

**T.C.
İSTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES IN TUNISIAN ACTIVISM
A STUDY OF TUNISIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE POST
REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD**

MA Thesis by

**Sarra Zouaoui
2100000493**

Department: International Relations

Programme: International Relations

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Nazlı Çağın Bilgili

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ÖZET

Bu tez, Tunus aktivizminin 2011 sonrasındaki gelişimini, ülkedeki sosyal hareketlerin karşılaştığı zorluklara odaklanarak analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, sömürgecilik döneminden günümüze kadar Tunus aktivizminin tarihini, özellikle devrim sonrası döneme odaklanarak incelemektedir. Var olan literatür ve teoriye dayanarak, çalışma dijital aktivizmin ve uluslararası ağların yeni formlarının ortaya çıkması ve sosyal hareketlerin birden fazla rekabet eden örgüte bölünmesinin, devrim sonrası Tunus aktivizminin temel özellikleri olduğunu belirlemektedir.

Bu analize dayanarak, çalışma, Tunus devletinin devrim sonrası aktivizme verdiği yanıtın, kapsayıcılık ve baskı gibi, sosyal hareketlerin hareketliliğinin sürdürülmesi ve somut sosyal ve siyasi değişimlerin gerçekleştirilmesinde önemli zorluklar yarattığına dair özel bir hipotez geliştirmiştir. Bu hipotez, aktivist mobilizasyona verilen devlet yanıtının, medya ve gözetim gibi kullanımı ve örgütler arasındaki koordinasyon zorlukları gibi, sosyal hareketlerin karşılaştığı zorlukları analiz ederek test edilmektedir.

Çalışma, Tunus aktivizminin geleceği ve Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika'daki sosyal hareketler için geniş kapsamlı sonuçları düşünülerek sonuçlandırılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu tez Tunus'ta devrim sonrası siyasetin karmaşıklıklarının daha derin bir anlayışına ve aktivistlerin daha adil ve demokratik bir toplum kurmak için karşılaştığı zorluklara katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sosyal Hareketler Teorileri, Tunus, Demokratik Geçiş, Aktivizm, Sivil Toplum.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the development of Tunisian activism in the post the 2011 period, focusing on the challenges facing social movements in the country. This study examines the history of Tunisian activism from colonial rule to the present day, with a particular emphasis on the post-revolution period. Drawing on existing literature and theory, the study identifies the emergence of new forms of digital activism and transnational networks and the fragmentation of social movements into multiple competing organizations as key features of post-revolutionary Tunisian activism.

Building on this analysis, the study develops a specific hypothesis that the Tunisian state's response to post-revolutionary Tunisian activism, including co-optation and repression, has created significant challenges for social movements in sustaining mobilization and achieving substantive social and political change. This hypothesis is tested by examining the state's response to activist mobilization, including its use of media and surveillance, as well as analyzing the challenges faced by social movements, such as generational divides and the difficulties of coordinating across organizations.

The study concludes by reflecting on the implications of these findings for the future of Tunisian activism and the broader implications for social movements in the Middle East and North Africa. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of post-revolutionary politics in Tunisia and the challenges activists face to build a more just and democratic society.

Keywords: Social Movements theories, Tunisia, Democratic Transition, Activism, Civil Society.

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List of Abbreviations

ADLI	:	L'Association Tunisienne pour la Défense des libertés Individuelle
AFT	:	L'Association des Femmes Tunisiennes
ATFD	:	Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates
ATIDE	:	Association Tunisienne pour l'Intégrité et la Démocratie des Élections
CEDAW	:	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CGTT	:	Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisien
CPS	:	Code of Personal Status
CPG	:	Compagnie des Phosphates de Gafsa
CRM	:	Civil Rights Movement
EIDHR	:	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EU	:	European Union
FTDES	:	Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economique et Sociaux
IFEDA	:	Centre d'Information de Formation d'Etude et de Documentation sur les Associations
ISIE	:	Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Elections
LTDH	:	Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des droits de l'Homme
MENA	:	Middle East North Africa
NCA	:	National Constituent Assembly
NGO	:	Non-Governmental Organization
ONAT	:	Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie
RCD	:	Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique
SNJT	:	Syndicat National des Journalistes Tunisiens
UGTT	:	Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail
UNFT	:	Union Nationale de le Femme Tunisienne
US	:	United States
UTICA	:	Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce, et de l'Artisana

1. Introduction

Social movements have played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of Tunisia over the past few decades. From the struggle against colonialism to the Arab Spring protests of 2010-2011, social movements have been at the forefront of efforts to challenge authoritarianism and fight for social and political change.

The origins of social movements in Tunisia can be traced back to the early 20th century when the country was still under French colonial rule. Tunisia's first significant social movement was the national liberation movement, which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and was led by figures such as Habib Bourguiba and Salah Ben Youssef. This movement called for the country's independence from France and paved the way for Tunisia's eventual independence in 1956. After that, social movements played an essential role in Tunisian politics, with the rise of trade unions and student organizations in the 1960s and 1970s. These movements advocated for workers' rights, democracy, and social justice. They were often met with repression by the authoritarian regime of President Habib Bourguiba and, later, his successor, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (El Houssi, 2014).

During the 1980s and 1990s, social movements in Tunisia faced increased repression as the government cracked down on opposition groups and civil society organizations. However, despite these challenges, social movements continued to organize and mobilize, with groups such as the Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des droits de l'Homme (Tunisian Human Rights League, LTDH) and the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (General Union of Tunisian Workers, UGTT) playing a pivotal role in advocating for democracy and human rights (Weilandt, 2019).

In December 2010, a wave of protests broke out across Tunisia, sparked by the self-immolation of a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi. These protests, which came to be known as the Arab Spring, quickly spread across the country and eventually led to the downfall of President Ben Ali in January 2011. Tunisia, the spark of the Arab Spring, has been a leading example in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region of being an emerging democracy. The collapse of the dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali after 23 years of being in power resulted from a national movement spread across the country in hopes of a better Tunisia. Since 2011,

January has been marked as the month of protests because ousting the dictator was the first step in changing the state operating system (FTDES, 2023).

Over the last 11 years, the Tunisian political landscape has undergone a significant transformation, marked by the resurgence of civil society after a prolonged period of inactivity during the authoritarian regime's rule. One of the most striking features of this transformation is the surge in the number of social organizations. According to the Centre d'Information de Formation d'Etude et de Documentation sur les Associations (Information Center for Training, Study and Documentation on Associations, IFEDA) and the General Table of Associations in 2023, 24,747 associations are currently operating in Tunisia, highlighting the crucial role played by civil society in the country. This rise in the number of social organizations has been accompanied by a growing interest in social movements and activism, particularly among international and local organizations. The January movements, for example, emerged as a response to state policies on economic development and social inequality. The most notable social movement that took place between 2019 and 2021 was sparked by widespread protests against corruption, political elite's dominance, and socio-economic inequality. Following these movements, the head of state, Kais Saied, responded by freezing and opening the parliament, a move that was seen as an effort to break the political deadlock and address public demands for change. This decision, however, was met with a mixed response, with some arguing that it was an infringement on democratic norms, while others welcomed it as a necessary step towards creating a more inclusive and representative political system. Despite the ongoing debates surrounding the role of civil society and the appropriate limits of executive power, the January movements have shown that Tunisia's civil society is alive and well, and its voice cannot be ignored (FTDES, 2022).

