies, and make a prognosis. More women's voices in dissent would impose constructive dissent rather than destructive forms, enabling more effective coping.



CHAPTER 3: STATE FEMINISM

Professor Moghadam said, “*State feminism has a very long history, and it begins with the communist countries. Soviet Russia, for example, had a state-funded women's rights organization... all the communist countries had a form of state feminism through state-funded women's organizations.*” (Moghadam, 2024). This concept of "state feminism" allows the questioning of what seems to be therefore a riddle: how to pursue a feminist policy aimed at promoting the dignity of women, and the independence and equality of men and women, dictated by an exclusively Western ideology; and to hold a discourse defensive of Islam, based on indigenization of the latter to claim a double cultural exception (Islamic and socialist) that is essential to legitimize Tunisian sovereignty, by avoiding an open conflict with the religious dimension, and without actually attacking the issues of religion. Based on examining several feminist initiatives that emerged under the dictatorship, state feminism favored a civil society strategy. Preferences for this strategy are initially assumed by the state when it grants a particular legal and freedom of association to women's rights organizations, which it can also co-opt to control the development of civil society. In recent years, Tunisia has been associated with a specific "benevolence" about women's rights in the Arab world, often explained by its long secular tradition and a strong state feminism. Indeed, post-independence Tunisia has had a very particular relation towards the place of women in society and the associated reforms, the most well-known of which is the Code of Personal Status of 1956, the first of its kind in the Arab-Muslim world. More generally, the question of women about the status of Islam, or even of freedom of expression in Tunisia, has often been associated with a "double language" or "double standards." The reason is that the state adopted a secularist discourse and made considerable legislative and social efforts to promote the condition of women while, at the same time, implementing a policy of control to undermine and sometimes crush the emergence of any independent sustainable feminist impetus.

3.1. Historical Background Of State Feminism In Tunisia

Tunisian women have exercised their freedom and freely fought for independence, as in other parts of Tunisia. We can see also that Tunisian women have always actively participated in the fight to claim their rights and equality. During the early 1950s and 1960s, women were also participating in strikes and demonstrations against French colonialism not only to be free from the colonial rule of the French but also to be liberated from subjection as women. After gaining

its independence in 1956, Tunisia established a liberal legal framework that granted women equal rights. The basis for women's liberation in Tunisia can be divided into essential milestones: Many leaders and spokespeople to the fore, especially Tahar Haddad Habib Bourguiba and women's movements for freedom and social rights. It is worth emphasizing that there were a lot of influential personalities who struggled for women's liberation in Tunisia; it is necessary to mention that Tahar Haddad, who supported the rights of women as well as their justice in the context of Islamic conventional. Enumerated below are reforms done during the presidency of Habib Bourguiba as the provision of women's rights in Tunisia. These reforms included outlawing polygamy, compulsory free education, and a new personal status code that gave Women rights. These progressive measures were justified in an Islamic context primarily through the principle of *ijtihad*; this is the radical interpretation of the scripture to fit into the current events and ensure that the religious decrees still apply to the current generations. It allows scholars to fit the new problems into the Islamic legal tradition so it remains tolerant, progressive, and ethical at the same time (Grami, 2018).

3.2. Advantages of State Feminism In Tunisia

One of the advantages of the initiated reforms is the practice of women in all fields, which is where the pioneering project of women's institutions commenced. Tunisia was not only the first among Arab and Muslim countries to legally recognize women as equal to men at the political level, but Tunisia has become the first Arab and Muslim country to have women at all levels. Women were first appointed to parliament on May 8, 1959. Up till now, Tunisia has continuously strived to achieve international equality. Among the early and directly called women of substitution in legislative election UNC for the first time in the history of Tunisia, the nominative women's lists are compulsory by half of the nominations for the six municipal offices in Tunisia, and representation rates Tunisia had expanded or fallen to other levels or fifties parliamentary debate used in 1963, the adoption sixteen mixed real in the legislative elections of 2011 in which: *"59 women were elected out of a total of 217 seats in the NCA, representing 27 percent of the deputies. Notably, 42 belonged to the Islamist party Ennahdha (which won 41 percent of the total vote)."* (Cherif, 2014). The advantages of the authoritative stand of the Tunisian State toward the concept of women in Tunisia cannot be denied. This desire of the Tunisian women for the freedom of dress is still a dream in society. The Tunisian woman cannot cover herself entirely in any street. This means that she is not able to wear anything she desires anywhere. The difference in how women are dressed is an obvious

indicator that Tunisian women are not entirely free in this respect. The authors believe that Western culture could play an essential role in supporting freedom of dress in Tunisia in one way or another. This is because it came from the idea of the emancipation of women, where, in society, women are allowed to dress differently, sometimes unveiling their own, without fear of reactions from the community. Be that as it may, some of the reforms affected Tunisian society negatively. Even to date, it is not entirely free to wear.

3.2.1. Increased Gender Equality

Tunisian Presidents Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba were known for pursuing gender equality. They not only pushed for legislation to promote gender equality but introduced their ideas directly to the people and began to implement their policies rigorously. The core issue with state feminism is that policies developed by the state tend to be implemented aggressively, even in places where they are met with significant opposition, which is the case in Tunisia. While the state has enacted some of the most liberal policies in the Middle East, these policies are not entirely accepted in society. Since the inception of these ideas, the state has been aware of this. During French rule before these transformations, nothing changed for Tunisian women. The government can combat such harmful cultural norms existing in both rulings and oppositional nationalist parties through legislation that gives those rights to all citizens, irrespective of their gender, through state policy. Tunisia took a decisive step in ensuring that men and women have equal status under the law and by implementing state feminism, citizenship, and personal status laws. Then, this law gave women the right to engage in civic activities and run for or engage in all levels of government. Advances in personal status laws were significant factors in advancing state feminism and women's rights in Tunisia. The rights of women were for the first time enshrined in the Tunisian Constitution in 1956, and Tunisia continued to be an icon in the Arab World for women's rights for the rest of Ben Ali's presidency in the 1970s. In 1992, on the 17th of August, during the Ben Ali period, the president of the republic said that he appointed Lalita Nabiha Gueddana to serve as the State Secretary to the Prime Ministry, with a specific mandate on women and family matters. Citing the UNFT, it was stated that Neziha Mezhoud, who took over the UNFT presidency, was made the State Secretary to the Minister of Social Affairs. Besides, six women were provided this year's chargé d'affaires has held roles across various ministries, such as Ministère de la Coopération et de l'Économie Étrangère et du Commerce, Secrétaire d'État à l'Économie Nationale, Ministère des Transports, and Ministère de la Formation Professionnelle et de

l'Emploi (Brand, 1998). Among Arab countries where women still have a way to go before equal measures of political engagement and minimal scope of advancement, Tunisia's state feminism offers a good yardstick. Nevertheless, there is still room for challenge and disparity, and ongoing institutional work is needed to ensure that all the potential for women's political participation is met in Tunisia. As a role model, Tunisia is ahead of other Arab countries by using its proactive approach to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Tunisia's state feminism has led to growth in women's political participation. Today, women sit in several seats in Tunisia's parliament that exceed what's usually found in many other Arab nations. The government's clear intention of helping women become empowered and creating a conducive atmosphere for women's political participation came to pass. Tunisia is one of the only Arab countries that have taken measures to progress women's rights and promote their political representation, unlike many other Arab countries. Besides the constitution and electoral laws, the country's legal framework ensures gender equality and prohibits discrimination. Tunisia also took affirmative action, with gender quotas in parliament and political parties, for example, to increase women's presence in the decision-making body. A distinct approach to women's political participation in Tunisia also compares the influence of state feminism in Tunisia versus other Arab countries. Tunisia is exceptional in its progressive state of feminism throughout the Arab world, as Tunisia has to offer gender equality policies and initiatives.

3.2.2. Empowerment Of Women

While the roles and status of women have improved substantially in the past few decades, in many countries around the world today, women cannot play the same important role in community development as men. The aspects showing that women and girls are disempowered include Domestic and sexual violence, unequal division of caregiving and household chores, limited control over their sexuality and reproductive rights, and lack of leadership voice in leadership positions at the community and national levels. These constitute the foundation of the UN's definition of empowerment. Women's rights are a route and a process towards attaining women's human rights, and, in turn, they are a goal. The participation of the people is also critical to the timely accomplishment of the set developmental goals in the most sustainable, equitable, and culturally responsive manner. For example, Tunisia has relatively liberal laws on the status of women in the Arab world, enacted in the early 1950s. For instance, in 1956, Tunisia was the first Arab country to do away with polygamy and later set a rather difficult example by proactively pursuing a policy that discourages the use of the Islamic scarf.

However, this and similar reforms have been insufficient; traditions and customs remain a burden to women. The best predictor of change that augurs well for women is power, being aware of their rights, making the right choice, and bringing change. That is when they can grow to their optimum and play an active role in the country's development process. Contrary to other Muslim countries, Tunisia is regarded as an example of how the condition of Muslim women in Arab countries can be. This is so because it is now the only country in the Arab world that has outlawed polygamy, and it has some liberal judicial laws and policies that encourage and facilitate women's escalation. Also, Tunisia provides further evidence of the regional high ratio of women's employment, political activism, and involvement in public domains. Some people have sought to temper such a positive assessment by arguing that women are not as well off as they are being made to appear through participation in the informal sector. However, the participation of Tunisian women in various sectors of the economy's formal and informal sectors has been instrumental in giving Tunisia a better gender-sensitive approach to its development. Women are, therefore, not only presented as passive receivers of development, although in some cases they are, but as active participants in the development practice. This, in turn, can transform women's position within the country, changing them from inactive objects to actors. In the late 19th century, Tunisian women showed an understanding of their civic rights, and in 1920, Muslim women of Tunis appealed to the French ruling power in Tunis to give women the same legal rights as men. Women, shortly after independence in 1956, demanded their grievances for equality and justice in the country's new constitution, and the efforts of women's organizations were fruitful. State feminism, deliberately or not, has its limits. As Maamouni rightly points out (1986), their specificity often leads them to present only one problem: that of women and women, according to an official reading devoid of a class problem. Consequently, we can argue that this type of feminism results in a real breakdown throughout the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT), founded by Bourguiba, which, although secularized, was coactivated by all the progressive forces of the society of the time since it affected two problems: that of the dictatorship and that of gender. Meanwhile, post-independence political reality is reduced to one, powerless to negotiate between political organizations, cultural and social movements, and national women's organizations, as underlined by Mernissi (1975). Yet, it is necessary to recontextualize this policy at the level of mediation, which can demonstrate the efficiency of imbrication modes of expression and gender structures. It is a matter of returning to the time of the balls of these women for whom the ministrations promoted for them do not have the great effect of the battle. Even the rural zones, whose women represent supposed fundamentalism, have adopted their combative means

to regain a social status inherited from independence's revolutionary and progressive reforms. Likewise, they also demanded the availability of family planning. The central role of the FEDETT is confirmed, which is none other than the Federation of Tunisian Women.

3.2.3. Legal Protection for Women's Rights

In addressing issues of broader social justice and human freedoms, feminists supported by the majority of Tunisian legislation addressing women's rights since 1956 argued that both principles, of legal protection on the one hand and gender equality through the privileged status state in their legal text, were at the root of women's independence and empowerment. It is believed that both mechanisms are interconnected and that the Promoter President's work must result from both parties developing a reciprocal initial direction of interaction. The passages of the CPS related to women's rights as points of interaction have contributed to strengthening their legal protection. Feminists have also campaigned for enhancing the role of civil society organizations, especially the UNFT, and promoting a law that abolished the occasional and should be complemented by international recommendations and mandates, which was reiterated several months later during MFFE's work with states that advocate an international law, parliamentary working groups to draft reports that recommended 24 May. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Child Marriage, as the MFFE, sought to become a state party by recording reservations. Tunisia has always been seen as a progressive country in the region regarding women's rights. In 1956, the Tunisian Code of Personal Status (CPS) was promulgated to highlight the importance of the subject at the national and social level to encourage non-discrimination based on gender. Despite the challenges of a long-burning debate between controversial opinions, the state has tried to develop the legal framework. This aligns with the United Nations Conventions and recommendations, including those for women's rights, such as the UN Convention on Political Rights of Women in 1953 and the UN Convention on the Sound Principle in Terms of Economics. The free choice of professions and employment, the right to vocational training, equal pay for equal work, and the specific equality principle in employment from 1959 to 1964. The Tunisian government has created an environment that criminalizes all forms of discrimination against women. Feminists claim that provisions on gender equality have provided them with legal protection against gender violence through several co-sponsorship agreements, including the 1993 founding agreement between the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT) and the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs (MFFE) and the 2006 return

to the 1956 agreement. In 1956, the provisions of the CPS providing for rational equality evolved in conjunction with the establishment of the constitutional provisions laid down in Article 21 of the 2014 Constitution, which reads in part: ‘All citizens, men, and women, are equal before the law without any discrimination,’ stated the Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia (*Gender Justice & the Law: Tunisia*, 2018). In other words, any related legislation intended to base the protection of women on a legal basis, as well as serious steps to promote human dignity and to defend women's rights, threaten national independence and integration with international obligations, provided that national options are taken as a starting point.

