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Public Opinion Trends in Tunisia 2022

اتجاهات الرأي العام في تونس عام 2022

Abstract: This report explores public opinion towards the economic and political situation in Tunisia, drawing on data provided by the latest Arab Opinion Index conducted in the summer of 2022. It highlights a pessimism about the economic situation of the country, which influences perceptions of the state generally, coupled with grim attitudes towards the political institutions in place. The report discusses trust in political institutions, namely, parliament, political parties, and the government, attempting to make sense of the increasing trust in government alongside decreasing confidence in representative bodies. It notes a political crisis indicated by low confidence in the political institutions of the country and increasingly critical attitudes towards a democratic political system. While democracy remains a favourable political system for most Tunisians, many are disenchanted with the political scene, leading them to support a government that is reversing the democratic transition. It concludes, however, that continued support for Kais Saied's government will hinge on his ability to execute economic improvements.

Keywords: Tunisia; Arab Opinion Index; Economic Situation; Political Institutions; Kais Saied.

الملخص: يعرض التقرير توجهات الرأي العام نحو الوضع الاقتصادي والسياسي في تونس، استناداً إلى بيانات المؤشر العربي لصيف عام 2022. ويسلط الضوء على التشاؤم إزاء الوضع الاقتصادي للبلاد، ما يؤثر في التصورات تجاه الدولة على نحو عام، إلى جانب المواقف الغاضبة من المؤسسات السياسية القائمة. ويناقش التقرير مسألة الثقة بالمؤسسات السياسية، أي البرلمان، والأحزاب السياسية، والحكومة، محاولاً فهم الثقة المتزايدة بالحكومة التي رافقت تراجع الثقة بالهيئات التمثيلية. ويلاحظ وجود أزمة سياسية يتجلى فيها انخفاض الثقة بالمؤسسات السياسية في البلاد وتزايد المواقف الناقدة للنظام السياسي الديمقراطي. وفي حين تظل الديمقراطية النظام السياسي الأمثل بالنسبة إلى معظم التونسيين، فإن الكثيرين يشعرون بخيبة أمل تجاه المشهد السياسي، على نحو يدفعهم إلى دعم الحكومة التي تعمل عكس مسار الانتقال الديمقراطي. ويخلص التقرير إلى أن الدعم المستمر لحكومة قيس سعيد يتوقف على قدرته على إجراء تحسينات اقتصادية.

كلمات مفتاحية: تونس؛ المؤشر العربي؛ الوضع الاقتصادي؛ المؤسسات السياسية؛ قيس سعيد.

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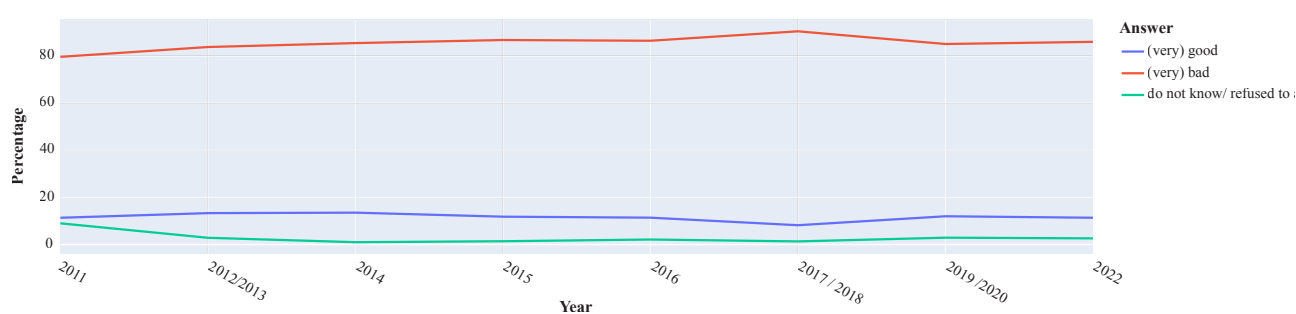
Introduction

The past three years under the Kais Saied government in Tunisia have led to worries that the country's short-lived experiment with democracy has come to an end. Multiple surveys have observed public support for Saied's power grab, including his dissolution of parliament and measures to limit judicial independence.¹ The support Saied received has led to speculations as to whether it is an indication of Tunisians' lack of support for democracy, or whether it is the result of their dissatisfaction with the economic conditions and lack of trust in certain political actors. This report assesses public opinion on economic conditions, the political scene, and the ideal of democracy, discussing how they may be interrelated and how they are affecting possible support for Saied's government. It draws on data from the latest Arab Opinion Index (AOI) survey, conducted mid-2022. The analysis highlights a pessimism about Tunisia's economic situation, which influences perceptions of the country's state of affairs generally, coupled with grim attitudes towards its political institutions. Low rates of confidence in the political institutions point towards a political crisis, producing negative attitudes towards a democratic political system. The conclusion discusses the factors likely to influence the direction of public opinion, mainly towards the government.