The surge in the number of social organizations and the rise of social movements in Tunisia over the past 12 years illustrate the extent to which Tunisians have come to recognize the importance of civil society in shaping the country's political and social agenda. This phenomenon has been accompanied by a growing interest in social movements and activism, particularly among international and local organizations, as illustrated by the January movements. However, the Tunisian people are not accustomed to democracy, and as the country undergoes a transition period, certain concepts could be interpreted and applied differently. The fact that 11 years of annual protesting had only achieved a fraction of the demands raises questions about how these protests develop and the missing elements that could help them

achieve political and social change. Nevertheless, by embracing civil society and the democratic principles it represents, Tunisia is charting a new course characterized by transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, which represents a positive shift towards a more inclusive and democratic society (Weilandt, 2019).

The relevance of this research lies in providing a comprehensive view of Tunisian activism and studying its interaction with governmental institutions during the post-revolutionary period. Despite the surge in social organizations and activism, there remains a need for in-depth and inclusive research on various Tunisian social movements at an academic level. Furthermore, as Tunisia undergoes a democratic transition following the Arab Spring, analyzing the manifestations of social movements and their interaction with governmental institutions is crucial to assess the importance of social movements in effecting political change.

The primary research question of this thesis is: "What are the challenges and responses of post-revolutionary social movements in Tunisia in achieving substantive social and political change?" In line with this primary question, the following secondary questions will be addressed: (a) "How has the Tunisian civil society's role as the government's monitor influenced the country's democratic transition?" (b) "What are the prominent social movements that have developed and solidified during the studied period?" (c) "Which instruments have shaped the mobilization process of these social protests?"

By exploring these questions, this research aims to uncover the reasons behind the limited success of post-revolutionary social movements in Tunisia. It is hypothesized that the political atmosphere, resource constraints, and foundational deficiencies have hindered these movements from fully achieving their objectives. By identifying and analyzing the weaknesses of these movements, this research seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge and provide actionable insights for improving their effectiveness and their contribution to Tunisia's ongoing democratic transition. The findings of this thesis will provide a comprehensive understanding of Tunisian activism and its interaction with governmental institutions. It is expected that this research will shed light on the importance of social movements in effecting political change and contribute to the ongoing democratic transition in Tunisia. Ultimately, by addressing the challenges and weaknesses of post-revolutionary social movements, this research aims to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and democratic society in Tunisia.

2. Literature Review

Social Movements are a crucial aspect of societies worldwide, shaping the course of history and driving transformative social change. Understanding the factors that contribute to the emergence and success of these movements is a complex and multifaceted endeavor. In this literature review, I delve into the realm of social movement theories to explore the intricate dynamics surrounding social change to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for young democracies.

The study of social movements encompasses a wide range of theories, each offering unique perspectives on the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of these transformative collective actions. Starting off by defining the fundamental notions related to social movements, this chapter goes through the definitions of activism and democracy and exploring their interconnection. Then it moves to establish the bases of resource mobilization theory to shed light on the strategic methods before moving to the relative deprivation theory that gives insight about the psycho-social factors to examine its effects on the rise of this phenomena. Also, it will analyze the relationship between social movements and political framing as well as presenting some of the challenges that may face these movements under certain political contexts.

These theories are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary that lay the foundations for this research study that seeks to enhance our understanding of how social change occurs and how it can be sustained in diverse setting.

2.1 Activism and Democracy

In the modern era, activism has emerged as an instrumental force in shaping political landscapes across the world. With the advent of social media, globalization, and the ability of individuals to mobilize and organize, activism has become a powerful tool for social and political change. One fundamental aspect of activism is the desire for democracy, which seeks to empower citizens and give them a voice in shaping the decisions that affect their lives. Thus, this section will explore the relationship between activism and democracy, as it helps to frame the democratization process for countries in transitional periods, particularly after a revolution.

Activism and democracy are interconnected concepts that have been the subject of much scholarly and practical attention. While democracy is a system of government that involves the participation of citizens in decision-making, activism is a form of political engagement that seeks to influence public policy and promote social change (Pateman, 1970).

Participatory democracy theory emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in decision-making processes. According to this theory, citizens should be directly involved in decision-making processes rather than simply voting for representatives who decide on their behalf. Participatory democracy seeks to empower citizens by giving them a more significant say in the policies affecting their lives and creating more opportunities for public deliberation and collaboration. Citizen participation is a crucial element in creating a genuinely democratic society. Thus, democratic institutions should be designed to enable and encourage this participation. In this context, "participation" and "activism" are closely related. Activism is a way for citizens to engage in the democratic process actively and can be seen as a form of participation in democracy (Pateman, 1970).

Several examples of citizen participation illustrate the importance of active engagement in democracy. For instance, participatory budgeting is a process that allows citizens to have a direct say in how public funds are allocated. This involves a participatory decision-making process that enables citizens to identify and prioritize public spending projects and to vote on how funds should be allocated. This process provides citizens an opportunity to impact public policy directly and promotes a culture of active citizenship. Another example of citizen participation is citizen juries. Citizen juries involve a group of randomly selected citizens who are asked to deliberate on a specific issue and make recommendations to decision-makers. This process allows citizens to learn about and engage with complex policy issues and provide input into decision-making processes (Pateman, 1970).

While participatory democracy theory has many proponents, it also has its critics. The first criticism of participatory democracy theory highlights the potential for powerful interest groups to manipulate citizen participation in decision-making processes. These groups may have more resources, knowledge, and expertise than the average citizen and may be able to dominate discussions and influence outcomes in their favor. This can lead to a situation where the interests of these groups are prioritized over the broader public interest, thus undermining the legitimacy of participatory democracy (Fung, 2015).

The second criticism of participatory democracy theory concerns the potential for the "tyranny of the majority" and the reinforcement of existing power structures. This criticism highlights the possibility that the participation of the majority can drown out the voices of minority groups, leading to an unfair outcome. Additionally, participatory democracy may not be effective in addressing issues of social inequality, as it may fail to give sufficient weight to the opinions and experiences of marginalized groups. This could perpetuate existing power structures and exacerbate social inequalities (Bächtiger et al. 2010).

These criticisms suggest that while participatory democracy theory may have significant potential to increase democratic participation and engagement, it is not a panacea for all democratic shortcomings. Careful consideration must be given to ensure that the voices of all citizens are heard and that powerful interest groups or majority viewpoints do not dominate decision-making processes. In this way, the potential benefits of participatory democracy theory can be fully realized while minimizing the risks of co-option and inequality (Bächtiger et al., 2010; Fung, 2015).

Carole Pateman's work on participatory democracy theory directly links the relationship between social movements and democracy. The theory suggests that social movements can be seen as a form of citizen participation. They are organized efforts by ordinary people to bring about political and social change. Social movements can influence democracy in several ways. Firstly, they can raise public awareness of important issues and increase the visibility of marginalized groups. By doing so, they can pressure governments and other powerful actors to address these issues and include the perspectives of these groups in decision-making processes (Pateman, 1970).

A convenient example that highlights the relationship is the civil rights movement in the United States which brought attention to the issue of racial discrimination and ultimately led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed racial segregation and discrimination. The movement catalyzed the development of participatory democracy theory in the United States. It highlighted how marginalized groups were excluded from political decision-making processes and inspired a rethinking of democratic practices. Additionally, the CRM was characterized by a deep commitment to democratic values, and tactics, such as sit-ins and protests, were based on the idea that citizens have a right to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Clements, 2003).

Secondly, social movements can serve as a check on power and authority. By mobilizing and organizing large numbers of citizens, they can create pressure for change and hold those in power accountable. This can help to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a few and ensure that decision-making processes are more democratic and representative. Thirdly, social movements can generate innovation and new political ideas. By providing a platform for new and diverse voices to be heard, they can challenge existing power structures and promote alternative visions for society. This can help to generate new ideas for policies and governance structures that are more responsive to the needs of citizens (Pateman, 1970).