3.3. Disadvantages Of State Feminism In Tunisia

3.3.1. Limited Scope And Impact

In the case of the Tunisian women's movement and state feminism, it is possible to single out a mutual advantage to both regimes: the first succeeded by placing gender and women's rights high on the public agenda, benefiting from considerable financial aid and immediate results; and the second by capitalizing on the increasingly positive image that women's rights projected abroad (and at home) as a token for both modernity and progress and an example of Tunisia's success in safeguarding human rights. However, this symbiotic interpretation might mean that activists, feminist scholars, and commentators overlook the numerous and firm conditions placed on women by policymakers. The precise moment that the Tunisian government "invented" the modern Tunisian woman by stressing both her education and her attachment to Islam was instrumental in controlling and neutralizing Islamist opposition. State feminism is a model that has been followed by very few of the gender-equality trailblazers in the Arab world, and its success has been met with limited and unsatisfactory results. In fact, beyond the instrumentalization of women's rights for both autocratic and democratic reasons lies a continuum of practices that have made the integrity, autonomy, and principles of feminist and women's organizations questionable and have limited the scope and ambitions of women's rights policies. In this respect, then, it is essential to investigate further the impact of state feminism in Tunisia in a more general manner that does not limit itself to the success stories but which takes into account, contextualizes, and adequately evaluates the specific Tunisian experience in terms of the breadth and limitations as well as errors of its expertise.

3.3.2. Instrumentalization For Political Gain

While some respondents noted that women are appointed to leadership positions in different spheres of society and governmental structures, this is regarded by many respondents as more ‘window dressing’ and ‘an illusion’ that painted the lovely picture of Tunisia, which is far from being confirmed for the majorities of women residing in the country. Their presence has become devoid of meaning, and the term gender becomes merely a concept of description. Women are simply the representatives of the regime. Another limitation of state feminism that several respondents pointed to is the instrumentalization of the women's movement by the state for its political purposes. This is believed to have led the women's movement to become too closely associated with and too identified with the state, to the extent that the independence of women's organizations is being called into question. Some, therefore, consider women's movement members too frequently in the difficult position of being seen to advocate what is already a government policy. The money that flowed for a certain period to these organizations has also weakened them since it led to a decline in their organizational and mobilizational capacities. Aurora and Rayah suggested that women's organizations in the region lack a position of independence and that the division between the secular and the Islamist organizations very much comes down to the question of whether or not they identify themselves with the regime.

3.3.3. Lack Of Intersectionality And Inclusivity

The legislative quangos have often acted as a mouthpiece for the state, describing the country as a sanctuary of women's rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and Sahel regions. The people involved in these institutions form part of what came to be called state feminism or women's state, labeled "bureau feminism" by the political scientist Radhia Triki. In early 2014, in conjunction with Mrs. Sihem Badi, Minister of Women's Affairs and co-founder of the Civil Democratic Party, and the conflict that counterposes it to several civil society organizations of the women's movement of the country, the women's office became an ostensible and contentious site (Hachemaoui, n.d.). Intersecting and combining all the disadvantages of mobilizing around the State, the women's office is in a situation of instability and is condemned to move constantly. Ministries alone do not provide the best environment for feminist collective action. Preoccupations external to defending rights are regularly relegated to its priority area for reflection and action. The serious obstacle to the actual effectiveness of state feminism is this lack of taking into account the plurality of experiences. The voices of, first, lesbian,

bisexual, transgender, and queer Tunisian women and, second, sub-Saharan migrant women and transgender people remain unheard in all the national and international studies on violence, access to politics, economic discrimination, education, health, and so on. For the first group, this unknown presence impedes the development of public policies better adapted to reality and access to their fundamental rights (Fanack, 2020). For the second group, omitting their experiences obstructs the State apparatus that perpetuates their marginalization. Additionally, excluding these devices from these inclusion passages dictates that they cannot be emancipatory passage scales for all Tunisian women.

3.4. Challenges and opportunities faced by grassroots feminist movements

Some grassroots organizations may be missing an opportunity to promote some fundamental positive change for Tunisian women by failing to address some key areas of economic subordination. While escaping the patriarchal control experienced through dependence might be a first step, a truly transformative change would see women who are not simply employed in low-paying jobs with no benefits. Small localizing groups have a double limit in both feminist and anti-systemic movements. At the same time, as they seek to foster individual capacities and address women's specific conditions, they risk reproducing a level of integration in the current global economic model. This disruption is indicative of a much broader transformation occurring in the world and for religious movements for social reform. These acts demonstrate a fluctuation in the social picture as people search for new ways to cope with the system and enhance their lives. Religious movements, as a means of psychological aid and social protection, are perfect typologies of movements that help people live in the new economic and social structures of our times. Compared to state feminism, grassroots feminist movements have generally had more success mobilizing around and gaining rights in personal statutes. However, not all personal status laws are being tackled by grassroots feminists in Tunisia. This fact might be indicative of the natural limits that exist for such organizations. Indeed, activists are more likely to fight for domestic violence laws or women's shelters, issues that receive much international support. Further, some personal status laws are also closely associated with religion and culture, potential deterrents to mobilization. There is no Women's Private Status Law, and it does not receive the attention that other laws regarding women receive (i.e., the Cyber Violence Law and the Inheritance Law). The PSL is generally left to the existing trade unions and is focused on the political sphere. This discrepancy in attention between all these other PSLs reflects that it is a more cultural and religious issue and has yet

to reach a critical period of attention, either from the international community or Tunisian citizens (Norman, 2020). It is essential to create a functional environment for women to achieve their goals and continue enhancing their political participation. In transitional Tunisia, the stage of transformation to democracy presents many opportunities for women activists to put forward greater equality between men and women through their involvement in public policy. Tunisia is on the African continent, a part of the broader Middle East and North Africa, where stringent gender-specific institutional and informal barriers deter women's political involvement. But it was also true, as in the rest of the region, that women in Tunisia were becoming more educated, and recognition was growing that economic and human development could be more effective with more women. Data from transitional countries also strongly corroborates that greater female political participation yields real development gains. Individual women entrepreneurs in the region are also demonstrating success, but business and advocacy-oriented women's rights groups are also succeeding across the region. Those factors indicate room for more significant or even dramatic change.

3.4. Impact And Achievements Of Grassroots Feminist Movements

3.4.1 Impact On Gender Equality And Women Rights In Tunisia

Tunisia owes gender justice in part to movements generated by feminism. The Personal Status Code (PSC) of 1956 was under the regime of President Habib Bourguiba, where women got citizenship rights, polygamy was prohibited, Women brought a legal marriage age, and also the right to take care of children in the event of the death of the father. The decade of the nineties also saw changes that paved the way for the Recognition of Women and Family Affairs Ministry and the Center for Studies, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF). At the same time during this period, changes in the Nationality Code formalized the fact that Tunisian mothers could transmit citizenship to their children born out of wedlock to a non-Tunisian father. The Arab Spring uprisings that swept across Egypt and the Arab world in 2011 sparked a new wave of Islamist feminism, which achieved gender parity quotas in the constitution in 2014. Between 2011 and 2019, women got partial quotas for legislative elections and full quotas in the 2018 local election (Youssef,2023). Additionally, the 2017 violence against women law recognized marital rape and political violence, holding the state responsible for survivors' well-being. Despite these gains, there have been challenges and backsliding. The implementation of the 2017 Violence Against Women law has been criticized for being partial, and gender quotas were removed before the 2022 legislative elections, leading to lower voter

turnout, including for women who face harassment at the polls. For example, the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT) and the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) have involved civil society organizations in implementing and lobbying for women's rights. Funding, training, and learning from Tunisian feminists will be essential ways the international community can support Tunisia's progress. A study on youth perceptions of gender equality in Tunisia found a strong commitment to gender equality. Still, it highlighted significant challenges, particularly in terms of economic participation and violence against women. Tunisia's ranking in terms of gender equality has dropped in recent years, now standing at 128th in the Global Gender Gap report (World Economic Forum, 2023). To this end, Tunisia has remained a potent symbol of progress in the Arab world in that women have increasingly made their way into the government and private sectors. Feminist movements in Tunisia have been crucial to the mark of equality and women's rights in Tunisia. Despite progress, significant gains remain, combined with ongoing challenges and backsliding. International support and continued activism are crucial to maintaining and expanding these gains. Feminist activists, most of whom have still not reached 30 years of age, launched satirical online performances in December 2013, which led to the comprehensive popular mobilization under the campaign #EnaZeda, which demanded access to abortion (Ena zeda = "I am certain"). The campaign and the call for gender equality and recognition of sexual orientation have reshaped entire sections of the Tunisian civil society to a significant extent. LGBTQI activists organized a pride march, and young tattooed, feminist, highly modern appearing young women campaigned for the introduction not only of abortion rights but also of marriage equality. These openly worded demonstrations of demands contradict the Sharia withdrawal of some Tunisian feminists from their campaign for gender equality in legislation. These campaigns exposed the new gender differences that emerged post-2011, emphasizing sexual revolution rather than political representation of the same elites. (Fredericks, 2022).

3.4.2. Criticism Toward Feminism

In the case of Tunisia, even though gender equality and women's upliftment were central focal points during Bourguiba's regime, the reality is slightly different. Critics have described his approach as "state feminism. Critics have attributed the following weaknesses to this approach which are: There are several weaknesses inherent in this approach that Critics has attributed to Bourguiba's policies The following Weaknesses include The following factors that contributed to this: The state was integrated into women's organizing through the disbandment of the pre-existing independent women's unions and the establishment of the state-affiliated National

Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT). These state-sanctioned organizations could not play the role of ‘watchdog’ of the regime or had no freedom to follow other goals and agendas. For example, the UNFT acted more as a facade to prove that the state of culture was sensitive to women’s rights than being the empowering tool for feminist activism. Also, women’s organizations in the time of Bourguiba encountered some difficulties; significantly, they were inhibited from taking action independently. While enjoying the patronage of state authorities, they did not have the right to speak ill of the government’s decisions or actively campaign for any cause beyond what the regime allowed. This retarded growth of a genuinely mass-based women’s political activism and ensured that women’s contributions to political debates were kept narrow. To this critique, women did not change their positions in public life and managerial posts; they remained marginalized even after legal changes. Women in government roles were appointed to those positions mostly because they were primarily affiliated with the ruling party, and it helped the party cast a broad image and project that they were inclusive; they had no say in decision-making processes. Patriarchal relations remained intact, and women remained excluded from the political and economic fields. Still, the critics continue to state that Bourguiba turned women’s rights into a political tool that served the aims of his nationalist regime. The second method he used was eradicating the base of women’s rights and incorporating them into his political structure, which hindered the formation of an organized movement that claimed women’s liberty and status.

Although freeing women through the Personal Status Code as a legal code immediately produced a series of rights never before afforded them, this reform is sometimes criticized for failing to go deep into the root of the social and economic injustices women experienced during this period. Men are still dominant power over women, while women are still restricted from having an independent action. In addition, expressions of disagreement were prohibited, and citizens were jailed for protesting against the state’s narrative on the rights of women by forming feminist organizations that differed from those supported by the state. Even after the regime change following Bourguiba’s death in 1966, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali maintained this model of state feminism while simultaneously eradicating the potential for independent and informed women’s politics. In conclusion, it could be noted that the reforms initiated by Bourguiba led to legal changes for Tunisian women. Still, the changes were from the top and did not reflect underlying problematic approaches to women’s rights and equality. Struggles integrated by the state feminism of Ben Ali’s Tunisia show the need to develop an independent women’s movement in Tunisia that can directly fight for women’s rights and equality.

Chapter 4: WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE ARAB SPRING AND ITS AFTERMATH: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

During the Arab Spring uprising, the status of women came out vividly in Tunisia, where women protested and demanded the removal of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power in 2011. Tunisian women had a tradition of resistance and activism before the Arab Spring, and unsurprisingly, women's networks were highly dynamic during Ben Ali's presidency.