A Gloomy Economic Outlook

With a slow recovery from the economic crises after the 2011 revolution and following the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a popular consensus in Tunisia that the economy is in bad shape. In 2022, the AOI reported that 86% of the population believe the economic situation of the country is (very) bad. Moreover, the economic situation was the reason most cited for why the general state of the country was deteriorating. Attitudes towards the economy are consistent with the general trend over the last decade, with the percentage of those pessimistic about the economy persistently hovering over 80%.

Figure 1: Perception of the economic situation over time



The steady pessimism in attitudes towards the Tunisian economy can be explained by unimproved unemployment and GDP per capita rates since 2011. While unemployment rates shot up to 18.3%² in the aftermath of the revolution, they quickly dropped to around 15% in the three years that followed.³ However,

¹ Alexandra Domike Blackman & Elizabeth R. Nugent, "Tunisia's President Threatened the Judicial System. What do Tunisians think about these power grabs?," *The Washington Post*, 8/2/2022, accessed on 16/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2p5n2xbh>; "Arab Barometer VII," *Tunisia Report*, Arab Barometer, 2022, accessed on 16/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/yn7aemv>

² World Bank, "Tunisia: Unemployment rate from 2003 to 2022," *Statista*, 2023, accessed on 3/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/6yp6vu3y>

³ Ibid.

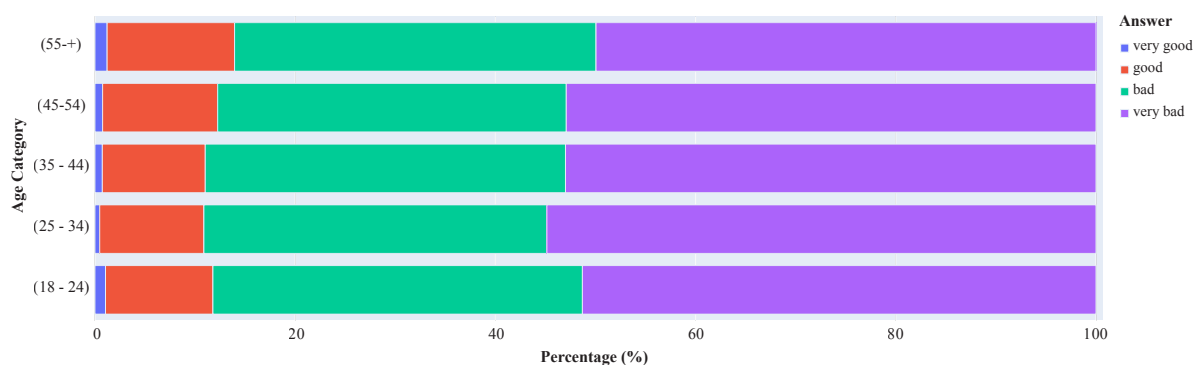
Tunisia has seen little improvement in its unemployment rates since 2014,⁴ frequent dips in growth rates⁵ and in GDP per capita rates,⁶ in conjunction with rising poverty rates.⁷

The survey shows that young people between the ages of 18 and 34 were most likely to specify unemployment as the biggest problem facing the country, as in Table 1, which demonstrates the percentage of respondents naming a particular problem from each age group. However, all age groups generally ranked economic challenges as amongst the most important issues the country has to deal with and approximately similar percentages across all age groups ranked the economic situation as (very) bad (Figure 2).

Table 1: Cross Tabulation of age category and the participants' voted most important problem of the country in 2022

		In your personal opinion, what is the most important problem you face (the country of study) today?														
		The un-employment	Bad economic conditions	Weak public services	Weak health services	High prices and high cost of living	Poverty and low standard of living	The absence of security and safety	Financial/administrative corruption	Social problems	Political instability (polarization)	Regional/ sectarian/ ethnic/ tribalization divisions	Judgment and its policies	External risks/ external forces intervention	Democratic transition	Total
Age	18-24	22.10%	38.30%	0.50%	1.30%	9.00%	4.80%	2.10%	3.70%	6.60%	7.70%	0.00%	2.90%	0.80%	0.00%	100.00%
	25-34	20.20%	37.80%	0.80%	0.00%	17.10%	5.70%	2.00%	2.00%	5.10%	6.70%	0.00%	2.40%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
	35-44	12.00%	39.70%	0.20%	0.20%	21.50%	7.70%	2.20%	2.20%	3.30%	6.90%	0.00%	3.30%	0.20%	0.50%	100.00%
	45-55	12.10%	40.80%	0.50%	0.20%	22.10%	5.90%	3.20%	2.10%	2.50%	7.30%	0.20%	3.00%	0.20%	0.00%	100.00%
	55+	10.40%	36.70%	1.20%	0.00%	21.30%	5.60%	3.90%	3.00%	3.20%	9.50%	0.00%	4.20%	0.50%	0.50%	100.00%