Ultimately, activism and democracy are interconnected concepts crucial in shaping political landscapes and promoting social change. Participatory democracy theory emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in decision-making processes and highlights this approach's potential benefits and drawbacks. While social movements can serve as a form of citizen participation, they also face challenges in ensuring that the voices of all citizens are heard and that powerful interest groups or majority viewpoints do not dominate decision-making processes. Careful consideration must be given to these issues to fully realize the potential benefits of participatory democracy theory and ensure that democracy is truly representative and responsive to the needs of all citizens (Pateman, 1970).

2.2 Activism between social protests and social movements

Before I move forward to discussing social movement theories, it is essential to define the difference and similarities in which social protests and social movements intersect to provide a cohesive and comprehensive framework for my case study about Tunisian Activism.

Since the 2011 revolution, Tunisia has seen multiple uprisings throughout the last 12 years due to political, social, and economic instability, especially during January and February of every year as they mark the revolution's anniversary. The numbers from the Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economique et Sociaux (The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, FTDES) report showcase a spike in social protests, where we can see that in 2015 the number was at 8562 protests, and in 2021 it reached 12025 (2021). This data raises a critical question for this research: among this surge in numbers, have any of these protests been a part of a social movement, and how did they shape the Tunisian activism scene.

To explore the dynamics of activism in the Tunisian context, the relationship between social protests and movements needs to be examined first, and the differences between the two concepts need to be drawn. As noted by Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (2006) in "Social Movements: An Introduction" and Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2015) in "Contentious Politics," social movements involve the mobilization of resources, such as time, money, and labor, and the formation of networks and coalitions among like-minded individuals and groups. Social movements may also use a variety of contentious repertoires, such as protest, civil disobedience, and direct action, to bring attention to their cause and pressure those in power to make changes.

Furthermore, social movements engage in framing and identity work, seeking to define their grievances, goals, and collective identities in ways that resonate with potential supporters and mobilize collective action. Tilly emphasizes that social movements are shaped by broader political, economic, and cultural structures and processes, influenced by the opportunities and constraints of their particular historical and social contexts (Tilly, C & Tarrow, S. 2015).

In their work, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) differentiate between social protests and social movements, he highlights the importance of organizational structure, duration, and strategic orientation. Social protests tend to be more spontaneous and short-term, while social movements are sustained and organized and involve the formation of formal organizations, networks, and coalitions. Social movements often use framing to mobilize support and gain legitimacy, while social protests may focus on expressing anger or frustration. However, the authors note that the difference between social protest and social movement is not a clear-cut binary but a matter of degree and context. They share many similarities but differ in key aspects. For instance, some social protests can become social movements if they attract more participants, form a more formal organizational structure, and develop a more sustained strategy. On the other hand, some social movements can turn into social protests if they lose momentum, fail to attract new participants and become more reactive and issue-specific.

The American civil rights protests in 1960 were initially characterized by their episodic and often spontaneous nature, with protesters mobilizing around specific events such as sit-ins and boycotts. Nevertheless, over time, these protests coalesced into a broader and more organized movement, with civil rights organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leading the movement forward. These organizations mobilized resources, built alliances with other groups, and

developed sophisticated strategies for achieving their goals, such as legal action and voter registration drives. Through this process of institutionalization, the civil rights movement became a powerful and sustained force for change, ultimately achieving significant gains in voting rights, desegregation, and civil rights protections. This vividly illustrates how social protests can evolve into social movements through sustained mobilization and institutionalization (Tilly, C & Tarrow, S. 2015).

2.3 Social Movement Theories

Social movements have been the subject of much research and theorizing over the years, with different scholars offering different perspectives on how and why they emerge. One of the earliest and most influential theories of social movements is resource mobilization theory, which emphasizes the importance of resources in the success of social movements. This theory argues that social movements require resources such as money, volunteers, and media attention to be successful, and that activists must strategically allocate these resources to mobilize and sustain a movement (Christiansen, 2017).

Another important theory of social movements is relative deprivation theory, which explores the psycho-social factors contributing to social movements' rise. This theory posits that a sense of deprivation and dissatisfaction arises when individuals compare themselves to a desired reference point, such as their reference groups. When individuals' desires become legitimate expectations blocked by society, they experience feelings of relative deprivation, which can contribute to the motivation to mobilize and create social change (Christiansen, 2017).

Finally, social movements and violence theory explores the relationship between social movements and violence, and the conditions under which social movements turn violent. This theory argues that the use of violence by social movements is a complex phenomenon that is shaped by a range of factors, including the movement's goals, its organizational structure, and the political and social context in which it operates (Christiansen, 2017).

In the context of Tunisia, understanding the interplay between these different theories of social movements can shed light on the nature of post-revolutionary activism and the factors that have shaped its trajectory. By analyzing the role of resources, relative deprivation, the

relationship between social movements and violence, as well as the connection between activism and democracy, and the correlation between populism and democracy, we can gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and strategies of Tunisian activists and the challenges they have faced in their efforts to create social change.

2.3.1 Resource Mobilization Theory

To assess the efficacy of a social movement, a key metric is to evaluate its capacity to rally and involve proponents towards its objectives, encompassing various aspects, and this is where resource mobilization theory comes into focus.

Essentially, this is a theory in sociology that emphasizes the importance of resources and strategic planning in the success or failure of social movements. This theory argues that activists must effectively mobilize resources, such as money, time, media, and political support, to organize and sustain a movement. The theory also highlights the importance of political opportunities and collective action in the success of social movements. (Jenkins, 1983).

This theory explains the evolution of social movements from their classical form to a modern approach. The classical model is defined by local leadership, volunteering principals, collective action, large membership, and the donation collection from direct beneficiaries. While the modern form involves professional activism with paid staff, professional leaders, no member participation required, and outside resource donations. This evolution is a challenge for the Tunisian civil society and is a point of tension between generations of activists (Ragnar Weilandt, 2019).

Jenkins outlines the main principles of social movement mobilization theory, which emphasize the importance of resources, strategic mobilization, political opportunities, collective action, and the potential impact of repression. For social movements to be successful, activists must have access to resources such as money, volunteers, and media attention and strategically decide how to allocate them. Political opportunities, such as a sympathetic government or favorable legal environment, can also significantly impact a movement's success. Additionally, collective action and activist coordination are necessary to pool resources and coordinate efforts effectively. While repression by authorities can sometimes backfire and increase support for a social movement, Jenkins' theory (1983) highlights the strategic and

resourceful nature of social movements and the critical role of political opportunities and collective action in their success or failure.

The US civil rights movement was a pivotal social movement in American history that applied different theory elements. It was characterized by a series of nonviolent protests, marches, and demonstrations to end racial discrimination and segregation. Resource Mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of material and non-material resources in facilitating collective action. In the case of the civil rights movement, activists mobilized resources such as funding, media attention, and legal expertise to support their cause. They also utilized social networks, such as churches and community organizations, to recruit and mobilize supporters. Strategic mobilization was also critical to the movement's success, as activists sought to maximize their resources and leverage political opportunities. For example, the movement strategically targeted specific institutions, such as schools and businesses, to pressure them to desegregate. Activists also utilized legal strategies, such as court challenges and lawsuits, to challenge discriminatory laws and policies. Collective action was another critical factor in the movement's success, as activists worked together to sustain protests and maintain momentum. The movement's success was also facilitated by developing a shared identity among activists based on their commitment to nonviolence and pursuing civil rights for African Americans. Finally, the civil rights movement also benefited from favorable political opportunities, such as the declining legitimacy of segregationist policies and the support of international actors. For example, the movement gained momentum following the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional. In conclusion, the US civil rights movement provides a powerful example of applying resource mobilization theory to social movements. By mobilizing resources, leveraging political opportunities, and engaging in collective action, activists achieved significant social change and advanced the cause of racial justice in America (Christiansen, 2017, p64 – p68).