All women across the age barrier were crowded in the 2011 revolution, and they altered the perception of Arab women as wallflowers. The position of women in the uprisings was meaningful because it described the fact that people's stance toward the government was highly damaging and helped to bring the fast change of the regime. Tunisian women continued to serve as active participants in changing society as they participated in local and legislative elections, engaged in social media, and supported civil ones. Among the civil liberties, Tunisia adopted a new constitution in 2014, and women became more active during the municipal and local elections. Nevertheless, the condition of women in Tunisia, even after the Arab Spring, does not seem very satisfactory. Even though the country is among the leaders in the struggle for women's rights, women are discriminated against and are between the walls of political diversity. The current government has limited freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and movement, and, unfortunately, domestic violence cases have shot up due to the pandemic. However, Tunisian women have not stopped demanding their right to be treated like men; they have demonstrated and campaigned for equal rights despite their challenges.

4.1. Pre-Revolution Era

The Tunisian State and the Condition of Women: The Tunisian State and the Condition of Women: It was often mentioned and commended at the international and national levels that in various fields, the Tunisian State had accomplished the task of setting up a legal regime that grants the protection and promotion of the rights of women. Tunisian women had benefited from remarkable legal reforms that started with the adoption of the Personal Status Code in 1956, abolished polygamy, established the right to file for divorce, and granted equality between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, fathers and mother heirs in terms of inheritance by applying the principle of legacies. Thus, the emancipation of women in Tunis began with the book of Tahar and his ideas for equality between women. Tahar al Haddad's Book 'Imra'atuna fi al-Sharia wa al-Mujtama' (Women in Law and Society) out of which one is the Tunisian Family Law (Personal Status Code) that acts as the legal ground for attaining the

emancipation of women in Tunisia following the year 1930 impacted women's rights movement. He favors freedom, equal rights for Tunisian women, and education (Ismail & Hasan, 2020). Before the revolution that occurred in December 2010, civil society activism in general and women in particular was severely restricted and policed by the Tunisian security forces. It was a large and diverse sisterhood of women activists involved in work cutting across the spectrum of development, human rights, environment, democracy, and civil rights. Until the revolution, the prominent women's gains included improvements in education, health services, and justice for women, as well as legal and human rights support activities.

Nevertheless, the increasing violence against women went unchecked, as the state chose to consider violence in the private sphere a personal matter. wWomen'smovement primarily focused on far-reaching legislative reforms and improving women's image and status in public spaces while only addressing this issue as a marginal and secondary one for several years before starting to work on awareness raising and advocacy at both the public and political levels, as well as direct support to victims of violence. Tunisian women had their share of liberal policies before the Arab Spring, especially in abortion and divorce policies. However, these policies were primarily the result of actions from above rather than grassroots efforts from below. The paternalistic state feminism employed by the regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali co-opted existing female organizations, limiting the extent of women's participation in the political process (The Arab Spring and Women's Rights in Tunisia, 2013).

4.2. Post-Independence To The Jasmine Revolution

Between the foundation of the republic and the Jasmine Revolution, Tunisian politics was marked by the absence of opposition forces. This is true whether one is discussing women or men, but it is especially so for women. Colonization put an end to Islamist demands and opposition demands. The state turned women's rights into a promotional tool, establishing commissions to arrange Tunisian women's employment conditions. Tunisian Women's rights activists could be part of defending the nation or the labor front. From 1956 to 1981, the decision to unite national and progressive forces into a single party led to the criminalization of any opposition. Therefore, Tunisians protested and were repressed or fled into exile to carry on their struggle outside the borders. Tradable activities for women were restricted to those initially carried out exclusively by women when, in truth, women worked in every field. It has only been since independence, especially since the Personal Status Code (PSC) in 1956, and the advances resulting from the demands and efforts of the state, that the trade union has taken

action with some continuity. (Robinson, 2020). One example of women in the role of change is the Arab Spring in Tunisia, where demonstrations and activism for change led to the expulsion of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's presidency in 2011. Similarly, "Women networks were highly active during former President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's regime, which led Tunisia to historically rank first in the Arab world in categories about women's rights, including autonomy, security, and freedom" (Carter, 2022). Regarding gender and age, it was noted that women were involved in the uprisings and delivering social media messages. Constitutional institutional transformation occurred in Tunisia after the revolution in 2014, which further improved women's position. A part of the constitution article 46 also enshrines the provision of equal representation of the male and female sex in any electoral body, and this empowers women to vote for or be voted for as presidents. It also maintains the rights acquired through Tunisia's Code of Personal Status in 1959. It demands the state to act actively in the fight against different forms of violence against women. Yet, the existence of these laws becomes an issue in its own right due to their implementation. For instance, high statistics rates in cases of domestic violence and non-compliance with provisions of gender equality in several sectors of Tunisian life are prominent indicators of attitudes regarding women and their equality in Tunisia.

4.3. The Arab Spring Impact on Women's Political Participation in Tunisia

Tunisian women actively participated in the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in 2011. During that period, women joined several democratic struggles, protesting against the authoritarian government. Their activities were not limited to direct participation in political struggles against the state and its oppression, but they forged a militant women's movement questioning women's social role enshrined in conventional gender roles; women from all walks of life demanding freedom, human dignity, and social justice. This involvement was further compounded by their heavy reliance on the use of digital technologies and or social media activism through blogging and journalism, in which known activists and journalists, including Lina Ben Mhenni, were very instrumental in the relay of unfiltered information of the protests and the documentation of the violation of state power. These digital endeavors were important in driving support, awareness, and engagement of the public locally and globally and shifting the hearts and minds about women's roles in political processes. However, women mobilized in alternative, discreet ways, supporting civil society and using social networks to deliver food, medical supplies, and transportation to protesters.

Most of these women participated in feminism and human rights organizations before the revolution and used experiences and organizational skills to continue the fight after February 2011. In addition to waging the actual battle, women also did so in cultural and through media activism, in the arts, cinematograph, and journalism that molded revolutionary vision and emphasized the pivotal role that women themselves played in the fight for democracy. They remained on the political scene even after the overthrow of Ben Ali; women engaged in the democratic process of Tunisia through political parties, especially the National Constituent Assembly, and most significantly, the calls for policies sensitive to women. Their campaigns after the revolution successfully achieved gender quotas in the parliament laws for women in 2011. Tunisian women participated in the Jasmine Revolution in diverse and multiple ways, not only to assert women's participation in an oppressively patriarchal society to remove the political regime but also to lay the foundation for the fight for women's rights and democratic reforms in the new Tunisia. It's worth mentioning that the Tunisian Revolution flushed out reforms for women to bring about significant changes in political life. Although women were not on the periphery of the protest held in Tunisia, they were involved in the uprising that toppled the Ben Ali regime in 2011 to ensure women participated in politics. Other progress was as follows: A parity law in Tunisia proposed having women not less than half the members in the elected chambers. This, together with the 2014 constitution that had granted the status of women the right to sit in elected assemblies and vote for the presidency, was a crucial positive step closer to gender parity.

Moreover, the more embracing constitution offered another article in defense of progressive rights agreed upon under the 1956 Code of Personal Status, and also accused the state of committing violence against women and declared it the state's responsibility to put an end to the act. Women also flocked to politics, the parliament, the Council of Representatives, local elections, and vying for these positions. Besides the above impacts, online activism and social media movements provided women other ways to attain political power. However, as in any situation, listing several negative tendencies concerning such innovative vehicles is possible. Similarly, women's rights remained an issue since they have yet to be fully enforced, and access to and compliance with the laws must be improved. There are still problems with discrimination and the insufficiency of women in politics; the most recent change of direction toward an even more authoritarian regime may be difficult; such liberties as association, speech, and movement remain endangered but are very important for progress. Significantly, it is possible to consider the Arab Spring as the critical juncture that enhanced women's active participation in the

political processes; still, more efforts should be made to provide gender equality for Tunisian women in the political field.

4.3.1 Institutional Frameworks for women's Political participation In Tunisia

4.3.1.1. Ministry of Women, Family and Children

MWFC's mandated activities include providing services in favor of the targeted population and creating and mobilizing cross-cutting national, international, NGO, and CSO strategic partnerships, including intergovernmental cooperation frameworks (IGCF) with direct UN funding. To this end, the ministry has to be central in developing and implementing gender-focused public policies and strategies, especially legal reforms promoting women's empowerment. This has included recently increasing focus on gender-based violence, including the development of joint policies with other government ministries, as well as with the House of Representatives (HOR) to address all forms of violence against women. This collaboration aims to come together to develop comprehensive gender-based violence response strategies. This includes the MWFC target population, which is women who are victims of direct and indirect abuse in its various forms, Tunisian families, and vulnerable persons within the public sphere, namely family members and children. It means people protected or for whom protection is sought within ministerial structures or other organizations (National Gender Report TUNISIA 2015 | INS 2016). Such rights have received significant pushes under the first WMFC (Government and Parliament, etc.) to be more effectively protected during the advent of the revolution-led ministry. Rights extended to defenseless people of all types - including those under La Casa and, at a lesser scale, to those under MoJ (Ministry Of Justice) were mainly due to unique situation rights created at the department level to enforce those rights. This started a trend that continued under the current ministry with funds approved to create a similar department under other targeted minors' rights protective institutions. The Ministry of Women, Family, and Children (MWFC), created under the first post-revolution government (a new WNCC was again created after the 2014 elections) and with a state secretary role, is dedicated to designing and implementing policies and activities that are cross-cutting to enforce all essential rights of its target population, as highlighted by post-revolution mandates for this organization. Legal grounds for its emergence come from the legal framework that mandates the constitution to provide special focus on reinforcing gender equality and protecting women's rights, including through frequent reviewing of the legislation and enforcing necessary changes to ensure parity between men and women not only in civil, political, social, and cultural rights

but also in representation responsibilities (Ghali, 2020). To build a better society where families can raise their sons and daughters based on Islamic and human solidarity values, we need an Islam that completely protects the wealth and souls of individuals. Islamic society organizations should also work in parallel with this Islam. However, the basic values taught to women are essential for better social, political, and economic development. When first-world countries accepted women into politics, they established an organizational infrastructure for women and trainers to raise ethical personalities. As women took on responsible administrative roles, this organizational background showed how wise it was to involve women in decision-making. The same rules remain valid for societies that wish to continue progressing. In the Tunisian system, all references talk about equality regardless of gender and explicitly mention that women should be involved in high positions, not just middle-lower positions. The Tunisian legislator mentioned in the constitution the right of women to represent the people. In parallel with the constitution, the new parliament and elections law and responsibilities also use the terms of women's representation and responsibility. The word "women" should be read carefully in all feminist approach texts. It never talks about women's voices but rather about increasing women's involvement in the rule of men (Della Valle, 2022). Post-uprising, the first parliamentary and presidential elections witnessed a clear commitment to women's political representation by the political parties, interim governments, and other institutions. The election law was amended to strengthen intra-party quotas and a 5% bonus for political lists that complied with the gender parity provision outlined in the same law. Media, civil society, and political parties supported the role and the need for gender parity in elections through the lead of the High Independent Electoral Commission. Several organizations in civil society, particularly the League of Tunisian Women Voters, the Center for Research, Studies, and Documentation on Women (CREDIF), and the Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research, contributed with awareness campaigns, training programs, and other activities for women's political participation and for promoting gender equality in post-revolution Tunisia. To achieve that, the Ministry of Women held the Quota Project to increase the number of women competing in organizational positions within political parties and organizations. (Martin and Carey, 2023). The passage of these programs, initiatives, and agencies has been put into play to increase women's political participation in Tunisia. They comprise the country's constitutional framework, political parties, civil society, international institutions, and regional and international agreements. The 2014 Constitution features six articles devoted to gender balance and women's political participation generally. Article 34 provides a one-third quota for women's participation in electoral bodies. It is stipulated in Article 49 that there is a need to lay

down a legal foundation for the representation of both genders on electoral lists. Article 16 is devoted to gender equality in membership and leadership within parties. Article 72 gives the Higher Independent Authority for Elections (ISIE) a duty to have equal representation of men and women. Many measures have been taken to promote women's presence in Tunisia's decision-making processes and the broader political sphere. One such program intends to enhance the quality of life of women and their families by offering its services to certain parts only. Violence against women continues to remain a serious problem, so to prevent the recurrence of such cases, the ministry, in collaboration with international partners, held a side event at the UN Committee on the Status of Women. (the *Republic of Tunisia Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and Seniors Report of the Republic of Tunisia on Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)* + 25, n.d.) Moreover, the ministry has active and constructive engagement in boosting women's economic opportunities through its commitment and contributions to the formulation of Arab policies aimed at enhancing women's social and economic standing and increasing their proportion of involvement in development sustainability. Training and capacity building are also developed for the executives overseeing children's overall education and animation to enhance skills in their respective offices. Moreover, concerning private ministries, the ministry subsidizes organizations for women and families, children and their support, and private entrepreneurship. All these initiatives are jointly and severally employed to enhance the situation of women in Tunisia by making the community more sensitive to the issue (*Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors (MFFES) (Tunisia)*, n.d.). Despite the efforts of the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, and Children to promote gender equality and promote and defend human rights, more needs to be done. While women still account for almost half of the voting-age population, they are underrepresented in the offices that matter most in politics: governorships. Material, social, and economic barriers also hamper political participation by women and even shorten their access to resources during campaigns. Financial and resource support by political parties for female candidates has often left much to be desired and is just not enough to ensure the success of said candidates. There are also large cultural attitudinal and mentality obstacles, such as pushing for gender equality, which is not a simple shift if societal norms shift towards equal opportunity and partnerships. Additionally, the ministry experiences problems implementing its plans and programs effectively; it cannot track how successful they are or measure how much it serves women, their families, and children. Together, these impede the progress toward fulfilling gender equality in Tunisia's political landscape.