Figure 2: Perception of the economic situation by age in 2022



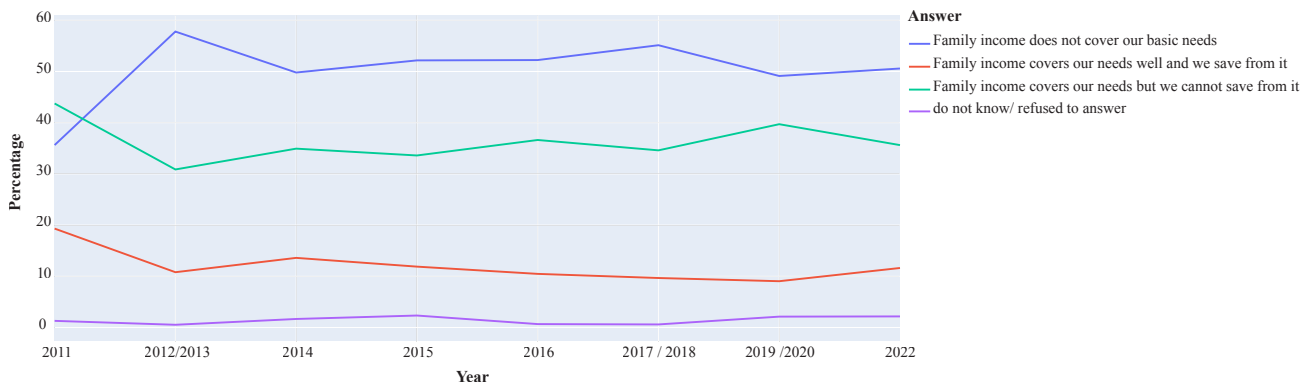
The last decade also saw a gradual increase in the population reporting that their family's income does not cover their needs (Figure 3). While 37% reported this income insufficiency in 2011, this proportion has risen to 50% since 2012. Moreover, the percentage of the population able to cover their basic needs and amass savings dropped to less than 15% since 2011 and remained at this low for the following decade. Despite a 6% decrease in the population reporting that their family income cannot cover their basic needs in 2020, the number rose again by 2% in 2022, likely due to the pandemic. With over 50% of the population unable to cover basics with their net family income, 54% rated their family's economic situation as being (very) bad in 2022.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ World Bank, "GDP growth (annual %) - Tunisia," *World Bank Data*, 2022, accessed on 3/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdzbzfa2>

⁶ World Bank, "GDP per capita growth (annual %) - Tunisia," *World Bank Data*, 2022, accessed on 3/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/5dbtka7f>

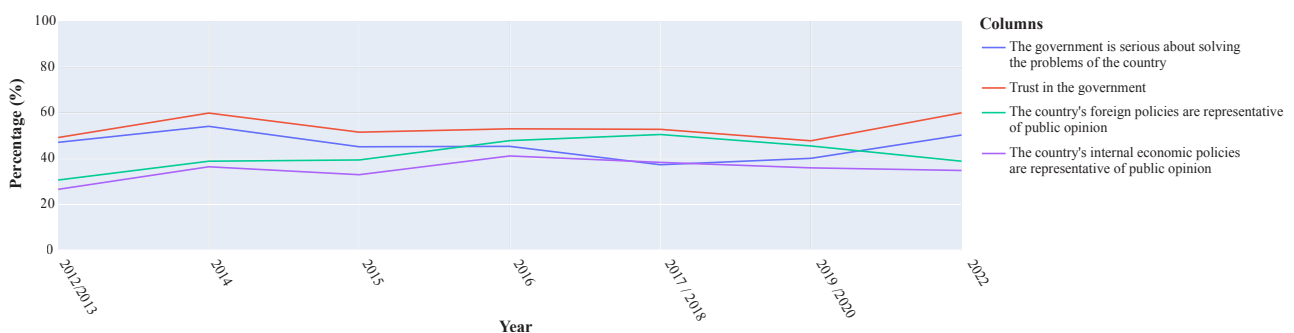
⁷ World Bank, "Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population) – Tunisia," *World Bank Data*, 2021, accessed on 3/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2k8y93jw>

Figure 3: Respondents' self-reported evaluation of family income over time

Improved Perceptions of the Government

Trust in the government increased from 49% in 2020 to 60% in 2022 (Figure 4). There was also an increase in the percentage of people who believe the government is serious about solving the country's problems, although the population remains divided regarding this question. As such, the government could be enjoying an increase in trust due to Saied's policies. Conversely, there is no increase in the percentage of people who consider the country's current domestic or foreign policies to represent them, which has been in continued decline since 2016.