However, a crucial aspect that the resource mobilization theory tends to neglect is the psycho-social elements of social movements and downplays the impact of collective identity within the rallying groups. Jenkins (1983) pointed out some of the limitations of resource mobilization theory. One of the main limitations is its narrow focus on the instrumental aspects of social movement mobilization, such as the acquisition and allocation of resources, at the expense of the psychological and cultural factors that motivate individuals to participate in

social movements. Another limitation is its assumption that social movement actors are rational and strategic in pursuing resources and goals, which may not always be the case. Additionally, the theory neglects the role of ideology and culture in social movement mobilization, which can be critical in shaping individuals' motivations and collective identity. Finally, the theory tends to emphasize the agency of social movement actors in achieving their goals while neglecting the impact of external factors, such as political opportunities and repression, on social movement outcomes (Christiansen, 2017, p64 – p68).

2.3.2 Framing and Narrative in Social Movements and Violence

One of the most central questions regarding social movements is the legitimacy of violence in social movements. In the book “Theories of Social Movements” by Christiansen (2017), extensive insights are provided into this topic, highlighting the role of framing theory and narrative construction in understanding the portrayal and perception of violence in social movement.

In reference to Tilly and Della Porta's works, the term violence can be controversial due to the various definitions of violence among movement participants, state institutions, media outlets, and the public. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that when discussing violence concerning social movements, the terms shift to relational violence between groups and individuals engaged in inevitable political conflicts. The spectrum of violence is vast, and people can draw the line where they think violence has reached its ultimate form; for example, violent language can be considered a form of violence. Moreover, when analyzing social movements that involve violence or property destruction, it is essential to consider how the media frames and covers these events (Christiansen, 2017, p39 - p43).

Framing theory, a concept widely applied to the study of social movements, focuses on how activists strategically shape the perception and understanding of social issues or events to mobilize support and bring about social change. Within the context of social movements and violence, framing theory helps explain how activists deliberately select and present certain aspects of an issue while downplaying or omitting others. By framing their messages, activists seek to define the problem, assign responsibility, and propose solutions that align with their goals and values (Christiansen, 2017, p83 - p87).

Furthermore, narrative theory provides insights into the storytelling and narrative construction surrounding social movements and violence. Narratives play a crucial role in shaping public understanding and interpretation of events. Different narratives can be presented by various actors, such as media outlets, state institutions, and movement participants. These narratives can influence how violence in social movements is perceived and understood. Narrative theory emphasizes the cultural and emotional effects produced by these narratives and highlights how they contribute to the overall meaning-making process (Christiansen, 2017, p1 – p5).

When examining the portrayal of violence in social movements, it becomes evident that the media's framing and narrative construction play a significant role in shaping public perceptions. The media often frames protesters either as dangerous radicals who undermine the legitimacy of their cause or as heroic freedom fighters challenging oppression and injustice. These frames align with the different narratives presented by media outlets, highlighting the underlying grievances and goals of the protesters or focusing on the disruptive and violent actions they undertake. The framing and narratives used by the media can significantly impact public support for social movements, either by undermining their credibility or by galvanizing support and momentum (Christiansen, 2017, p83 - p87).

In the case of the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa, Italy, media coverage of protests and other forms of activism was highly influential in shaping public perceptions of militant tactics and their political goals, with some outlets portraying the protesters as violent and destructive, and others as victims of police brutality and state repression. The Black Bloc, a decentralized network of protesters who use militant tactics such as wearing black clothing and masks, played a significant role in the protests in Genoa. While some media outlets focused on the Black Bloc's tactics of property destruction and confrontations with police, others offered a more sympathetic view, emphasizing the underlying grievances and goals of the protesters. The Black Bloc's tactics of property damage and direct action can be seen as a means of challenging the status quo and promoting their political goals. However, such tactics can also have negative consequences, as they can overshadow the broader goals and messages of the movement. The media coverage of the Genoa protests and the role of the Black Bloc highlight the polarized nature of media coverage and its potential impact on public perceptions of social movements. It is essential to acknowledge and address instances of violence or property destruction that may occur during protests or social movements. Still, it is equally important to understand these

incidents in the broader context of the movement as a whole and to avoid letting them overshadow the underlying grievances and goals of the movement (Juris, 2005).

Social movements and violence also raise different questions to be answered in the following parts of this literature review. However, it should be noted that violence in this context is part of a set of action repertoires and exceeds its physical meaning to transcend to symbolism against the state regime; different levels of violence can also expose the type of the regime. Moreover, the framing and narrative theory explain how social movements navigate the portrayal of violence and its impact on public opinion and the overall goals of the movement.

Political violence is mainly symbolic: “the cultural and emotional effects that it produces are more important than the material damage.” (Della Porta, 2008, p.226).

2.3.3 Relative Deprivation Theory

Contrary to resource mobilization theory, the relative deprivation theory explores the psycho-social aspect contributing to social movements' rise. It was initially developed by sociologist Samuel A. Stouffer after World War II. Relative deprivation theory posits that a sense of deprivation and dissatisfaction arises when individuals compare themselves to a desired reference point, such as their reference groups. When individuals' desires become legitimate expectations blocked by society, they experience feelings of relative deprivation. Conversely, social satisfaction is the opposite of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is critical in explaining social movements, as it drives the desire for social change that motivates social movement mobilization. Therefore, according to Morrison (1971), social movements emerge from collective feelings of relative deprivation (Flynn SI. 2023).

Furthermore, relative deprivation theory differentiates between two notions: the first is egoistic deprivation, which refers to the individual's feelings of dissatisfaction compared to other group conditions. The second notion is Fraternal deprivation, sometimes referred to as group deprivation, which is the feeling of discontent that arises from comparing the status of an entire group with a reference group. Relative deprivation theory offers a more nuanced understanding of the psychological and social factors driving social movements' emergence. It highlights the importance of comparing oneself to others and how blocked desires can lead to feelings of relative deprivation, which drives social change. Additionally, the distinction

between egoistic and fraternal deprivation provides further insight into how social identity can be shaped by feelings of relative deprivation, which, in turn, can contribute to social movements' mobilization (Flynn SI. 2023).

Relative deprivation theory has been subject to several critiques by scholars. While Morrison (1971) critiques the theory for neglecting the role of political opportunities, Singer (1992) argues that it overlooks the emotional dimensions of social movement mobilization. Morrison argues that relative deprivation theory places too much emphasis on individual psychological factors and neglects the larger social and political context in which social movements arise. Conversely, Singer contends that social movement mobilization is not driven solely by feelings of relative deprivation but also by emotional responses to social injustices, such as anger, outrage, or empathy towards others experiencing injustice. Singer's critique emphasizes the importance of understanding the emotional dimensions of social movement mobilization alongside the psychological and social factors emphasized by relative deprivation theory. While these critiques challenge the relative deprivation theory's explanatory power, they also provide valuable insights into the motivations and dynamics that drive social movements (Christiansen, 2017, p58 – p62).

Despite these criticisms, relative deprivation theory remains valuable for understanding social movements' emergence. The theory's emphasis on individuals' psychological and social factors contributing to social movements' mobilization provides valuable insights into the motivations and strategies of social movement actors. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of social movements, it is essential to consider other factors, such as political opportunities, collective identity, and social networks, alongside relative deprivation (Christiansen, 2017, p58 – p62).