4.3.1.2. The Tunisian National Council For Women, Family and Elderly (CNFFPA)

Tunisia's largest association fighting for gender equality and promoting women's rights: The CNFFPA. Women, families, and older people are the target of its policies and programs directed toward that purpose. It is important to note that the CNFFPA offers the government insights into gender-sensitive policies. This body is responsible for evaluating their efficiency in implementing such policies to enhance the welfare of women, families, and children. The council also has an essential function of gender mainstreaming, which means that all governmental programs and the planning of all its activities are to be done concerning gender, meaning the needs and the conditions that women and girls face.

Furthermore, the CNFFPA funds bodies that support women, families, and children, promote private enterprises, and sensitize people to equality and companionship of the sexes. Nevertheless, challenges and limitations exist in the council, including constraints that do not allow women to fully engage politically through leadership positions. They also experience structural factors limiting their political activity; among them are material factors and a need for equal resource distribution, especially during campaigns. Sometimes, even political parties that, on paper, should support and promote more women fail to offer the necessary backing and capacity for women to win. Nevertheless, there are other significant barriers rooted in cultural mindsets and gender attitudes that make equality and gender parity an impossibility. However, the council experiences numerous challenges in the discharge of its mandate, such as in the implementation of plans and programs, monitoring of accomplishments, and evaluation of the effects that the programs have on women, families, and children.

4.4. The Outcomes Of The Arab Spring For Women In Tunisia

In the Tunisian revolution of 2011, especially the liberation of women played very crucial roles, which played significant roles in the revolt that overthrew the Ben Ali regime; the following years marked significant advances and some declines in the fight for women's rights and gender equality. Some of the legal changes, including gender parity in the elections and entering into treaty CEDAW, were crucial achievements. Some of the changes included; There was also a rise in women's political representation, though it was slight. However, challenges remained, such as latent sexism, cultures of misogyny, attempts to roll back women's rights activism, and the interplay between democratization and despotism. Despite the events of the revolution that

symbolically signaled the discussion of women's rights and gender roles, there are still enormous barriers to the achievement of women's equality.

After the Arab Spring uprisings, women, especially those from Tunisia, have risen to leadership positions. The principle of gender quotas and people's increasing involvement in the political process compelled women to take authoritative positions, such as 47 percent of the seats in the local elections in 2018 (Gouvvy, 2021). This was more or less a milestone regarding the political representation of the female gender. However, this trend has not been consistent in equal ratios throughout the previous years. Subsequent elections recorded reduced participation of women, probably because of demoralization by political parties, among other issues, which they consider unimportant and do not address women's issues. Persistent social enmity and challenges to achieve genuine leadership roles with the political parties persisted. Nevertheless, women's activism and voting rights have brought dynamism to the formulation of progressive legislation, such as the 2017 law on preventing violence against women. Nonetheless, much has been done to reach gender parity; women's road to politics is gradual, with victory and setbacks on the way.

4.5. The Arab Spring's Dual Legacy: Progress and Persistent Challenges

During this research, there have been significant difficulties in conducting interviews with people who run NGOs and other institutions. Initially, the aim of this research was to include various perspectives, but logistical obstacles, institutional disinterest, and unwillingness to participate made this possible. Although this seems anecdotal, it represents broader structural problems with Tunisian politics and society. First, they reveal Tunisia's lack of institutional transparency and cooperation even after the revolution. Despite constitutional reforms intended to promote openness and accountability, actual on-the-ground realities reveal the disconnect between aspirations and reality. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and the lack of trust between civil society actors and the state further cause this gap. The vast majority of NGOs working on sensitive topics like gender equality and political reform are operating in an environment in which the resources are scarce and the environment hostile. This bolsters the barriers to an open, inclusive society by causing them to be cautious when inviting external researchers. Second, these difficulties highlight a more profound cultural issue: Tunisian society's stubbornness of patriarchal norms and socially conservative values. The idea of the Revolution brought more dialogue around freedom of expression and women's rights. However, there are still a lot of societal thoughts on both that don't come from a modern or feminist perspective.

For example, some organizations I contacted were worried about the political fallout of participating in gender-related research, admitting a fear of public and state backlash. It is this fear that serves to emphasize the circumstances under which civil society actors exist in Tunisia and its political geography. Thirdly, these are signs of Tunisia's political system fragmentation and instability. The struggle of post-revolution governments to develop consistent policies and frameworks to support civil society has created an uncertain environment. Yet this lack of stability directly affects the research and advocacy since it generates an atmosphere of hesitation and resistance in prospective collaborators. Further, it retraces the more general but still pervasive obstacles experienced by women and other marginalized groups in making their way in the political arena, where standing for election remains, at least in many spheres, a struggle rather than a given.

From an analytical perspective, these findings reinforce one of this thesis's central arguments: The Tunisian Revolution launched a stream of institutional transformation but did not change the underlying structures perpetuating inequality and exclusion. But these barriers have persisted: the revolution hasn't caused the creation of a more liberal, inclusive society. Instead, it details a reality of duality where progress and stasis follow one another, complicating the trek toward fundamental social and political transformation. Furthermore, while the challenges I experienced in this research are anecdotal, these challenges are evidence. They demonstrate the lived realities of civil society actors operating in Tunisia and capture broader systemic issues they are subject to. These are not isolated bureaucratic, cultural, and political barriers but are deeply embedded in the post-revolution country landscape. In this sense, they have enabled us to make sense of the revolutions' limits and continuities of change. This analysis also points to areas where future research and advocacy could be built. This suggests any effort to thrust forward gender equality and political reform in Tunisia must address not only the formal forces of power but also the informal sensibilities and cultural orientations that facilitate inequality. It also indicates that promoting an expanded space for a more transparent and trusted civil society should be vital to building an open and participatory political culture.

4.6. Challenges For Women's Political Participation in Tunisia

Despite the Arab Spring that altered women's political participation in Tunisia, these women have faced several structural, cultural, and socio-economic impediments. This implies that although the laws exist and call for women's employment in organizations, women must be represented in leadership positions. For example, 50 percent of the respondents were women.

A parliamentary caucus of registered voters who participated in recent elections shows that while 5% of the voters are women, only 11% of the lists of electoral candidates are led by women. (Afràa, 2014). Moderate political parties lure female candidates to meet the set quotas but do not support them to win the elections. Instead, they are offered poor seats on the list of candidates. However, women in leadership positions are also sidelined in policy-making issues, where men tend to preempt most decisions. It is also evident that cultural issues remain another primary driver of this problem, as the community tends to disapprove of women in leadership positions. A study showed that most men end up supporting male candidates to lead, which is a reflection of how society is. However, women are often scared of repercussions from political rivals and other politicians they may encounter in politics. These factors are worsened by differences in economic status that reduce the chances of women participating in politics, especially in rural areas that lack resources and educational facilities. Again, though Tunisia has achieved some progress in education for women, challenges persist, especially in rural areas, to limit women's political participation and leadership. In response to these challenges, several proposals have been highlighted as worthy of consideration. Enhancing the existing gender quotas by modifying the electoral laws so that women are affirmed on competitive seats on electoral lists could strengthen the representation of women in electoral lists. It is assumed that training in political leadership, voice projection, and campaign management skills would empower women and assist them in engaging in active politics. Enhancing gender-sensitive politics at political parties and encouraging the adoption of quality and capacity-building programs for aspiring female politicians may also strengthen the cause of women's representation in decision-making processes.

CONCLUSION

The Tunisian Revolution paved the way for women's political participation in terms of gender equality efforts. But it's also exposed the continuing structural and social barriers that, despite all this, continue to impede women's full rights realization. This research sought not only to analyze how these Tunisian developments have affected the participation of women in political matters but also to measure the level of opportunities and political participation for women in post-Arab Spring Tunisia precisely. Through the Revolution, the political spaces were opened up for women, and the legal reforms also made an exceptional mark by introducing gender parity legislation in elections. However, this study also ends with very little space for women facing many challenges. Patriarchal norms at roots, irresolute political conditions, and socio-economic factors still impede their active participation and representation. Translating revolutionary ideals into long-term gender equality within the political realm is complex, and these factors illustrate that.

Additionally, this thesis argues for using feminist institutionalism as a framework to analyze the political structure and gender dynamics during and after the Revolution in post-revolution Tunisia. The 1950s were pivotal for Tunisia's independence, followed by decolonization in 1956, when claims for women's rights began to take root. When Habib Bourguiba became the leader, the Code of Personal Status was enacted, which forbade polygamy, set a minimal marriage age, and enabled women to work, vote, and get educated equally. While Bourguiba's reforms were often progressive, independent feminist movements were never allowed to grow since they needed top-down support. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, his successor, continued to tide up women's rights, enacting reforms to citizenship, alimony, and custody, but his authoritarian rule was justly condemned. Women also sought to retain these rights following the 2011 revolution, helping to cement Tunisia as a comparatively progressive jurisdiction on gender equality, but significant hurdles remain.

Tunisia's trajectory toward women's rights stems from colonial influence, state-led modernization, and the evolution of the political landscape after independence in 1956. This was when an entry in the Personal Status Code (CPS) brought critical rights to women and linked gender equality to national modernization goals. Bourguiba and Ben Ali repeatedly opened doors for women, but the leaders did not always finish paving the road to true political freedom in authoritarian frameworks. Returned to center stage two years later under the guise of the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, activism for women's rights around protections from domestic violence and equal inheritance has raised the priority. Still, social resistance and patriarchal

norms remain prevalent against full gender equality. Education and political representation have advanced, but lately, legislative setbacks and economic barriers, especially during President Kais Saied have slowed progress. However, Aswat Nissa women's civil society organizations have been a critical driver of gender equality while political polarization and socio-economic barriers persist. However, the results also show democracy is essential to advancing women's rights and contributing to broader societal progress, but women's rights remain at risk in post-Arab Spring societies. Threats to rise are the conservative ideology. Yet Islamic feminism might mark an opportunity for reconstructing women's rights in an Islamic context. The debilitating struggle Tunisia's women's rights face is a sign of the need for organized, regional change. It emphasizes gender equality and the stability and prosperity of democratic societies. This analysis illustrates both the specific and general struggle for gender equality in Tunisia due to colonial impacts, state reform efforts, and the expansion of the political process. CEDAW forms part of an international women's rights movement championed by projects like the one that seeks to address the issues that women face, promoting institutionalized but deeply entrenched economic and social inequalities marked by class, race, and gender. Tunisia's 1998 Constitutional Law formally committed to gender equality. However, the formal legal framework is not enough to drive the equality of women out of the law and into the public sphere; the political devaluation of women remains persistent. However, women's organizations like the Tunisian Democratic Women's Association (ATFD) and the Association of Tunisian Women for the Research on Development (AFTURD) have played an essential part in this process. Yet, they have repeatedly faced resistance to gender parity among its leaders. In 1956, Tunisia completely abolished polygamy, increased the minimum age at which a person can marry, as well as granted women educational and political rights, which led to a significant 'milestone' on the path toward women's empowerment. Bourguiba and Ben Ali booksended success and restriction of women's rights depending on political agendas. Setbacks aside, Tunisian women have a long engagement in activism, from early 20th century demonstrations on women's education rights to the activism they are engaged in now, in the employers' movements, such as the Popular Front.