The AOI does not ask whether the respondent agrees with "the government's policies" but whether they agree with "the policies being implemented in their country." The question's framing is thus likely affecting whether the respondents accredit these policies to the doings of the government or to the state's different political institutions. Thus, the decrease in agreement with the state's policies could be an expression of either distrust in the state's institutions generally or indicative of a critical view of the government. However, given the increase in trust in the government, it is more likely that the respondents blame state actors other than Saied's government for their dissatisfaction with the economic and foreign policies of the state.

Figure 4: Trust in the government and perception of the country's domestic and foreign policies overtime

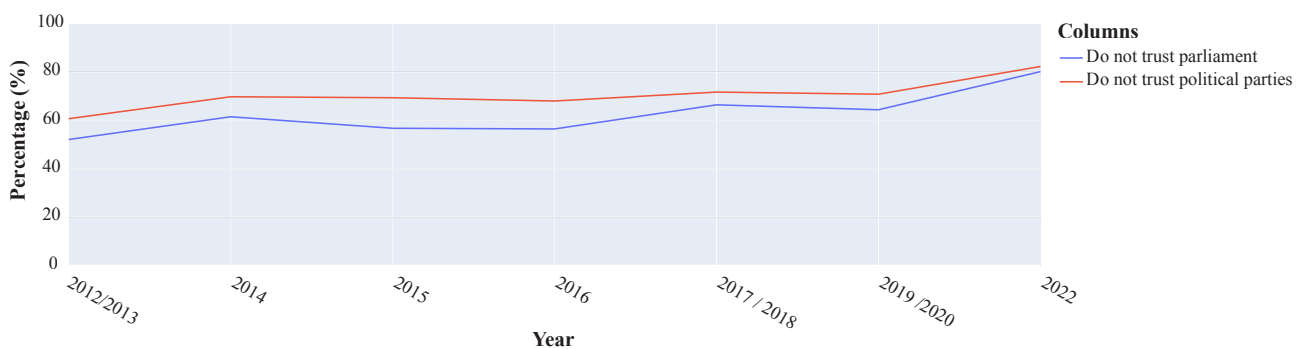
The survey was conducted in the summer of 2022, a year after Saied had dissolved parliament and launched a crackdown on the opposition. During this period, he fired 57 judges and announced the drafting

of a new constitution that would expand executive powers, giving him more authority over the judiciary and parliament.⁸ Since this is the first year that the AOI has recorded an increase in trust in government since 2014, the results give the impression that people favour an authoritarian regime over a democracy. However, this trend of increased support would have to be sustained over time if such a conclusion was to be drawn, as currently the results only reflect the initial enthusiasm for a president that has declared war on corruption and claimed he would shake the political deadlock. Furthermore, as pointed out in a previous report, “continuing support for the president [will] depend on his ability to execute policies to improve the economic conditions of the average Tunisian,”⁹ rather than his authoritarian tendencies.

Trust in Parliament and Political Parties

Trust in Saied’s government coincided with Tunisians becoming increasingly disenchanted with the post-revolution political map. Since 2011, most Tunisians surveyed expressed a lack of trust in representative bodies and political parties. Throughout the last decade, distrust in parliament continued to increase. The 2022 AOI shows that 80% of the population expressed distrust in parliament. In addition, there is consensus that real political representation is lacking. Since 2020, there has been an almost 40% increase in those who see that the parliament is not at all representative of different voices and factions in their society. Trends in trust in political parties have followed a similar trend with 82% expressing distrust in Tunisian political parties. As with parliament, distrust in political parties has been increasing over the past decade but has accelerated since 2020. While increasing cynicism about parliament and political parties could indicate that a political crisis has been brewing for some years and thus likely contributed to the rise of an authoritarian leader, distrust in both increased at a much higher rate over the past two years. This leap could have been partially fuelled by the current government’s rhetoric.

Figure 5: Distrust in parliament and in political parties over time



* The blue line shows the percentage of the population that said they either had high distrust in or distrusted parliament to an extent. The red line shows the percentage of the population that stated they either had high distrust in or distrusted political parties to an extent.

