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Tunisia's democratic dream is at risk as the country's economy struggles



Tunis/Los Angeles/DNA (ots) -

Once hailed as the success story of the Arab Spring, Tunisia now faces a grim reality. According to a new study, Tunisia's democracy, born from the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, is on the verge of collapse. President Kaïs Saïed, who rose to power in 2019, has increasingly consolidated control, raising concerns that the upcoming October elections will solidify his authoritarian rule.

According to researchers behind a new [Berggruen Governance Index \(BGI\) report](#), the promise of political reform, which once inspired hope, has failed to deliver economic progress, leaving many Tunisians disillusioned.

The Jasmine Revolution had brought a wave of optimism. Tunisia ousted long-time authoritarian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and embarked on sweeping political reforms. By 2021, Tunisia had significantly improved in democratic accountability, as shown by the Berggruen Governance Index. However, these gains were not matched by economic growth. Tunisia's GDP stagnated, and public goods provision—such as healthcare and infrastructure—remained weak.

President Saïed capitalized on growing public frustration. In 2021, he suspended the parliament in a move critics called an "auto-coup," and a 2022 constitutional referendum further expanded his powers. Saïed's crackdown on opposition groups and civil society has drawn widespread criticism, and human rights organizations have documented increasing repression.

Economically, Tunisia's rejection of a 2023 International Monetary Fund loan, seen by many as a populist move, left the country in deeper financial trouble. Foreign investment, which peaked under Ben Ali's authoritarian rule, has dwindled, compounding the economic crisis. Rising unemployment, inflation, and food insecurity have further eroded confidence in the government. Emigration has grown steadily.

As Tunisia prepares for the 2024 elections, many fear that Saïed's authoritarian tendencies will undermine the democratic institutions that were painstakingly built after the revolution. According to the report, which was conducted by researchers from the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), the Los Angeles-based Berggruen Institute and the Hertie School, a university in Berlin, Germany, the country's experience highlights a critical lesson: Political reform must be accompanied by economic progress, or democracy itself may crumble.

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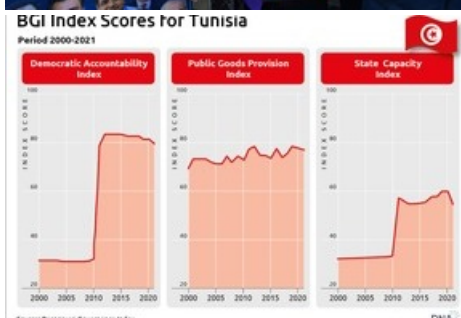
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Protest against the President: Tunisian demonstrators attend a rally against President Kais Saied, called for by the opposition "National Salvation Front" coalition, in the capital Tunis, on April 9, 2023. (Photo by Fethi Belaid / AFP) / More information 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.



While Democratic Accountability and State Capacity improved after the Jasmine Revolution, the provision of Public Goods in Tunisia did not see significant changes after 2011, according to the Berggruen Governance Index (BGI). (Infographic by ANSA for DNA) / 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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