Today, under Tunisia's legal provisions, gender quotas encourage women's political participation in a country that cannot avoid the effects of conservative societal norms and recent legislative rollbacks. This is leading women's role in public life to continue advancing courses for a new societal identity where gender equality and democratic values are entwined in Tunisia's political landscape. In light of recent electoral law changes and the socio-political context under President Kais Saied, this paper looks at the considerable challenges the Tunisian

women have faced in their political careers. Constitutional guarantees of gender equality and steps forward in women's political participation in the aftermath of the Arab Spring have been rolled back by sealing a new electoral law in September 2022. Not only will candidates still need to gather 400 signatures, which disproportionately hinders women's candidacies, but there has also been a regression of women's gender parity. Although the government has appointed women to leadership positions, such as the first female Arab world prime minister, all that work has been thwarted by the government's failure to address fundamental issues related to women's socio-economic rights, including inheritance rights. Traditionally and politically entrenched structures have been at a loss to accept the role of women in the political arena in what remains an ongoing resistance of women in the realm. This landscape shows a continuing dominance of men in governing and seeds a renewed advocacy to reinstall and broaden women's rights and presence in Tunisia.

The importance of electoral laws in Tunisia reflects the huge developments in the electoral arena after the 2011 uprisings. The establishment of the Higher Independent Authority for Elections from previous electoral commissions was a break from the past insofar as this involved the introduction of greater transparency and respect for high administrative standards. Yet that progress has still left the intricacies of the electoral system on display in the form of voting age and eligibility criteria. Special disqualifications reflect an attempt to ensure a qualified and responsible political class; for instance, you must be at least 20 years old to vote and 23 to stand as a candidate. How votes are cast and aggregated is part of how the electoral system is designed, and it affects how the values of citizens are translated into public policy. Secondly, it also underscores the need to comprehend the consequences of electoral rules for the party system, the behavior of voters, and, more generally, democratic participation. Challenges of representation and accountability, so bedeviling the design of electoral systems for a nascent democracy struggling to opt above the water, illuminate. The hopeful and uncertain situation of democracy in Tunisia after the election, and there are discussions now that concern electoral rules in Tunisia within its unmatched social and political context, are analyzed in this essay from the perspective of Tunisia's electoral laws and the role of women in politics. Part of the foundation for women's representation in political institutions is Article 15 of the Tunisian Constitution, which enforces the state's commitment to protecting women's rights and extending gender equality in decision-making processes. The 2011 electoral law laid down a principle of parity, which requires that political parties respect gender balance in candidate lists. While this law was implemented, implementation has been weak; lists may be dominated by one sex without this law being strictly followed with stiff penalties. Despite such

changes in the electoral system, like the adoption of proportional representation and gender quotas, women's political representation has more or less failed; the abolishment of gender quotas in the 2022 reforms puts women's presence in politics would erode. This discourse on electoral laws in Tunisia is entirely the consequence of their historical regimes and Tunisian society's evolution from a centralized presidential system under Ben Ali to a parliamentary system. Although progress has been made, women's political participation remains constrained by electoral competitiveness growth, changes in campaign finance, and ever more stringent candidacy requirements, all of which could injure representation and diminish the voices of diverse political actors. The introduction of gender quotas has helped break traditional barriers to women's involvement in politics. Still, it has been successful only to a limited extent, and electoral design and political dynamics are often hindering. The achievement of gender equality in Tunisia's political sphere remains an ongoing advocacy to address the systemic barriers and incorporate women's perspective into the decision-making process, as democratizing post-Arab Spring and maintaining the democratic space that facilitates diversity and inclusiveness to further the advancement of women's rights. Tunisia's social, sociocultural, socioeconomic, and stereotypical gender challenges and barriers to the political participation of women constitute a multifaceted challenge that needs to be addressed. Social expectations of women as such have created a situation where women were constrained to behave to various sociocultural functions. As such, sociocultural functions have played a significant role in determining the role of women in matters of high-profile public roles. While workshops and training aimed at improving women's skills and confidence in political spheres have been realized, the social movements and civil society organizations chipping away at progress are hindered by long-ingrained stereotypes and cultural norms. The most discrimination against women is in the workplace; they have fewer career advancement opportunities or are paid less than men. Tunisian society is patriarchal, rendering women discouraged from seeking leadership positions, which reinforces the notion that political engagement is, to a great extent, a male thing. In addition, women's socioeconomic status largely determines their extent of political involvement as their status is more adverse from their rural background due to poverty, restricted education, health, and other key services; as such, they cannot actively intervene in politics. Also, we find a strong correlation between women's economic empowerment and political engagement: more wealthy women overcome biologically based barriers and are more inclined to engage in politics. Yet economically marginalized women often simply don't possess the financial resources nor the skills or support network required for politically ambitious roles, which results in very few of their voices being present in the political sphere.

Also, there are gender stereotypes still deep-rooted that dictate women's work and withdraw them from their lives in public. Since the Ben Ali regime was overthrown, progress has been made, but women still suffer from societally enforced views that do not credit women with what they bring to the table in the political realm. More details of how women are relegated to the figurehead role in political parties highlight how women remain unequal. As a result, the conditions of sociocultural, socioeconomic, and gender dynamics oblige the interplay of these varying barriers, and there is a need for Tunisia to provide some means to counter that and operationalize its more inclusive and representative political space. Several underlying barriers to women's political participation in Tunisia related to social norms, cultural traditions, and educational deficiencies were identified through key findings. Conservative ideologies, as well as the high proportion of parties that are Islamicly based, led to the lack of supporting social norms and restricted women's political involvement significantly, especially when referred to An-Nahda's governance from 2012 to 2014; the conservative ideologies and the dominance of Islamic parties reinforced traditional views about women's role on the street and restricted their visibility in public. The influence appears in the cultural expectations of modesty and clothing, reinforcing entrenched gender stereotypes. Furthermore, progress in women's rights is further complicated by cultural traditions and religious beliefs despite the presence of a Code of Personal Status (CPS), which was historically a conservative interpretation of Islamic law and, in many ways, has limited the extent to which women exercise power within their society. Activism has achieved some rights advancements, but this work of activism is often confronted by conservative voices of the societal and governmental echelons that advocate authoritarian control and secular voices that promote women's agency. Narrowness in access to education and information is another obstacle that arises mainly as education and information are not widely available in rural areas where young women are very young when married. So, the continuity and education are shattered. They become dependent and denied knowledge of their rights. The social norms, cultural traditions, and educational barriers associated with this combination make it particularly hard for women in Tunisia to engage in political participation, making an all-encompassing reform of the political environment critical and necessary. It is worth mentioning that government-led reforms by leaders such as Bourguiba and Ben Ali have deeply driven the progression of women's rights in Tunisia, and state feminism has been at the center. However, the reforms sometimes took place under that authoritarian umbrella, limiting room for independent feminist movements or leading to a top-down approach that didn't wholly seek or represent the needs of all women. This represents Tunisia's unusual history as its legal advances were significant, if not entirely successful. However, achieving true gender

equality will require more of an inclusionary gender movement that can flourish in a democracy. Through her analysis of an example of state feminism in Tunisia, Professor Moghadam demonstrates a multivalent approach in which the state is a part of promoting women's rights through legal reforms while at the same time controlling women's movements. Tunisia began laying the groundwork for gender equality in the years since 1956, when Tunisia became independent, via the Code of Personal Status that outlawed polygamy, granted women equal rights in such areas as property and divorce, and made Tunisia a pioneering country among the Arab world in women's rights. Waiting and creating this state-driven model allowed civil society organizations, such as the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT), to operate in tandem with the state as it pushed forward for progressive legislation and lobbied with the support of international conventions like CEDAW. Nevertheless, state feminism in Tunisia has not been without its limits. Although progressive laws and gender quotas in parliament brought about important steps forward, acceptance in society of these rights, especially women's empowerment in areas such as domestic violence, household responsibilities, and leadership, often lags as conservative cultural norms continue to combat women's empowerment. State feminism also risks reducing the feminist agenda to a single, state-approved narrative that fails to account for class and the needs of those marginalized (such as migrant and LGBTQ+ women). Bureau feminism, for instance, has shattered women's organizations and prevented effective collective advocacy in favor of the state. Despite this, Tunisia has shown commitment to gender equality through legal frameworks and deserves to be seen as a model in the Arab world. But genuine gender equality will remain beyond reach without constant reforms that meet the particular needs of all Tunisian women and implement what it will ultimately take to avert parity from being a mirage: an inclusive, intersectional approach informed by state policies aligned with Tunisian women's lived realities, and the participation by them in determining the way Tunisia develops. These key findings imply that grassroots feminist movements in Tunisia face numerous complexities emphasized: economic empowerment, political engagement, and cultural factors in women's rights advocacy. Many grassroots organizations intend to empower women yet overlook economic dependencies that prevent transformative change and reinforce existing economic structures. Despite this, these movements have achieved success in mobilizing around the issues of domestic violence and women's shelters and have received international support but have shied away from deeper cultural issues embedded in personal status laws. The opportunities and challenges for women's activism in Tunisia's political transition. Successful women entrepreneurs and advocacy for economic inclusion favor a favorable advocacy environment, such as a rising

degree of female education and recognition of women's potential in development. Tunisia continues to move forward towards gender justice as evidenced by significant milestones such as the Personal Status Code of 1956, the 2014 gender parity quotas, and the 2017 law on marital rape but lagging on implementation with the withdrawal of the quotas and the lowering of gender rankings. More young feminists and grassroots activists have been taking up comprehensive rights campaigns, which advocate issues outside of traditional gender roles, from reproductive rights to marriage equality with #EnaZeda. The limitations of genuinely achieving gender equality are revealed in criticizing state feminism under the regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. While the policies of Bourguiba were somewhat progressive, the most effective way to co-opt women's organizing was by incorporating the work of women into state-sanctioned entities like the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT) while denying actual advocacy, instead signifying a loss of women's organizations as tools against state propaganda. The Personal Status Code established as law some rights for women. Still, critics claim that these reforms did little to address the core Patriarchal structures and that the state's regulation of feminist activism closed off independent political voices. Though there were legal advances, women's roles in public life had remained marginal, and appointments of women had served to strengthen the regime more than to bring real change. Taking stock of its legacy of state feminism, it kept independent feminist activism caught up in its constraints and urged the development of a more autonomous grassroots movement, one able to call for true gender equity in Tunisia. The Tunisian journey toward gender equality and women's empowerment is a story of progress and challenge.

For vulnerable populations, the Ministry of Women, Family, and Children (MWFC) acts as a vital provider of those policies protecting women's rights and addressing gender-based violence. However, there are considerable disparities in political participation, particularly in executive positions, even if constitutionally and historically, there is a commitment to gender equality and women's representation. Financial barriers, lack of party support, and harsh cultural attitudes stifle women's access to resources and political engagement opportunities. The analysis shows how women's activism throughout history gave women a presence in public perceptions and participation in the political arena, especially with the Arab Spring. The 2014 constitution introduced a new era in women's rights, but discriminatory practices and a persistent aversion to change continue to hobble progress. Thinking not only about the transition from state-sponsored feminism to grassroots movements as a significant step in the struggle for equality but also about the continued existence of glaring systemic barriers to women's rights resonates with the first step in creating the environment necessary to advance

women's rights. The results show that the effectiveness of gender equality gains depends on strategies beyond legal frameworks to address the cultural and material impediments confronting women and that the progress toward gender equality should endure. The Arab Spring has been a change maker for women in politics in Tunisia, a wave of activism that challenged gender roles, authoritarianism, and the status quo. It was during the Jasmine Revolution of 2011 that Tunisian women were not merely committed to change; they were actively involved in using digital technologies and social media; figures like Lina Ben Mhenni were outspoken about the critical role of women in these 'digital battles' for democratic change. Today, the post-revolution era is characterized by women's participation in the political processes to the extent that gender quotas were set, and the new constitution of 2014, where equal representation and state action against violence against women was enshrined. These advances have come while discrimination and a recent turn to authoritarian governance risk reversing progress.

The initial solid representation of women in politics, however, has wavered as political party dynamics and male biases, including socially instituted biases, perpetuated through socioeconomic inequalities, especially in rural areas, have impeded women's participation. To help women politically participate, change electoral laws, provide political training, and create awareness of women in the community, especially in marginalized areas. However, Tunisians have both a legacy and a need to continue to advocate for structural change to ensure that the gains won are more than preserved but extended, as that is their legacy of the Arab Spring.