Distrust in parliament and in political parties tends to be high amongst both those who trust and who distrust Saied’s government (Tables 2 and 3). Those who expressed confidence in the parliament and in political parties are a minority amongst both those trustful and distrustful of the government. While trust in the government in the

⁸ “Key Developments in Tunisia and U.S. Responses since July 2021,” *The Washington Institute*, 2022, accessed on 3/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/25cdpextd>

⁹ Public Opinion Polling Unit, “Public Opinion Trends on the Democratic Experiment in Tunisia,” *Al-Muntaqa*, vol. 4, no. 2 (December 2021/January 2022).

past two years increased but decreased in parliament and parties, there is no negative correlation (Table 4 and 5) between either of the two variables. Generally, confidence in parliament and political parties has collapsed regardless of perceptions of the government. Saied derives some of the trust in his government from the lack of trust people have in the political institutions he has shut down. However, there is also 25.7% (14.4% + 11.3%) of the population that express positive views of the government regardless of its policies, since they trust both Saied's government and parliament/political parties, despite Saied attacking the latter.

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of trust in government and trust in parliament

		Trust in Parliament				Total
		High trust	Trust to an extent	Do not trust to an extent	Do not trust	
Trust in Government	High trust	68.2%	29.5%	19.6%	20.9%	100.00%
	14.4%	11.3%	3.4%	70.9%		
	Trust to an extent	12.7%	49.5%	42.4%	38.2%	
	1.7%	11.9%	4.7%	81.7%		
Do not trust to an extent	3.6%	5.0%	21.7%	5.6%	100.00%	
3.0%	7.5%	14.9%	74.6%			
Do not trust	15.5%	16.0%	16.3%	35.3%	100.00%	
2.5%	4.6%	2.2%	90.7%			
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%		

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of trust in government and trust in political parties

		Trust in Political Parties				Total
		High trust	Trust to an extent	Do not trust to an extent	Do not trust	
Trust in Government	High trust	76.1%	29.2%	21.8%	21.5%	100.00%
	10.3%	10.9%	4.2%	74.5%		
	Trust to an extent	7.0%	50.3%	48.5%	37.6%	
	0.6%	11.8%	5.9%	81.7%		
Do not trust to an extent	2.8%	3.6%	16.8%	6.0%	100.00%	
1.5%	5.2%	12.6%	80.7%			
Do not trust	14.1%	16.9%	12.9%	34.9%	100.00%	
1.5%	4.8%	1.9%	91.9%			
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%		

Table 4: Chi-square and correlation tests of trust in government and trust in parliament

	Value	Asymp. Std. Errors	Approx. Tb	P-Value
Pearson Chi-Square	203.265			0.000
Pearson's R	0.196	0.02	9.339	0.000
Spearman Correlation	0.19	0.021	9.001	0.000
N of Valid Cases	2175			0.000

Table 5: Chi-square and correlation tests between trust in government and trust in political parties

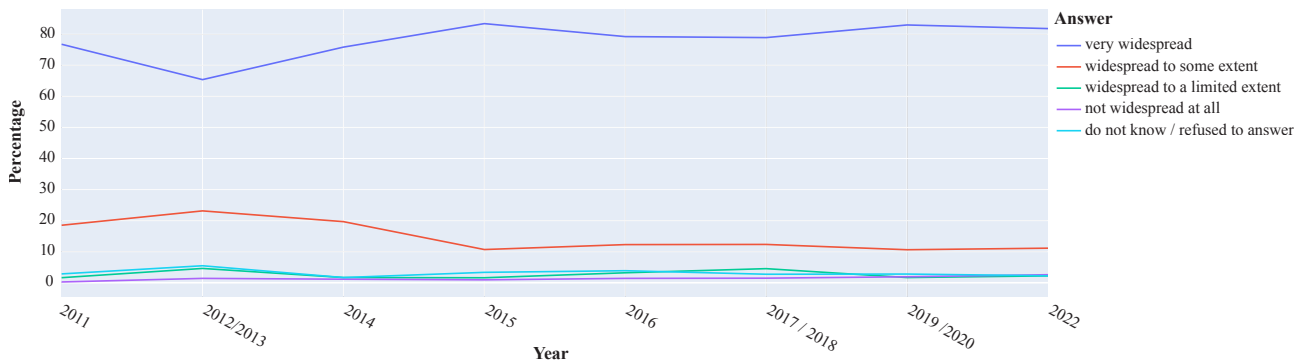
	Value	Asymp. Std. Errors	Approx. Tb	P-Value
Pearson Chi-Square	175.525			0.000
Pearson's R	0.186	0.02	8.805	0.000
Spearman Correlation	0.178	0.02	8.442	0.000
N of Valid Cases	2177			0.000

Besides the current government's rhetoric against the parliament and political actors, there could be multiple factors fuelling the lack of trust in political parties and representative bodies. Lack of trust in political parties can correspond to either a lack of identification with or a lack of knowledge of the political parties' political programs. The AOI shows that 80% of the population do not belong to any political parties and/or feel that none of the political parties represent them. The percentage of the population expressing such apathy towards the political landscape has been steadily increasing since 2017. Not only do people feel unrepresented by any of the political parties but a majority of 72% seem to be simply uninterested in politics.