This theory can be examined and applied to the United States Gay Rights movement to offer insight into why and how the movement emerged and gained momentum. For many years, LGBTQ+ individuals faced significant discrimination and marginalization in American society. Homosexuality was considered a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973, and anti-sodomy laws criminalized homosexual behavior in many states. LGBTQ+ individuals were often fired from their jobs and denied housing and other fundamental rights due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This discrimination created a sense of relative deprivation among LGBTQ+ individuals and communities, who felt they were being denied the

same rights and opportunities as their heterosexual counterparts (Christiansen, 2017, p27 – p30).

As a result of this relative deprivation, LGBTQ+ individuals and allies began organizing and advocating for their rights. The Stonewall riots in 1969, sparked by a police raid on a gay bar in New York City, are often considered the beginning of the modern gay rights movement in the US. The riots responded to the continued harassment and discrimination that LGBTQ+ individuals faced by the police and broader society. Following the Stonewall riots, LGBTQ+ individuals and their allies organized demonstrations and protests nationwide to demand equal rights and end discrimination. The movement gained momentum throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations fought for repealing anti-sodomy laws, including sexual orientation in anti-discrimination laws and the right to marry and adopt children. However, the movement faced significant setbacks in the 1980s with the onset of the AIDS epidemic, which disproportionately affected the gay community. This crisis highlighted the lack of support and resources available to the LGBTQ+ community and further galvanized the movement to fight for their rights. Activists like Larry Kramer emerged, calling attention to the government's inaction in addressing the epidemic and pushing for increased funding and research (Christiansen, 2017, p27 – p30).

The AIDS epidemic also brought attention to the issue of same-sex relationships and the denial of legal rights, as many gay couples were denied the ability to make medical decisions for their partners or receive survivor benefits. The movement expanded to include the fight for marriage equality, with the first legal same-sex marriage in the US taking place in Massachusetts in 2004 (Christiansen, 2017, p27 – p30).

The relative deprivation theory can help explain the emergence and persistence of the US gay rights movement. LGBTQ+ individuals and communities perceived they were being mistreated and not receiving the same benefits and opportunities as their heterosexual counterparts. This relative deprivation created a sense of injustice and motivated individuals to organize and advocate for their rights. By framing their struggle as a fight for equality and fairness, the movement was able to mobilize support and challenge the status quo (Christiansen, 2017).

This theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the emergence and persistence of the US gay rights movement. By highlighting the role of perceived injustice and inequality, it also sheds light on the motivations and strategies of social movements more broadly. It can help in analyzing similar movements in different regions (Christiansen, 2017, p58 – p62).

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, social movement theories offer various perspectives on how and why movements emerge, and each theory provides a unique lens to examine the complexities of social change. Resource mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of resources in the success of social movements, while relative deprivation theory explores the psycho-social factors contributing to social movements' rise. On the other hand, social movements and violence theory explore the complex relationship between social movements and violence. These theories are not mutually exclusive and can complement each other in analyzing social movements. In the Tunisian context, understanding the interplay between these theories can provide valuable insights into the motivations and strategies of Tunisian activists and the challenges they have faced in their efforts to create social change.

In addition to the complexities surrounding social movements, the challenges faced by young democracies cannot be overlooked. Populism and democracy play a significant role in shaping the political landscape of these nations and framing the challenges they face. Populism, emphasizing appealing to the masses and discrediting established institutions, can be a double-edged sword for young democracies. While it can be a catalyst for change, it can also threaten the foundations of democracy by eroding trust in democratic institutions and fueling polarization.

Besides, democracy provides a framework for social change and allows citizens to express their grievances and hold leaders accountable. However, the road to democracy is not always smooth, and young democracies face various challenges in consolidating their democratic institutions. The role of social movements in advancing democratic principles and challenging authoritarianism cannot be overstated, but their success ultimately depends on the strength and stability of democratic institutions. Therefore, in studying social movements in young democracies such as Tunisia, it is crucial to consider the interplay between populism, democracy, and social change. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics can provide

valuable insights into the challenges these nations face and the strategies that can be employed to overcome them. By examining the motivations, strategies, and impact of social movements through the lens of these complex interactions, we can better understand how social change occurs and how it can be sustained in young democracies.

3. Tunisian Activism

Tunisia, a North African nation with a rich history and vibrant culture, has long been a breeding ground for social and political activism. From the era of colonial rule to the successive presidencies of Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisians have fervently engaged in various forms of activism to challenge oppressive systems, advocate for their rights, and strive for a more just society. This chapter delves into the journey of Tunisian activism, exploring its evolution and transformation across different periods of the country's history. This analysis seeks to provide profound insights of the factors that shaped and influenced the trajectory of social and political movements. Furthermore, it aims to highlight the achievements, setbacks, and ongoing challenges faced by Tunisian activists as they continue to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing society.

3.1 Tunisian Activism During Colonial Rule

One of the most significant events in the history of the Tunisian liberation movement was the formation of the Neo-Dustour party in 1934. The party was formed by Habib Bourguiba, who would become one of the most prominent figures in the Tunisian liberation movement. The Neo-Dustour party's primary goal was to end French colonization and establish Tunisia as an independent state. The party's leaders advocated non-violent resistance and civil disobedience to achieve their goals. In 1952, the French colonial authorities arrested Bourguiba and other Neo-Dustour leaders and exiled them to France. This move sparked widespread protests and strikes in Tunisia, and the movement gained momentum. In 1954, the Neo-Dustour party launched a campaign of civil disobedience and strikes, which paralyzed the country and forced the French authorities to negotiate with the movement's leaders. The negotiations led to Tunisia's independence in 1956, and Bourguiba became the country's first president. Bourguiba's leadership shaped the country's political landscape and promoted social and economic reforms. Under his leadership, Tunisia became a leader in the Arab world, promoting progressive values such as women's rights and education. The Tunisian liberation movement

was not just a struggle against French colonization but also a struggle for social and economic justice. The movement's leaders sought to address the country's deep-seated social and economic inequalities and promote ordinary Tunisians' welfare. This focus on social justice was reflected in the policies of Bourguiba's government, which invested heavily in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. (El Houssi, 2017, p67 – p88).

The movement can also be analyzed regarding its organizational structure, leadership, and mobilization strategies. The movement's leaders, such as the Young Tunisians, Habib Bourguiba, and Salah Ben Youssef, played crucial roles in mobilizing the Tunisian people in the struggle for independence. These leaders helped to articulate the movement's goals and demands, as well as to mobilize support and resources. The movement's organizational structure was decentralized and diffuse, with various political parties, trade unions, and civil society organizations playing key roles in mobilizing the population. Regarding mobilization strategies, the movement relied primarily on non-violent resistance and civil disobedience tactics, such as strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations. These tactics were designed to disrupt the functioning of the colonial regime, as well as to raise awareness and mobilize support for the movement's goals (El Houssi, 2017, p67 – p88). The movement's reliance on non-violent tactics can be analyzed through resource mobilization theory, which emphasizes the importance of collective action, mobilization, and framing in social movements. It framed its struggle as a fight for social and economic justice and national liberation from colonial domination. This framing helped mobilize support across various social and economic groups and helped build a broad-based coalition supporting the movement's goals (Christiansen, 2017).