The Revolution's legacy to women's rights is a progress and continued struggle commensurate with the more general questions of gender equality in transitional democracies. Given these findings, it is clear that we need more reforms to take down barriers that still keep women from entering politics. They are policies that boost women's political leadership, have gender quotas, and policies to change societies' gender equity. Future research could also study how grassroots women's movements keep these changes alive so that the gains are not eroded in times of political and social challenge. The contributions of women to the Tunisian Revolution and the subsequent practical manifestation of the Revolution may be said to have been pivotal. Hence, several Tunisian women emerged as involved actors who campaigned for political, social, and economic liberty throughout the Jasmine Revolution. The previous societies, protests, civil organizations, and electronic networking occupied themselves or stood for the revolutionary process without dictation and with less inequality. In Tunisia, women's rights organizations have been crucial in developing and securing women's rights into law. However, we sought to find out if women's rights organizations in Tunisia, in addition to facilitating the writing and

drafting of new rules for women, also helped empower women and put in place broader levels of gender equality. We also wanted to know why women's institutions, though successful in the past, have had a much more limited record of success elsewhere in Tunisia that we attribute partly to constraints of government and, perhaps, other resources and financials. Also, there is a question of novel scope: will restrictive laws curb religious gaming opponents, thus transforming non-legal activities and debate regarding women's importance and claims that progress was imposed democratically upon the country? When we began our research, we had established several possible or probable impacts of women's rights organizations' activities. In the years following the Revolution, women demanded change to gain proper rights and increase female representation in society. The 2014 constitutional revisions of gender protection of equality, as well as the safety of women from gender abuses and the recent electoral parity law, are indications of the benefits of women's activism.

All these legal developments came with some struggle, though. This fighting for women's rights had to be done between progressive idealism and regressive elements, many inside political organizations or outside cultural and political institutions. Nonetheless, women's activism continued in Tunisia due to leaders like Tahar Haddad and organizations like UNFT. There is still a way to go in enforcing full gender equality in practice and practice despite strides made. Therefore, there are economic and political discriminations; women still earn less than men, and there are still few decision-making positions for women. Their opinions and judgment are still controlled by patriarchy, which hinders the total Liberation of Tunisian Women. Building the values that require deep progressive policies involving civil society and the state is still lengthy. Ultimately, the Tunisian Revolution represents a turning point, but the path to genuine gender equality in political participation remains ongoing. This research contributes to understanding how revolutionary movements can advance and complicate the fight for women's rights, offering insights for other post-revolutionary societies grappling with similar issues. At the beginning of 2011, the Tunisian Revolution was a turning point that marked a new era in which the Tunisian people were able to talk freely and participate politically. These tangible ways included women, increased representation in political space, gender equality incorporated into the 2014 Constitution, and increased public debates on women's rights. Its very existence connoted a push for inclusivity and the deployment of inclusive and democratic mechanisms included in the institutional and legal forums. Despite that, these advances have not generated more widespread social change. Women's legal and institutional rights have improved, but even so, cultural and political structures that hold patriarchal norms persist and impede their full participation and empowerment. The persistence

of these barriers attests to the incomplete achievement of this revolution, particularly not turning the revolution into one that has liberalized and equalized society. Progress in the reform of Tunisia's institutions does not change its deeply entrenched traditional norms. Patriarchal attitudes, economic instability, and weak political institutions are pushing back efforts to make progress in terms of gender equality and beyond. Political fragmentation and inconsistent leadership compound these problems and can't be implemented effectively. The revolution's partial success shows itself in this contradictory tension between its aspirations and Tunisia's entrenched political and cultural realities. In my research, the first problem I faced was interviewing representatives of the NGOs and other institutions. This was not just a logistical problem but symptomatic of societal problems: corruption, lack of institutional transparency, and mistrust in a still ailing political system. The challenges point to the structural inefficiencies that still hold the revolution's goal of openness, inclusivity, and accountability in check. The revolution destroyed oppressive structures while elevating the most marginalized women, but not importantly, it does not address the deepest-rooted cultural and structural issues that existed before it. This duality underscores the revolution's partial success: It made progress and opened doors but left many of society's barriers standing. Finally, it is an important turning point in the country's history, featuring new institutional and social reform chances. It allowed women to push forward their rights and play a role as more active, politicized people. But the revolution's effects have been uneven. What is clear is that legal and institutional reforms have been made. Still, the persistence of Patriarchal norms and the persistence of structural challenges in the political culture of Tunisia continues to obstruct the emergence of a truly liberal or egalitarian society. These problems are echoed by the difficulties I faced while researching, e.g., accessing NGO representatives, which further bring to light these barriers and reconfirm the gap between revolutionary dreams and material facts. A follow-up will be required to continue these deep-rooted issues to extend the promises of the revolution beyond institutional reforms and achieve real social transformation. Although this study offers important clues to the evolution of women's political participation in Tunisia since the Arab Spring, it must admit some limitations. Nevertheless, the applicability of the research to earlier contexts may be facilitated by the fact that the study is mainly concerned with the post-revolutionary period. Furthermore, there is also a dependence upon qualitative data from a limited number of interviews that may limit the scope of the range of perspectives taken into account. Future research can listen to the lived experience of the marginalized groups in Tunisia, such as the rural women or young activists, to understand the precise landscape of the participation of women in Tunisia. Longitudinal studies exploring the effects of specific policies on protecting women's rights

would also be of enormous value concerning the effectiveness of existing legislative frameworks. Finally, I close with the fact that the resilience and willpower of Tunisian women's activists are proof of a mighty determination to realize democratic yearnings. As they push to change what is traditional in Tunisian society and demand their rights, they are reshaping the political landscape of Tunisia and lighting a glimmer of hope for future generations bred to have equal footing and live a life of justice and equality.



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APPENDIX

Title : Women empowerment Before and After the Arab Spring

Interview 1

Question 1: How would you describe the importance of gender in shaping democratic development in Tunisia, particularly after the Jasmine Revolution?

Moghadam: Of course, we are familiar with the concept of state feminism through scholars from the Nordic countries, Scandinavia, and Mounira Charrad's work on Tunisia. However, state feminism has a very long history, and it begins with communist countries. Soviet Russia, for example, had a state-funded women's rights organization; after World War II, all the Communist bloc adopted similar initiatives. Thus, during the 1940s, 1950s, and 60s, all the communist bloc countries had a form of state feminism through state-funded women's organizations. These organizations had excellent resources, so some third-world countries followed that model, developing countries in MENA and elsewhere. Indeed, Tunisia very early on, and later countries like Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and so on also established these state-affiliated women's organizations with a lot of resources, etc., in part to help legitimize the state but partly also naturally to help modernize the country by giving women more access to public space, the public sphere to women, through things like education, obviously promoting girls' and women's education, and also their participation in the affairs of the state.

Question 2: How do you perceive the impact of Tunisian woman activists in shaping the political landscape and their role in advancing democratic values in the country?

Moghadam: It was pretty significant. The only place in the Arab region where women's roles were so substantial and consequential was precisely Tunisia. However, that's not just saying that women were not involved in other Arab Spring protests. They were engaged in Yemen, Egypt, Syria, etc. But they were most successful in Tunisia, partly because of partly or to a great degree because Tunisia had the pre-existing conditions that enabled women to participate and make a difference. For example, I have explained that in various of my articles and also in the book that I published with Shamiran Mako. The chapter on gender relations and the Arab Spring has a lengthy section on Tunisia that explains those pre-existing conditions that enabled women to take a big part in the protest and the democratic transition. One of those enabling factors was that Tunisia, like all other countries, had an authoritarian regime before the protest and before its democratic transition. However, the Civil Society under both Bourguiba and Ben

Ali did offer some opportunities for the labor movement, definitely for the UGTT, some human rights organizations, and feminist organizations. In 1989, the Ben Ali regime legalized the two major feminist organizations. Now, afterward, those feminist organizations did get into some difficulties with the regime; however, they were there, they operated, they had offices, and they had connections with like-minded feminists in Europe, mainly Morocco, and Algeria. They were also a source of inspiration. I think for feminists elsewhere, Tunisia's women were able to play a significant role in the protest and the democratic transition, Unlike Egypt, Yemen, and Syria, precisely because of those enabling conditions beforehand.

Question 3: How do formal and informal institutions shape women's role in political processes based on your research? What institutional barriers or opportunities do you see impacting women's activism in Tunisia, and how do you believe these influence the promotion of democratic values?

Moghadam: Well, now we're talking about it before 2021. The first thing to consider is the institutions in which women activists were engaged. Then, look to see what opportunities and constraints were available at the time or were present and which area should be considered. For example, here's the UGTT. Today, you can see that the UGTT did have feminist activists. The UGTT organized many workers, particularly women workers, and there were female Tunisian activists and intellectuals at the decision-making level. This was an institution within civil society space to which some kind of feminist engagement and influence could be attributed. For instance, Tunisia has many women professors, far more than Iran, when comparing the numbers and proportion of women university professors in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. However, the proportion has been low in Iran, though numbers are on the rise as more and more women continue their education, gaining master's and PhD degrees. According to Tunisia, however, its large number and proportion of women in academia have long been another empowering institution for Tunisian women.

Tunisia also has many women doctors who protested in the country in 2011 and have been afterward. It has also long had more women in Parliament than other Arab states. This was true even before 2011, and after the revolution, the numbers and proportions increased but have moderated somewhat after 2021. By looking at these institutions, we see how women, particularly feminist women, played out in civil society and how they used their institutional leverage to take part in the 2011s revolution and democratic transition. There were also constraints, both formal and informal institutional, and also constraints that were both formal and informal. Tunisia's economic transition was slightly dysfunctional. Others say it was due

to an overabundance of political parties that increasingly competed against each other or Ennahda's presence, adding to the decision-making problem. Some of this might be true, but the most significant missing element was international support for Tunisian democratic development. For example, comparing what the European Union offered Tunisia over ten years with what was handed to Ukraine in its first month after Russia's invasion tells the difference. It's tragic and outrageous; there's funding for war for the European Union but not its democratic transition in Tunisia. This lack of foreign direct investment and economic cooperation significantly contributes to the governmental and parliamentary dysfunction that is often criticized.

In terms of informal institutional constraints, these are societal attitudes, values, and norms. I have written papers and data from the Arab Barometer demonstrating that Tunisians are progressive regarding women's participation and rights but are traditional on other issues. The conservatism has slowed work on policies such as equal inheritance, which were part of the Khalib Report but did not materialize because society wasn't ready. The current president is against it, and former president Essebsi was hesitant to drive it. Attitudes and values around gender equality, therefore, are both inconsistent and contradictory.

Very little has changed in Tunisia since 2021, and it has a far less favorable environment. The enthusiasm for such was also present when Kais Saied appointed Najla Bouden as Tunisia's first female prime minister. It was seen by many as a historic moment – a step forward towards more women in leadership roles and the Arab world. She was well placed to make a difference, given her impressive (academic and) professional background. But it turned out her appointment was primarily symbolic. She sidelined Saied quickly, limiting her power and making her so insignificant that it seemed more of a statement than the actual place at the table. It has been disappointing that she couldn't effect change or lead substantial reforms. This initial optimism faded, and with it, a move that was likely more about sprucing up Saied's image and less about bringing gender equality to leadership, as Saied appointed several women to his cabinet with minimal impact. Despite their official titles, these ministers have no authority to push through significant policy or make transformational change. That is a return to authoritarianism for Tunisia, contrary to the forward movement marked in previous years. Often referred to as 'democratic backsliding,' where democratic freedoms and open governance gains start to be rolled back, Tunisia's decline has become part of a broader trend. However, women have not made their presence felt to have a real impact because their roles have been circumscribed under Saied's centralized control, and their ability to shape policy has been impeded. On the one hand, symbolic representationality, without actual power, may even

reinforce the idea that female presence will be just a denotative token and not a denotative active agent of a change in the government.

In addition, there has been a significant drop in the representation of women in Parliament. Tunisia, previously a regional leader in women's political participation, now has fewer women in parliamentary positions. The setback seriously dented Tunisian women's ability to influence laws and policies, increasing suspicions of gender parity in political spaces.