The general political apathy could also mean that people do not seek out information about political parties' programs and consequently do not identify with any. Furthermore, most of the population was not politically involved in any way in the past year. Even amongst those who have any degree of interest in political matters, an average of only 4.3% signed a petition (at least once), while 6.8% took part in a protest or a peaceful march, 4.6% joined a public advocacy group, 8% participated in a virtual campaign, 7.4% are part of a civil/voluntary organization, and 7% are part of a trade union. The lack of trust in political representatives coupled with the lack of involvement in political action illustrates a general alienation from the political scene.

Perceptions of Corruption

Almost all the population (93%) believes that financial and administrative corruption is widespread. This perception has been common since the first wave of the AOI in 2011, with over 90% expressing this view over the years (Figure 6). Hence, it is inevitable that Saïed's discourse which has focused on fighting corruption, particularly amongst the political elite, would influence people and push them to be more supportive of his policies. Those who say that corruption is very widespread share the highest percentage of distrust in parliament and political parties relative to the percentage of people amongst the population which do not think that corruption is so widespread. The perception of the extent of corruption is also significantly correlated with trust in parliament (Pearson's $R = -.129$, $P\text{-Value} < 0.001$) and in political parties (Pearson's $R = -0.067$, $P\text{-Value} < 0.001$), meaning the more perceived corruption there is, the less trust there is in parliament and in political parties. On the contrary, there is no significant relationship between trust in government and perception of widespread corruption ($P\text{-value} = 0.598$). Thus, it is likely that parliament, and political parties in particular, and not just any institution in a position of authority such as the government itself, are perceived by Tunisians to be associated with and to blame for corruption.

Figure 6: Perception of the spread of corruption over time

There are different possibilities for interpreting the relationship between trust in political bodies and the common perception that corruption is everywhere. It could be that the existing distrust in political parties is fuelling the perceived corruption. Equally, this perceived corruption could be inciting distrust in politicians considered party to this corruption. In either case, the perceived corruption plays an important role in a political crisis which manifested in support for an increasingly autocratic government that justifies its crackdown on political activity by accusing the political elite of corruption. The deteriorating economic situation in turn influences perceptions of corruption and puts the blame for people's economic woes on a seemingly corrupt political elite.

Tunisians' Perception of a Democratic Political System

Despite the ongoing political crisis, the increased support for an undemocratic government, and the lack of trust in democratic institutions, a majority of Tunisians continue to identify democracy as the best type of governance. In 2022, 78% agreed that "even though democracy has its shortcomings, it is relatively the best political system for governing". A majority has expressed support for a democratic political system over the past twelve-year period. Support peaked in 2014 with 88% of the population expressing this view,¹⁰ but over 70% of the population remained committed to democracy throughout the entire period since the 2011 uprising. Nonetheless, an increasing percentage of the population has been expressing discontent with democracy, with a 10% decline in support in the last eight years.

However, democracy enjoys positive connotations even amongst those who do not support a democratic political system, with 17.4% describing it as a system that protects political and civic freedoms, 32.8% equating it with equality and justice, and 21.9% associating it with improvement of the economic situation. Most respondents defined democracy in positive terms, with the two most popular definitions being "a system that protects civil, political, and public freedoms" and one that "preserves a level of equality and justice between citizens". When defining rules of power rotation and elections in a democratic system, there is consensus amongst the majority that a democratic system should be one where religious and non-religious parties can compete in elections. And while most do not condone preventing religious parties in elections, they oppose them making major changes to constitutions through the implementation of Sharia Law. Thus, most people support the right of religious parties to compete as long as the competition remains within

¹⁰ Between 2013 and 2014, Tunisia experienced a period of mass protests against the transitional Troika government led by the Ennahda party and the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly. The streets of Tunisia saw a revival of the slogans of the revolution with people chanting "we want the fall of the regime". This period of unrest was concluded when a constitution was presented towards the end of January 2014. It was during the first half of 2014 that the survey was conducted, and the responses illustrate people's attachment to democracy, whether that is despite or in response to the crisis in the transition to a democracy.

the bounds set by a democratic constitution protecting all freedoms. These attitudes reveal a degree of consensus about and a sufficient understanding of what democratic elections should entail.