Along with this overview of the colonial period, further analysis of critical historical events highlights the importance of the workers' movement and its capacity for resource mobilization that solidified the liberation front and pushed the limits of the French when it joined forces with the Dustur party in the early 1920s. This alliance was formed in response to the French authorities' neglect of the party's demands for greater autonomy and self-determination. The French government responded to this alliance by taking repressive measures, including arresting prominent Tunisian activists such as Gionpolo Finidori and Muhammed Bin Ali. These actions further radicalized the Liberation movement, and in October 1924, a strike was called to demand workers' rights. This led to civil unrest, which continued until January 1925, when Tunisian workers clashed with European workers, resulting in the arrest of the leaders of the General Confederation of Tunisian Workers (Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens, CGTT) (El Houssi, 2017, p67 – p88).

Following these events, the Liberation Movement shifted its strategy to non-violent resistance and embraced the rising French communist ideology. This approach aimed to expose French hypocrisy and flip the Tunisian struggle narrative. The opening of new offices of the Human Rights League in Tunisia, and the Committee for Liberation of North Africa, also helped to boost the party's political goals. In 1931, the party resumed its activities by launching cultural meetings with different regional leaders but faced another crackdown from the French authorities. This led to internal ideological conflicts within the party, eventually leading to the Neo-Dustur party's creation. This new party resonated with broader sections of Tunisian society, from the petit bourgeoisie to the working classes. It was led by Habib Bourguiba, Mahmud El Matri, and Taher Sfar, who founded a new newspaper, *Al Amal*, to encourage civil disobedience, such as boycotting French goods and refusing to pay taxes, yet despite these efforts; the French authorities remained their authoritative stance. In response, Bourguiba took matters into his own hands and pursued the path of resistance with a stubborn workforce who went on general strikes in 1938. The post-World War II period saw the birth of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) under the leadership of Farhat Hached. This organization played an important tactical role in mobilizing over 100,000 workers while Bourguiba embarked on a diplomatic tour to gain support for the Tunisian cause. The rise of the armed resistance movement, "Fallegah," and the United Nations' decision to look into the Tunisian case all contributed to the eventual fall of colonial rule. These events marked a turning point in the country's history and paved the way for Tunisia's independence in 1956. The history and evolution of independence movements in Tunisia was a complex and multi-faceted process that involved various political, social, and economic actors. The workers' movement, in particular, played a crucial role in shaping the course of this struggle, and their efforts eventually brought about Tunisian independence. (El Houssi, 2017, p67 – p88).

One of the most prominent movements that emerged from the colonial era and is overshadowed by the Young Tunisians and Workers movements is the Feminist movement that marked the reformative era after the French's ouster. The active participation of women in the national liberation movement played an integral role in the struggle for independence, contributing to the resistance through various means, including organizing protests, providing financial support, and even participating in armed resistance. However, women's voices were often marginalized within the movement despite their active participation, and their rights and concerns were not always prioritized. The colonial period in Tunisia witnessed a gradual shift

in gender roles and expectations. French colonialism brought new ideas and values that challenged traditional gender roles and norms. This created an opening for women to participate in the public sphere and become involved in political activism. Women's participation in the national liberation movement was not limited to the urban elite, as women from different socio-economic backgrounds contributed to the struggle (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33).

Women's involvement in the national liberation movement began with the emergence of nationalist organizations such as the Dustour Party in the 1920s. Women were initially excluded from these organizations, but they began to organize their associations to support the nationalist movement. The Tunisian Women's Association (Association des Femmes Tunisiennes, AFT) was established in 1936 and played a significant role in the national liberation movement. The AFT provided financial and material support to nationalist organizations and participated in protests and demonstrations (Moghadam, 2005).

During the 1950s and 1960s, women's involvement in the national liberation movement intensified. Women participated in strikes, sit-ins, and other forms of non-violent resistance. Some women also participated in armed struggles, such as the case of Djamila Bouhired, a member of the Algerian National Liberation Front, who fought against French forces in Tunisia. Women's participation in the national liberation movement was not only limited to political activism but also included providing logistical support to nationalist organizations, such as providing safe houses for militants, transporting weapons and supplies, and participating in underground networks (Hanssen, J & Weiss. M. 2018)

Women like Tawhida Ben Cheikh pushed for advancing women's rights during this time. Ben Cheikh was Tunisia's first female physician and a prominent feminist activist. She founded the first maternity hospital in Tunisia in the 1930s and was instrumental in advancing women's access to education and healthcare; she founded the first family planning clinic in Tunisia and was a vocal advocate for women's right to control their bodies. Another key figure in the feminist movement was Taher Haddad, a lawyer, writer, and intellectual who advocated for women's rights and equality. He challenged traditional interpretations of Islamic law that discriminated against women and argued that women should have equal rights and opportunities as men. Haddad's book "Our Women in the Sharia and Society" (Nos Femmes dans la Législation Islamique et la Société, 1930) was a groundbreaking work that challenged

traditional views on women's rights and sparked a national debate on gender equality. He argued that women's rights were essential for Tunisia's progress and development and that gender equality was necessary for social justice. Haddad's ideas significantly impacted the feminist movement in Tunisia and inspired many women to become involved in the struggle for women's rights. Eventually, Haddad's work inspired the creation of the AFT (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33),

Despite women's active participation in the national liberation movement, they faced challenges and obstacles that hindered their full participation and recognition. Women's rights and concerns were only sometimes prioritized, and women were often marginalized within the movement. Women's organizations, such as the AFT, were primarily dominated by men who held leadership positions and made important decisions without consulting women. Moreover, traditional gender roles and patriarchal attitudes persisted, which limited women's opportunities to participate fully in political life and decision-making. The role of women in the liberation movement during colonial rule and the emergence of the feminist movement in Tunisia are two intertwined stories that shaped the country's history. Women's active participation in the liberation movement laid the groundwork for the emergence of a feminist movement in the post-independence period. Key figures such as Tahar Haddad, Tawhida Ben Cheikh, Radhia Haddad, and Neziha Rejiba played critical roles in advancing women's rights and equality in Tunisia. Despite women's challenges and obstacles, their contributions were essential to Tunisia's struggle for independence. They heavily contributed during the reformatory era that granted women more freedom and rights through the Code of Personal Status (CPS) and the ongoing struggle for gender equality. The CPS was a landmark achievement for women's rights in Tunisia and one of the most progressive family laws in the Arab world. The CPS abolished polygamy, established women's right to initiate divorce, and granted women equal inheritance rights. The CPS also raised the minimum marriage age and required both partners' consent to marry. The CPS was a product of the feminist movement's activism and the government's commitment to modernizing Tunisian society. The CPS marked a significant shift in Tunisian society's attitudes toward women and paved the way for women's increased participation in public life and politics. (Achour, S. B & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p96 - p111).

The Tunisian women's involvement in the national liberation movement and the emergence of the feminist movement can be better understood through theoretical frameworks of relative deprivation theory and resource mobilization theory. Relative deprivation theory

explains how individuals or groups who feel deprived of resources or opportunities compared to others in their society are more likely to mobilize for change. This is highly depicted in the case of Tunisian women. Their exclusion from nationalist organizations and the lack of prioritization of their rights and concerns led to a feeling of relative deprivation. This feeling, combined with the availability of resources such as the Tunisian Women's Association (AFT), led women to mobilize and participate actively in the national liberation and feminist movements. The AFT played a critical role in mobilizing women by providing financial and material support to nationalist organizations, participating in protests and demonstrations, and providing logistical support to the movement, thus highlighting the importance of resources in social movements, as emphasized by resource mobilization theory (Christiansen, 2017).