It's especially noteworthy that Tunisia is shifting from a country heading toward being more open before 2011. Tunisians had even been able to talk, debate, and participate in public discourse, to some degree, even in casual places like taxis, even under the authoritarian regimes of the 1990s and the 2000s. But it was the 2011 revolution that served as a watershed moment, during which nearly a decade of democratic transition followed in which political debate prospered. When I went to Tunisia from 2011 to 2020, I realized the culture there is one of discussion. The Tunisians spoke freely in political discussions, expressed their opinions clearly, and passionately debated several issues. The country even had a few early rough patches involving sporadic terrorist incidents. It appeared to be on the right track to creating a democracy where people could freely participate in charting the future of their nation. But under Kais Saied presidency, that openness changed. Many found his more authoritarian approach alarming, which centralized power in ways they found undeniable. Introducing a new constitution was one of the pivotal moments that enormously increased the president's powers while reducing the number of checks and balances. The result is what scholars and analysts call 'democratic backsliding,' a reduction toward undemocratic principles and institutions. Under Saied's new structure, he has committed unprecedented control, compromising Parliament and the judiciary, stifling political pluralism, and suppressing Tunisia's democratic gains.

But Tunisia is part of a global trend. Regressing democratic principles has been happening in many countries, including Turkey, Hungary, and Poland. The United States has not escaped challenges as polarisation concerns grow, as does the erosion of democratic norms and threats to institutional integrity. Netanyahu himself has also been busy taking Israel to task for policies that many believe undermine democratic ideals. Whereas in Israel, the other challenges above democratic backsliding are coupled with uncomfortably large steps of undermining the rights and safety of some communities. And these are worrying trends: several countries that appeared to be heading toward democracy are remarkably slipping back to authoritarianism. While Western governments have some responsibility for this backslide, Tunisia and Tunisians have the same responsibility. This was during the period of Tunisia's democratic transition when Western nations did not offer the necessary economic and financial support during the golden

years that helped nourish a democratic Tunis. From 2011 until roughly 2020, Tunisia's political environment was open and permissive of dialogue, protest, and participation. However, the country faced severe economic woes: high unemployment, high inflation, and a shortage of foreign investment. The lack of support from Western countries wasn't only an obstacle to Tunisia's economic growth but also accelerated political tension. Tunisia had a struggling economy, public frustration was building, and that opening was for Saied's popular promises of order and stability.

The European Union was much quicker off the mark in supporting Ukraine's war against Russia than in backing Tunisia in recent years. It shows missed Western democratic opportunities in Tunisia to invest in strengthening its institutions and enabling its democratic transition. Without this support, Tunisia's young democracy was under growing siege, which resulted in Kais Saied coming to power and a rollback of democratic gains. The consolidation of Saied's power, the country's limited resources, and the lack of adequate working democratic institutions made it easier for the door to authoritarianism to open.

Finally, Tunisia's democratic backsliding is made worse by enduring social constraints. Tunisians are often progressive toward promoting women's rights and participation. However, they have conservative values, often concerning gender equality or inheritance laws. For instance, the profound social norms have prohibited proposals of equal inheritance, as they have hindered progress. While the current president, Kais Saied, and the late former President (Essebsi) hesitated to push these reforms, the current president is against them. Of the numerous factors contributing to an environment that restricts personal freedoms and women's rights, the combination of such conservative values and the authoritarianist approach taken by Saied adds to the complex interplay of formal and informal institutional challenges in Tunisia today.

Question 4: What are the significant differences between state feminism and the grassroots feminist movement in Tunisia? Which approach has had a more lasting impact on gender equality?

Moghadam: It's a combination. Cooperation between the state-funded and independent feminist groups in Tunisia has always been a trademark of the country's attitude to gender equality. Tunisia marked differences in contrast to many other Arab countries where such cooperation was full of tension or even hostility, with these groups working in a productive dialogue. I was very struck by the level of collaboration among these organizations, mainly because it is difficult in many parts of the region to collaborate with state-funded organizations, such as other parts of Egypt. There was some cooperation in Algeria, but in Egypt, feminist groups were hesitant about the state's ability to control women's organizations. Tunisia was

unique, however, as this cooperation offered a floor for considerable progress in women's rights before and after the revolution.

Until 2011, this collaboration brought together feminists from both state-funded and independent statuses who could advocate to pursue legal reforms and increase political participation for women. There was an apparent convergence of goals and common sense about respect between the two sides, which saw progress in rights to reproduction, family law, and, not least, women's access to the labor market. Once the revolution finished, this cooperation was carried on, creating a fertile environment for women's activism within the newly born democratic framework. But since 2021, this has almost evaporated into thin air, and the situation in Tunisia has been transformed. In contrast, the Tunisian political climate, especially under Kais Saied, has radically declined democratic freedoms, and civil society (including the feminist movement) has been dramatically weakened. Open dialogue and collaboration among state-funded and independent women's organizations have declined to a large extent. The fact that this collaboration doesn't exist today is symptomatic of the broader racialization of Tunisia's political environment, where political spaces for open debate, civil society engagement, and democratic dialogue are shrinking. That is a tragic turn of events, given the optimism that was there when Saied appointed Tunisia's first female prime minister, Najla Bouden. Her appointment may be a significant symbolic triumph for women, but her inability to change is a frustration leveled at the current political leadership. In this political economy sense, Tunisia's economic struggles have been a part of its democratic backsliding. For democratic institutions to function, the economy must grow enough to keep those institutions working. Severely facing economic problems, such as high unemployment, inflation, and lack of foreign investment, Tunisia has been plagued by hardship for many years. In addition, these problems have been caused only by the failure of the Western nations to give enough economic aid and investment during Tunisia's critical transition period. The flow of substantial financial and military assistance to countries in conflict, such as Israel and Ukraine, while applicable for the furtherance of peace, has failed to offer the international support Tunisia's democratic transition requires. Tunisia's inability to achieve the economic stability needed for its young democracy to flourish is due to this imbalance.

This is a glaring contrast in the way in which the international community has responded to the conflict in Tunisia, the conflict in Ukraine, and the conflict in Israel. The European Union and other Western powers pumped billions into military and reconstructive aid to conflict zones. Still, Tunisia, intent on creating a democratic society after the revolution, received measly

funds. The absence of assistance, in turn, has made it more challenging to resolve Tunisia's economic problems, and political instability has prevailed. After this, the political dysfunction became easier for Kais Saied to consolidate power and then push back on the democratic gains achieved after 2011. I also believe that this shortfall in economic support for Tunisia has been decisive in the collapse of its democratic transition.

Tunisia once served as a benchmark, a model of cooperation between state-financed and autonomous feminist organizations, but now this progress has been eclipsed by Tunisia's political and economic woes. A significant factor in Tunisia's backsliding has been the lack of international support for Tunisia's democratic development, contrasting with the massive aid provided to countries in conflict. Any progress on women's rights or gender equality that Tunisia gained towards creating a democratic society is now a profoundly disappointing and tragic turn of events.

Question 5: What are your thoughts on the future of gender equality and democracy in Tunisia?

Moghadam: When thinking about the current difficult stage Tunisia is going through, there is an international and regional platform that Tunisian women can take advantage of to highlight and advocate for change. They can be visible and create a feeling of solidarity among feminist activists, intellectuals, and political leaders. International meetings, including academic forums, UN sessions, or meetings of committees for women's rights, are significant moments for women groups in Tunisia to leave a mark on the challenges women suffer from and to submit their solutions to realize a better future. For example, there are meetings at UN committees like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, or other meetings that focus on gender. These can become spaces for Tunisian women to share experiences. While the governments must offer up official reports of progress on gender equality at these events, civil society organizations also have an important role: They present shadow reports, which are often more nuanced and critical. Tunisia's women's groups could work actively and give their shadow reports to detail the problems women are facing under the current political atmosphere and suggest concrete steps to be taken in the future. These represent external spaces in which Tunisian women's organizations can make a point of the disparity between government claims and the reality on the ground. Thus, they can multiply their concerns and pressure the international community to take action or at least that it does document and address Tunisia's democratic slide globally. They might also highlight the failure to promote women in political institutions, retreat from women's rights, or implement

gender-responsive policies. These reports can help resist the regression in Tunisia and build in the political system, accounting, and responsibility.

Furthermore, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) or African Union can also be the stages and spaces where you create connections, build alliances, and show solidarity with other feminist activists and organizations operating on the African continent. Through these gatherings, Tunisia's gender issues find their place in a more comprehensive, scaled, and related African narrative of women's struggles, achievements, and potential unmet collective aspirations. This solidarity could help Tunisian women activists build solidarity and support that could help them fight the intense challenges on the ground, especially at home. Because these regional platforms can provide a space for advocacy and the opportunity to fashion transnational alliances, which are essential in times of national political crisis, they are an important new space for transnational activism. Women of Tunisia can uplift their voices to be heard in global and regional forums in the hope that they will be heard, representing their challenges and being leveraged by the international community for change. These external but connected spaces allow them to draw visibility to their struggles, organize with other activists, and keep pushing for the reforms they need inside Tunisia. Strategic engagement in these platforms allows Tunisian women's groups to demand justice and continue to inspire hope as they fight to better women's lives in their nation.

Interview 2

Question: How would you describe the evolution of women's rights activism in Tunisia before the Arab Spring? What are the key challenges and opportunities?

Grami: There is a long history of women's activism in Tunisia, beginning in the 1920s when women participated in various political parties. They were active and vocal, advocating for their rights and discussing societal roles. This led to gatherings in private spaces where women could talk openly about their societal roles and relationships with their fathers, husbands, and others. Some were even supported by their families, allowing them to organize and connect with other groups, such as the workers' unions. Gradually, women began to play a more active role in the public sphere. Notably, there was collaboration among women from different communities, including Jewish and Italian backgrounds. This shared activism fostered a sense of solidarity that crossed religious and cultural lines. In this context, the Marxist and Communist political parties also played a significant role, supporting social change initiatives aligned with women's interests. Tunisia's activism approach, especially with various communities' involvement, stands out from other countries' experiences. For instance, Iraqi women also began as agents of change within Communist parties, creating some parallels between Tunisian and Iraqi women's activism during this period. Another important aspect often overlooked in research is the supportive relationships between fathers and daughters. Many fathers, belonging to various schools of Islamic thought, such as Hanafi and Maliki within "Alfikh Al Islami," were open-minded and allowed their daughters to organize gatherings in their homes. Through these gatherings, women engaged in charity work, raised funds for girls' education and supported widows, actively participating in society and establishing a strong sense of agency. In the 1960s, after the colonial period, women's activism in Tunisia entered a new phase under President Habib Bourguiba, often called the "father of women's liberation." While Bourguiba played a crucial role in advancing women's rights, it's essential to acknowledge that women also had their agendas and projects for progress. This period saw two main movements: "state feminism," which aligned with Bourguiba's vision for women's rights, and an independent feminist movement pursuing its vision for Tunisian women's future. This divergence created a dynamic between Bourguiba's state-supported feminism and a more grassroots, independent feminism that sought to go beyond the political narrative of the time.

Question: Do you believe that women's participation in the political sphere has led to more Progressive policy changes in Tunisia, especially after the arab spring

Grami:

Different women, not just the elite but ordinary women, participated in this process. They were motivated to build new identities as politically engaged women with a vision for change. We discovered new faces by inviting many women to participate in talk shows and other activities, particularly among the youth. Young women played a prominent role, vocal and actively claiming their rights. This new dynamic is significant to study, as it questions the underlying motivations driving this political engagement. Are these motivations shaped by social, economic, or a new understanding of women's political roles?

There is an increasing visibility of women in the political sphere, yet this also reveals differences in political visions among women. For example, women from different political parties, such as Nidaa Tunis or Jabha Chaabia, may hold contrasting views, sometimes leading to confrontations or conflicts. These questions warrant further research to understand the varied motivations behind women's political participation across regions, such as the North and South, and social factors like class, religion, and other identities. Moreover, we cannot overlook the role of women in religious parties, what we refer to as Islamic activism. This dimension of women's participation adds another layer to understanding the diversity of political engagement and the evolving identities of women within Tunisia's political landscape. This topic calls for on-the-ground research to explore the motivations, challenges, and perspectives of women from different backgrounds as they engage in political life.

Question: How did the Arab Spring affect women's rights and gender equality in Tunisia?

Grami: The term "Arab Spring" is imposed primarily by the West; for Tunisians, it was always a revolutionary movement, and during the revolution, we referred to it as the Tunisian Revolution. This distinction is important because while Western discourse continues to use "Arab Spring" within Tunisia, there is a consensus to frame it as the Tunisian Revolution. However, we remain critical of this process and the term itself, especially given that our revolution advocated for values like equality, which have been central to the evolving discourse of women activists over time. In the early days of the revolution, secularism was a prominent theme among women activists, mainly in response to the presence of religious political forces. The activism on the ground, in demonstrations and marches, was substantial, and Ennahda

became highly visible in the public sphere, a new experience for many Tunisians. Feminists, in turn, sent a strong message to these political forces, asserting their secular ideals and ment to equality.