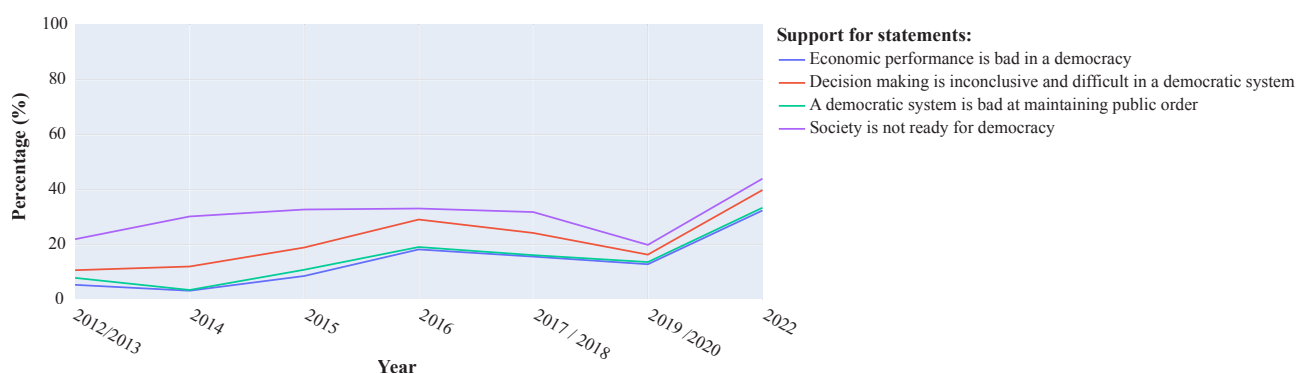
Dissatisfaction with the Performance of the Democratic System

While the majority of Tunisians support democracy over other political systems, pessimism regarding the ability of a democratic political system to make positive changes in the country is rising. There is a 16% increase from 2020 in those who consider democracy inefficient at solving the country's problems; half of the population agree that economic performance is bad in a democratic system, and close to 40% see that a democratic system is bad at maintaining order (Figure 7). Generally, these are arguments used by voices opposing democracy, seemingly indicating a rising discontent with democracy. However, those who agree with these statements and do not support a democratic political system remain a minority. Out of those who agree with the three statements that economic performance under a democracy is bad, that democracy is inept at solving the problems of the country and at maintaining order, a majority of 71.6% support a democratic political system. Thus, while more people are pessimistic about the performance of a democratic political system, they are not opposed to it.

One possible explanation for the persistent support for a democracy, even amongst those with a negative view of its performance in core aspects, is that this perceived performance of a democratic system is reflective of the country's perceived democratic system in its current state. This population is thus not critical of the concept of a democracy but is simply unhappy with the performance of the democratic system in place.

That being said, it should be recognized that there is a significant increase (18% from the previous year) in the percentage of Tunisians who consider their society not ready for a democracy. And while most people (78.5%) who hold this view support a democratic system, the belief in a lack of readiness, indicates that they may not support a democratic system right now. This discourse could explain increasing support for a non-democratic system, even if temporary, until society becomes ready for a democracy. The rhetoric of a particular society not being ready for democracy has been repeated by authoritarian regimes in the region to discourage people from demanding democratic change. Its revival in post-revolution Tunisia is a worrying prospect.

Figure 7: Support for unfavourable statements about democracy overtime



Attitudes Towards the 2011 Revolutions

Another indicator of support for democratic ideals are attitudes towards the Arab Spring revolutions which ended long standing dictatorships. Tunisians are almost equally divided in their perception of the 2011

revolutions, with 47% having a positive view and 49% having a negative one. Importantly, there is a 19% drop from the previous year in those who have a positive view of the revolutions. The negative perception of the revolutions, however, does not necessarily correspond to hostility towards their aims, but is more likely indicative of how people evaluate their successes. Thus, the perception of the revolutions varies according to and is reflective of how people perceive their current situation in Tunisia.

For instance, if the majority has a negative view of the current economic situation, they will not have a positive view of the revolutions, which is commonly perceived as having been sparked by economic grievances. When people were asked about what sparked the uprisings, a very small percentage (3%) conceived of the revolutions as foreign interference. If the negative perception of the revolution really corresponds with hostility towards the revolution's aims, then the percentage who understand what sparked the revolution through this conspiracy narrative would be higher. However, the responses illustrate the contrary, making it more plausible to view the negative perceptions of the revolutions as an indication that people are disappointed with the current outcomes of the revolutions but not with their original aims.

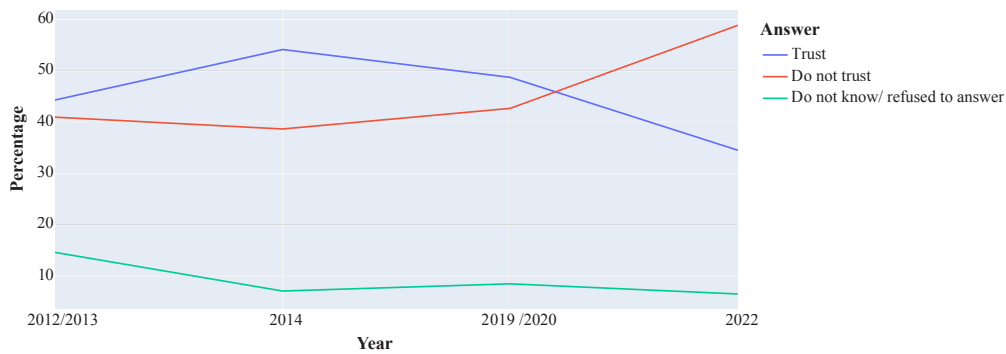
Trust in the Government and Opposition to Democracy