While Tunisian activism during the post-independence era was instrumental in securing essential reforms, such as the Code of Personal Status (CPS) and advancing women's rights, it is important to acknowledge that not all voices were included in the conversation. The feminist movement during this period was led mainly by elite women who had access to education and social capital, which meant that the concerns of rural and working-class women were not always represented. Moreover, while the CPS granted women some rights, it also reinforced patriarchal norms and excluded women from some spheres of public life (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33),

Furthermore, the state played a significant role in shaping the feminist movement during this period through what has been termed "state feminism." State feminism refers to the state actively promoting gender equality and creating institutions and policies to advance women's rights. While state feminism can be seen as a positive development, it is crucial to analyze its impact on the feminist movement critically. Some scholars have argued that state feminism can co-opt and depoliticize feminist movements by transforming them into state-sponsored initiatives that serve the interests of the state rather than those of women. For example, the Tunisian state used state feminism to promote the image of Tunisia as a modern and progressive nation, which helped to secure international recognition and support. However, this also meant that the state had control over the feminist movement and could use it to further its political agenda. In addition, state feminism often focuses on legal and policy changes rather than challenging deeply ingrained social norms and structures perpetuating gender inequality. While legal and policy changes are essential, they are not sufficient to achieve true gender equality. Feminist movements must also work on challenging patriarchal norms and values that underpin

gender inequality and transform social institutions such as the family, education system, and the media (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33).

Therefore, while Tunisian activism during the post-independence era achieved significant reforms and progress in advancing women's rights, it is essential to critically analyze the role of state feminism and the limits of legal and policy changes in achieving true gender equality. The subsequent section will examine how the Ben Ali government extended and intensified this approach to consolidate its power and neutralize its adversaries.

3.2 Tunisian Activism: A Comparative Study of Bourguiba and Ben Ali's Approaches

Tunisia's activism history continued after its independence in 1956 and witnessed new reforms under the rule of the first president of the republic Habib Bourguiba and the second president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. However, the two successive governments have consistently sought to control and suppress civil society organizations and political dissent, using a range of laws and regulations to limit the activities of activists and NGOs. This chapter will examine the evolution of Tunisian activism from the rule of Habib Bourguiba to the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, focusing on how these governments sought to control civil society and suppress political dissent.

Analyzing the various interactions of the Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras with their opposition highlights multiple similarities in which both presidents tried to control the political atmosphere to maintain their status. In the early years of Bourguiba's rule, there was a relatively open political climate in Tunisia, with several opposition parties and civil society organizations operating openly. However, this situation changed in the 1960s, as Bourguiba sought to consolidate his power and establish a one-party state. The Law on Associations, enacted in 1961, required all associations to obtain government approval before operating, giving the government broad powers to control and monitor their activities. This law was used to suppress various civil society organizations, including labor unions, student associations, and women's groups. Despite these restrictions, some civil society organizations continued to operate, and there were periodic outbreaks of political dissent in Tunisia throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), founded in 1977, emerged as one of the country's

most important civil society organizations, advocating for human rights and political freedoms (Derradji, 2011, p38 – p39).

Moreover, in a similar move that showcases the continuity of oppressive regimes, Ben Ali's government passed a law in 1992 restricting the right to strike and authorizing the use of force to break up demonstrations. However, the two consecutive governments continued to crack down on dissent, using a range of tactics to suppress political opposition and control civil society that would, in return, create a relative sense of deprivation (Christiansen, 2017) of freedom of expression and form a new collective identity of state oppression victims (Derradji, 2011, p40 – p44).

The Labor movement led by the UGTT (Union General Travailleurs Tunisien) was a significant opponent to the government policies throughout the years. The Tunisian General Labor Union emerged as a formidable opposition force to the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes. The union continued to mobilize workers and advocate for their rights even after the country's independence, which led to multiple clashes with the authorities (Netterstrøm, 2016, p383 – p398).

Initially, Bourguiba cooperated with the UGTT, as their demands aligned with his political agenda. However, their ideologies eventually diverged, and workers protested Bourguiba's liberal policies. As tensions grew, the government resorted to violence to subdue the opposition. During the first years of his administration, the Neo-Dustour party implemented socialist reforms, which positioned Tunisia as a progressive state that guaranteed workers' rights, women's freedom, and economic stability. Bourguiba's filtration of the UGTT started in the 1960s when he instigated internal conflict to eliminate his main opposition at the time, Salah Ben Youssef, the UGTT's secretary-general. This tactical move enabled Bourguiba to indirectly place Ahmed Tlili, who was more aligned with the ruling party, at the union's helm (Netterstrøm, 2016, p383 – p398).

Consequently, the UGTT became subordinate to the Neo-Dustour party. It is worth noting that Bourguiba's initial reformative plan after being elected as the first president required his cooperation with the union, as their demands aligned with his political agenda. However, when their ideologies grew different, the government resorted to violence to subdue the growing tensions. Bourguiba's socialist reforms pushed boundaries in the region and presented Tunisia

as a progressive state. Nevertheless, his filtration of the UGTT highlighted the government's efforts to control and manipulate the labor movement to advance its political objectives. By the 1970s, Bourguiba's socialist ideals failed to produce the expected economic outcomes, leading him to switch to liberal economic policies. Tensions between the UGTT and the government intensified, and in 1978, the UGTT called for a general strike to oppose the new policies. The ensuing protests resulted in violence between police and military forces, who attempted to repress the movement. Ben Ali served as the General Director of National Security during this period. His hostility towards the UGTT influenced his subsequent authoritarian leadership style and relationship with the union when he rose to power (Netterstrøm, 2016, p383 – p398).

From a theoretical angle, the UGTT represents a perfect study case for resource mobilization theory as it highlights the importance of resources, such as funding, expertise, and support, in social movements. The UGTT was able to mobilize workers and advocate for their rights by utilizing the resources at their disposal, such as their extensive network, financial resources, and ability to organize and coordinate mass protests and strikes. The UGTT's history exemplifies the importance of leveraging available resources to achieve goals and effect societal change. Plus, its resource mobilization efforts made it possible to maintain its independence from the government and represent the interests of the workers. The UGTT's extensive network and organizational capacity allowed it to build alliances with other opposition groups, international labor organizations, and human rights organizations, which increased its visibility and leverage in the political arena. By mobilizing resources and building alliances, the UGTT could sustain mass protests and strikes, which became a significant challenge to the government's authority, making it Ben Ali's next target (Christiansen, 2017).

After seizing power through a bloodless coup in 1987, Ben Ali promised to uphold democratic principles and respect human rights to appease opposition groups like the UGTT. However, his regime soon resorted to cracking down on dissent and targeting the UGTT as one of its primary opponents. Rather than resorting to violence, Ben Ali employed a classic strategy of infiltrating and holding leverage over the most influential organizations and figures to retain his grip on power for 23 consecutive years (Netterstrøm, 2016, p383 – p398).

One example of Ben Ali's tactics in containing and limiting opposition can be seen in the 2003 Tunisair affair. The privatization of the national airline, Tunisair, met with heavy resistance from the labor movement throughout the 2000s because it meant workers would lose

their jobs or social benefits if the company became private. The UGTT executive bureau was supposed to oppose this deal. However, the ruling party had already infiltrated the union, appointing members of the regime's ruling party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), as leaders. Despite worker protests and calls for new elections to replace the executive board, Ben Ali, with the help of Moncef Ben Romdhane, leader of the airport workers union, and Abdesslem Jerad, the union's general secretary, was partially successful in sabotaging these efforts. Physical intimidation bought them more time to sign the privatization agreement and triggered a series of continuous strikes. Even after Jerad and Ben Romdhane were replaced, the union could not bring the government to the negotiation table because the RCD continued infiltrating the union and holding critical positions with unique benefits. The regime offered union leaders tax exemptions, better educational opportunities for their families, and other temptations to maintain the status quo. Any retaliation attempts were met with blackmail to expose their receipt of benefits. The Tunisair issue highlights how systemic oppression and corruption through bribery, blackmail, and coercion aided the Ben Ali regime in maintaining its authority and undermined the labor movement's efforts to achieve its objectives. This insight can help illustrate how authoritarian regimes operate and their tactics to suppress opposition movements before I explain how social movements react to authoritarian regimes (Netterstrøm, 2016, p383 – p398).

