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Tunisian governance 'backsliding' as Arab Spring gains prove fleeting



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Tunisia was the cradle of the Arab Spring in 2010, and the last bastion of fleeting democratic progress that blossomed out of protest movements in the North African region. The country now is a standout performer among 145 countries in the 2024 Berggruen Governance Index (BGI), with some of the most improved scores across measures of democratic accountability, delivery of public goods and state capacity.

Those findings were presented in a report, titled "Democracy Challenged", by the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), which collaborated on the project with the Berggruen Institute, a think tank headquartered in Los Angeles, and the Berlin-based Hertie School.

However, the BGI only contains data through 2021, and in recent years Tunisian President Kais Saied has increasingly cracked down on dissent. Hours before the report was released Wednesday in Los Angeles, more arrests of journalists and civil society activists were reported in Tunis. The Tunisian political opposition is expected to boycott the presidential election due late this year.

Tunisia "is now backsliding," BGI principal investigator and lead author Helmut Anheier said in an interview in Los Angeles.

After an autocratic regime was toppled in 2011, Tunisia "held a series of elections that were considered by outside observers to be generally credible and competitive - a feat that Tunisia had not witnessed since gaining its independence in 1956," the BGI said.

The result showed in the report's 100-point Democratic Accountability Index, where Tunisia rose from 31 points in 2010 to 70 in 2021. The country also made strong gains in state capacity, which looks at the quality of government - from 33 to 55 points - and saw provision of public goods rise from 69 to 77 points.

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Medieninhalte



After years of improvement, now a step backwards in terms of democratic accountability. Protests are taking place again in Tunisia, like here seen not far from the Tunisian parliament in the capital Tunis, on March 20, 2022. (Photo by Fethi Belaid / AFP) / More information via ots and www.presseportal.de/en/nr/174021 / The use of this image for editorial purposes is permitted and free of charge provided that all conditions of use are complied with. Publication must include image credits.

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