The trust expressed in Saied's government appears paradoxical when the wide preference for a democratic system is considered. However, it is possible that Saied is not perceived as making the country any less democratic by those who are expressing more confidence in his government than in previous governments. There are indicators showing that the perceived level of democracy in the country has remained stable at roughly 5 on the 1-10 scale and people's rating of their ability to criticize the government without fearing repercussions has also remained roughly stable over the past three years, staying relatively high.

Furthermore, over 70% believe that real representation of the population in parliament is lacking, revealing a potential perception of the president's move to dissolve parliament as not being undemocratic. Saied had also not yet shut down any civil society institutions, a step which would, if taken, likely affect people's perceived level of democracy in the country. Thus, one factor explaining the president's apparent popularity amongst a population which expresses a preference for a democratic system, despite his undemocratic actions, is that Tunisians feel as though they still enjoy the degree of democratic freedom they had prior to his presidency. Since the majority define democracy as being political, civic, and individual freedom or as reflective of the ideals of justice and equality, dissolving parliament, especially when the elite in this parliament are widely considered a main source of corruption, does not directly infringe on these rights. If Tunisians had defined democracy as being a system of parliamentary representation, it would be more likely that dissolving parliament would affect people's perceived level of democracy in the country and affect support for Saied.

Furthermore, Saied could be deriving his popularity from the lack of confidence people have in his opposition. The vast majority expressed distrust in political parties and parliament members generally in the 2022 AOI, while there is also an increase in distrust in other political actors such as the Tunisian General Labour Union (see Figure 7). Drawing on other sources,¹¹ there is evidence that unfavourable attitudes towards parties that now form the main opposition to Saied had persisted for years prior to his presidency.

¹¹ "Public Opinion Survey of Tunisia – April 19 – April 26, 2017," *Survey*, Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2017, p. 63, accessed on 17/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/ycrhkzhr>; "Public Opinion Survey of Tunisians – November 23 – December 3, 2017," *Survey*, Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2018, p. 90, accessed on 17/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/5cwfuayx>; "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Tunisia, September 24 – October 11, 2020," *Survey*, Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2021, pp. 42-43, accessed on 17/9/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/wnx62hu5>

Figure 8: Trust in the Tunisian General Labour Union over time

Conclusion

This report has shown that while the majority in Tunisia still favours a democratic political system, people have become disenchanted with the democratic institutions in place. Trust in parliament and political parties has collapsed, while political apathy has increased, and a general feeling that people's voices are unrepresented taints the political scene. There is a pervasive perception that administrative and financial corruption is widespread, against the background of a discourse that blames parliament and a range of political actors for corruption and malpractice. In general, there is increasing dissatisfaction with the political scene as more people appear to struggle economically, reporting that they can no longer save or even afford their basic needs. This has provided ripe conditions for the rise of a leader that promises quick solutions to people's struggles and an end to corruption by using certain political actors as a scapegoat.

Contrary to previous years, the AOI saw an increase in the confidence in the government. It is, however, unclear whether Saied will be able to maintain this initial show of confidence in his government, as the country continues to grapple with an economic crisis manifested by low growth rates and high unemployment. In fact, Tunisia has witnessed since 2022 an uptake in the number of protests expressing dissatisfaction with Saied's government. Some have expressed economic grievances, mainly unemployment, while others have focused on political grievances, with some demanding that Saied steps down.¹² Furthermore, the low voter turn-outs during the constitutional referendum held in July 2022 and the parliamentary elections of December the same year, in addition to the boycotting of the latter by most political parties, signal the increasing opposition to Saied's rule. In the next rounds, public opinion towards Saied's government and the political institutions in place is likely to depend on whether the president can improve Tunisia's economic conditions. If political freedoms continue to be affected and the perceived level of democracy, which has not changed as of yet, worsens, without felt economic improvements, it is possible that public opinion will see more unfavorable attitudes towards the government.

¹² Information regarding protests in Tunisia between 2021 and 2023 was provided by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) upon request. ACLED records the occurrence of protests and provides a description of the events. Between the spring of 2022, during which a referendum was announced, and August of 2023, ACLED recorded over 30 protests across different cities in Tunisia expressing dissatisfaction with the president. Some of these protests had been orchestrated by political parties and opponents of Saied. During the same period, there were six protests in support of the president.

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