Equality became a central demand as the movement progressed, especially during discussions around the new constitution. Economic and political equality were crucial issues, leading to the push for the parity law. Although we believed this was a victory, we have had to continue defending the idea of parity. Today, while parity may not be explicitly outlined in the 2020 constitution, it takes root in practice through administrative roles, shared responsibilities, and civil society. This represents a new way of thinking about parity as a law and an enduring principle. This process shows how women navigate conflict and crisis, learning and growing through these challenges. I encourage many activists to document their experiences, as their stories of success span various sectors of political parties, for example, with figures like Saida Garrage and Leila Toubel making significant contributions. These experiences must be preserved so we don't lose the stories of successful women in Tunisia. Women's activism isn't limited to outspoken, media-visible figures; it extends to diverse groups of women who engage in political discourse, whether on talk shows, in association, or within various age groups. The current situation, however, is different. There is less interest in political programming and a growing fear of openly discussing politics. Practicing critical thinking and expressing political opinions has become risky, and many feel constrained in sharing their perspectives. This represents a backlash, as we face limitations on our freedom to express our worldviews, marking a significant change from the openness and activism that initially characterized the revolution.

Question: How do you see the relationship between women's activism and the realization of progressive ideals in Tunisia? Have women activists successfully challenged traditional norms and facilitated progressive change?

Grami: Women's activism and the 'realization' of progressive ideals in Tunisia are inextricably linked. Tunisia's leading feminist leaders tend to be academics with backgrounds in philosophy, political science, sociology, and anthropology. They have been given the knowledge and a critical lens to break it down, analyze, critique, and challenge traditional norms. The activists, unlike women who did not have the same educational opportunities or experience exposure outside Tunisia, bring a global lens to their work, having interacted with cultures, historical contexts, and feminist ideas. Grants have enabled many of these activists to form organizations, collectives, and strategies that have helped them to move their work forward.

Without the financial resources, meaningful activism would be much more limited. Tunisian feminists have been able to sustain efforts, strategize, and implement programs that support gender equality through the work of donor support and collaboration from local and international partners.

In the last decade, I've learned that different political climates and leadership styles invite different strategies. Activists made much progress under President Beji Caid Essebsi, now President, as addressed the approaches under Presidents Marzouki and Kais Saied, now President, face new challenges. This is ongoing; traumatic events such as the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi reminded us of the genuine and deep depth of violence in our society. The activists strengthened the community's solidarity and resilience after these incidents. This activism has been central to a dedication to knowledge, experience, and community engagement, mainly through listening to the many voices of women across Tunisia. Tactics may differ from group to group, but those principles are nevertheless the bedrock of women's activism and the key to progressive change in the face of resistance in society.

Question: What are the next steps for women's activism in Tunisia to continue advancing democracy and gender equality?

Grami: So for the Islamic group of women, what we call the Islamic activism, we didn't have any activities regarding their situation. They are under control so that they may be active in their private space, but there is no discourse of women who don't hear anything about their willingness to be part of the resistance movement, etc., except for some figures. Because they are husbands, they can accept working with other women only on this issue to liberate their husbands, so I know that we have a very active group of women. This is the first time that women from different perspectives, etc., and political parties gather together and work together in the distance, and the gap is actually for this issue. On the other hand, we have the dynamics of feminism. They succeeded in gathering 10 Associations. They are working on the organizing and March and demonstration, etc., so they are visible, and of course, they have the statements. Hence, the associations include Aswat Nissa, Democratic Women, and the Human Rights Association, and there are a lot of representations of different actors. Tunisia is one of the most politically charged countries in the world for the LGBTQ+ community; as it is under constant police force control, activists are imprisoned. Like this community, there is also little societal support. As youth have shown interest in advocacy activities, older generations cannot participate actively in the resistance; now, more than before, it is essential that the new

generation continues to uphold the resistance. Yet, for all that, public interest is restricted by a deeply embedded culture of fear. That social disengagement is reflected in the shallow level of society's engagement in activism and the low level of engagement so far in the feminist movement in Tunisia and around the world, the latter of which has been met with backlash, with populist resistance as well. Many young activists today are reluctant to highlight the feminist label too openly because they want to work for human rights more widely. There is a clear shift in their activism on an issue like the ceasefire in Gaza, evidenced in their more broad, rights-based perspective. As such, different activist groups hold varying stances, and acting within certain groups is becoming increasingly limited, stemming from more and more limited feminist and LGBTQ+ groups.

Question: what advice would you give younger generations wanting to engage in political and social change?

Grami: My advice to you is to learn about what has led up regarding the historical and cultural background of the issues you strongly advocate for. Connect with the experiences of those who came before you because that gives you perspective and insight into some of the successes and challenges from before. That's why building networks with people who think like you, mentors, organizations that offer your vision for change, and communities is also essential. Collaboration can bend your power and provide beneficial support.

Also, make an effort to build up some resiliency. Social and political change often involves steps back and takes dedication, patience, and emotional fortitude. Be ready to adjust your strategies as you learn and encounter problems. Lastly, keep returning to your values, stick to them, and understand that small, steady actions make significant change.

Interview 3

How did the Tunisian Revolution redefine women's role in public and political spheres? Were there any significant shifts in societal expectations or opportunities for women post-revolution?

Arfaoui :

The Arab Spring marked a pivotal signal for democracy, a movement that brought unprecedented openness, with Islamists gaining political power for the first time. Before this, they had neither exercised political rights nor engaged openly in public activities. This new democratic wave ignited a sense of freedom among people, encouraging them to speak out. I remember that meetings were held everywhere, including one close to where I live, at the SAFSAF in La Marsa. At that meeting, a woman took the microphone for the first time. She was eager and said, "I've never spoken in public before." Her excitement reflected the widespread feeling of empowerment that democracy brought. During this time, people took to the streets, walking freely and engaging with one another in ways that had never been seen before. They would stop and join the conversation if they saw a group talking, whether two people or more. This was a remarkable shift because individuals walking down the street usually kept to themselves and avoided speaking to strangers. This wave of democracy broke down those barriers, making it natural for people to communicate openly. People became eager to gather and discuss whenever they heard about a meeting; men, women, and youth alike would unite, seizing the opportunity to engage in this newfound democratic space. The Arab Spring didn't just bring democracy in a political sense; it fostered a culture of openness and communication across the country.

Question: What were women's demands and motivations during the Arab Spring for democracy?

Arfaoui: Tunisian women began their movement, even before independence, if we can call it that. Some women were already working to improve the situation for women, advocating for access to education and freedom from the veil. With independence, our first president, Habib Bourguiba, who led the revolution and established the Tunisian Republic, became familiar with some of these early activists. For example, he knew of Bshira Ben Marad and her work.

However, after independence, he seemed to forget about her. Instead, he founded the Association of Tunisian Women, UNFT, appointing new leaders while disregarding those active in the association, which operated as a government-affiliated organization. However, it still worked for the benefit of women. Education was bringing significant changes during this period.

When I first taught at a secondary school, I recognized from their accents that some of my students came from regions outside Tunis. This made me very happy because education was indeed helping in the country's development. Meanwhile, women had begun meeting to understand their position in society. When I came to Tunis after living in Sousse, Bizerte, and the United States, I learned about women meeting at Club Tahar al-Hadad, directed by Jalila Hafsia. These young women didn't know me, and I didn't know them, which made me feel isolated. I later discovered that they were cautious, suspecting any woman who wanted to join their group might be working for the government. I felt hurt and out of place because I didn't understand this dynamic. Yet, these women continued to meet, striving to understand their position and what more they could achieve.

Tunisia's Code of Personal Status, the first of its kind in the Arab world, represented a significant milestone. Despite this, they felt that elements of the code were still restrictive and sought further independence. They were determined to free themselves from governmental control, and this activism brought several positive changes. The situation of women didn't stagnate; it evolved as activism continued, and we anticipated further reforms. For example, President Beji Caid Essebsi, in many ways, wanted to position himself as a successor to Bourguiba's legacy. His pursuit of equal inheritance was one such effort. Bourguiba himself had considered this but found it challenging due to its apparent contradiction with the Quran. For instance, in 1956, Bourguiba ended polygamy by interpreting the Quran's provision for multiple wives as conditional on equal treatment, which he argued was impossible, thus justifying monogamy. However, equal inheritance poses a different challenge, as the Quran explicitly states that a woman inherits half of a man's share. With Islamists now part of the government, implementing this change in the Tunisian Assembly proved even more difficult. In a way, the movement to improve women's status was hindered after the Arab Spring. While we had been focused on expanding our rights, we suddenly found ourselves defending the ones we already had, which was completely unexpected. Since then, I don't believe we have made any significant progress.

Question: In what ways do you think the feminist movements during and after the protests of the Jasmine Revolution, as we call it, contributed to the political and social changes?

Arfaoui: During the drafting of the 2014 constitution, there was a fierce debate over the concept of "complementarity." Islamists in the assembly proposed that women be recognized as complementary to men. However, Tunisian feminists firmly opposed this notion, and they successfully put an end to it. I remember it was during Ramadan, we marched on Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis, with both men and women standing together, chanting in Arabic, "المرأة التونسية ماهريزيا محرزية" ("The Tunisian woman is not Mahrizia"). Mahrizia was an Islamist figure from Ennahda in the Assembly, and this chant expressed our refusal to accept the idea of women being merely complementary to men. We won this battle and secured parity in the constitution. Now, in any election, the ballot must alternate between men and women, a significant achievement made possible through the efforts of Tunisian women. However, even with such advances, there were times when Bourguiba acted in contradictory ways; when men began to complain that women were "taking men's jobs," he stated that he hadn't encouraged women to compete with men. At one point, he even suggested that women retire earlier, receiving three-quarters of their salary. These were some of the obstacles faced then, and some blamed improvements in women's status for such tensions. Yet, this movement was unstoppable. Family planning was one of Bourguiba's initiatives from the very beginning. He spoke to men, particularly older men with large families, asking them directly why they had so many children. In Tunisia, this movement towards family planning was widely encouraged, unlike in some neighboring countries. I remember a friend from Algeria who had been living abroad. When she returned to visit family, she found she had 60 nieces and nephews, a striking contrast. Family planning is essential, especially as we observe the conditions of African refugees and immigrants today. Many are without jobs or stable living conditions, and young women among them become pregnant and have children despite their hardships. I often see them begging in the streets with their babies, which raises questions. It's not just a matter of time but of education and responsibility; who should guide these women about family planning so they don't end up in dire situations with children? We see tragic outcomes, like people taking boats with their babies, risking and often losing their lives at sea. Family planning remains critical today and relevant since the early days of Tunisian independence.

Question: What were the most significant successes for women right after the Arab Spring?

Arfaoui: During the Arab Spring, Tunisian women played an active role, especially under President Beji Caid Essebsi, but since then, progress has slowed, and in some ways, it has stalled. Under President Kais Saied, the situation has become even more challenging. Saied has shown little interest in the feminist movement. Since he assumed the presidency, he has not met with any women activists, even on significant occasions like Tunisian Women's National Day, celebrated on August 13. Instead, his focus has been on visiting rural women, especially those working in agriculture, a populist move that many interpret as avoiding engagement with prominent feminist activists. While rural women's issues are crucial, Saied's approach overlooks that feminist activists have long advocated for all Tunisian women, not only urban professionals or educated women. Activists, including myself, have been visiting and supporting rural women for years, working to address their hardships, such as the dangerous conditions in which they are transported to work. Accidents in poorly maintained vans are tragically common, and many lives have been lost. Activists have been protesting these conditions and calling for reforms to improve the situation of these women. The feminist movement in Tunisia has always been committed to advancing the rights of all women, regardless of their social or economic status. However, our efforts are being disregarded now as the government has shifted its focus away from these broader advocacy efforts. This lack of acknowledgment of the activist community is deeply frustrating.

CV

Naoures Ghozlani studied at El Khawarizmi High School between 2014 - 2018. She completed her undergraduate education in the Department of English Literature and Civilization at the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of Sousse between 2018 and 2021. During her studies, she was actively involved in the Soliya Connect Program online, where she later became a facilitator through the program sponsored by the Stevens Initiative. After completing her undergraduate education, she pursued her master's degree in Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul Kent University, which she completed in 2024. She has actively participated in academic research, focusing on women's political participation and activism, and has completed interviews with leading scholars. Naoures has also attended various certification programs related to her academic and professional interests. Her hobbies include reading books, learning to play the piano, and exploring political and social dynamics. She is proficient in English and aspires to further her studies in political science at the doctoral level.