Another similarity between the regimes can be distinguished through observing the feminist movement that has been subject to state feminism that served the agenda of the authority figures rather than advancing the rights of women. State feminism refers to the government's use of feminist rhetoric and policies to advance its political goals and maintain its authority. It involves the incorporation of feminist discourse and demands into state policies and practices, often intending to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. However, state feminism can also be used as a means of co-opting feminist movements and organizations, controlling their agendas, and limiting their ability to challenge the state's authority, which was the case for the Tunisian feminist movement before the revolutionary period (Haradhan, 2022).

Under Bourguiba's regime, state feminism legitimized and promoted the government's modernization policies. The government launched a campaign to modernize Tunisian society, and part of that effort included granting women greater rights and access to education and employment. In 1956, Bourguiba passed the Personal Status Code (PSC), granting women

greater marriage and divorce rights. The PSC was hailed as a groundbreaking feminist achievement, and Bourguiba's government used it to showcase its progressive stance on women's rights. Nonetheless, the feminist movement during Bourguiba's era was closely monitored and controlled by the state. The government approved the creation of the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT) in 1956, designed to be the sole representative of Tunisian women. The UNFT was closely aligned with the ruling party, and its leadership was appointed by the government. The organization acted as a conduit for the government's policies and did not challenge the state's authority. Any feminist activism deemed too radical or critical of the state was met with repression and censorship (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33).

Similarly, under Ben Ali's regime, state feminism was used to co-opt the feminist movement and keep it under control; it systemically weakened all resources and potential networks that could consolidate and form an opposition. Ben Ali's government continued the modernization policies of the Bourguiba era, but the government's approach to feminism was more overtly instrumental. In 1993, Ben Ali's government passed a new family law, hailed as another feminist achievement. The law granted women greater marriage and divorce rights and allowed them to pass their nationality to their children. Yet, the law was criticized for failing to address issues such as inheritance and the status of men as the head of the family. Ben Ali's government also authorized a new feminist organization, the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD), seen as more independent and critical of the government than the UNFT. However, the ATFD was also closely monitored and harassed by the government. In 2003, the government banned the ATFD from holding a conference on women's rights, and several of its leaders were arrested. The use of state feminism by both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes significantly impacted the feminist movement. The movement was co-opted and controlled by the state, and any activism deemed too critical or radical was met with repression. The feminist movement became fragmented and divided, thus losing one of the pillars of social movements' success (Christiansen, 2017), with some women aligning with the state-sponsored UNFT and others aligning with the more independent ATFD. The movement's priorities also shifted, emphasizing legal reforms rather than grassroots activism (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33).

The limitations of the movement's achievements can be explained through the Tunisian identity struggle, torn between modernization and religion. On the one hand, Bourguiba sought to modernize Tunisia and pushed for a more secular society, which often conflicted with conservative Islamic beliefs. The revolutionary PSC set a precedent in the MENA region for the time and granted women more rights, such as initiating divorce and inheriting property. But it was also limited by the role of Islamic traditions in Tunisian society that uphold patriarchal rules. The balance between modernity and Islam persists within the movement itself even after the revolutionary period. The movement itself is also grappling with how to reconcile traditional Islamic beliefs with modern values and ideas about gender equality. While Bourguiba and Ben Ali's regimes used state feminism to promote women's rights in Tunisia, their ultimate goal was to contain and control the feminist movement. The state-sponsored feminist organizations were designed to be the sole representatives of Tunisian women and to quell any feminist activism that was seen as too radical. As a result, the feminist movement in Tunisia was fragmented, and its priorities shifted away from grassroots activism (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33),

While both regimes used similar tactics to maintain power, Ben Ali was notorious for his human rights violations record. His era was marked by restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, association, torture, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killings. The regime severely limited civil society organizations and the activities of activists who spoke out against the government's policies or advocated for human rights and political reform. Under his rule, the Tunisian government systematically targeted journalists, bloggers, and social media activists who were critical of the regime. The regime used various tactics to intimidate, harass, and silence dissent, including arbitrary detention, torture, and even assassination: journalists and political critics such as Taoufik Ben Brik and Mohammed Abbou served jail sentences after sitting through unfair trials. The government also imposed severe restrictions on the activities of civil society organizations, including human rights groups, feminist organizations, and labor unions. These groups were subject to constant surveillance, harassment, and legal and bureaucratic obstacles, making it difficult to operate effectively (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Moreover, Ben Ali's regime used the judiciary as a tool of repression, with politically motivated trials and harsh sentences handed down to activists, journalists, and human rights defenders. The regime also frequently resorted to violence to disperse peaceful demonstrations and protests. The government's repressive policies towards civil society organizations and

activists served to weaken Tunisia's democratic institutions and limit the participation of citizens in the political process. The regime's attitude towards civil society was characterized by suspicion and hostility, and it saw any independent voice as a threat to its grip on power (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

To conclude, the social movements in Tunisia during the periods of Bourguiba and Ben Ali's rule were marked by varying levels of repression and co-option by the state. While the Bourguiba era saw the emergence of nascent civil society groups and labor unions, their power and autonomy were limited by state control. Under Ben Ali, repression of civil society organizations and human rights violations intensified, creating a more hostile environment for social movements. However, despite this challenging landscape, some groups continued to push for change and challenge the authoritarian rule of the state, laying the groundwork for the eventual revolution in 2011. Today, Tunisian social movements continued to reform and lay the groundwork for navigating challenges, including restrictions on freedom of expression and association, but have made significant progress in advancing human rights and democracy.

4. The Road to Revolution

The Tunisian revolution of 2011 was a defining moment in the history of the Arab world. It was a popular uprising that led to the overthrow of the authoritarian regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled the country for over two decades. The revolution was the culmination of years of frustration and dissent among the Tunisian people, who were fed up with economic mismanagement, political repression, and human rights abuses. This chapter will examine the factors contributing to the Tunisian revolution and its subsequent success. Also, I will discuss the economic, social, and political factors that led to the outbreak of protests and the eventual downfall of the Ben Ali regime. Moreover, I will also examine the role of online activism, civil society organizations, and the collective psychology of the Tunisian people in the mobilization process. Exploring these factors will help provide a deeper understanding of the events that led to this historic turning point in the Arab world (Refle, 2019).

The Tunisian Revolution began with the tragic self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a young street vendor in Sidi Bouzid, on December 17, 2010. Bouazizi's act was a protest against the repeated harassment he faced from local authorities who confiscated his merchandise and publicly humiliated him. His death, which hearkened to the collective sense of fear and deprivation that permeated the Tunisian population, resonated deeply with the people, who had grown tired of the government's economic mismanagement, political repression, and human rights abuses. This event sparked a wave of protests and demonstrations across the country, as people demanded an end to authoritarian rule and called for more significant economic opportunities and political freedoms. In addition, civil society actors, including trade unions, human rights organizations, and youth groups, quickly mobilized to amplify these protests, using social media and other communication tools to coordinate mass demonstrations in Tunis and other major cities. The government responded to these protests with repression and violence, including tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets. However, these tactics further galvanized the opposition and brought more people into the streets. As the protests grew in size and intensity, the government's grip on power began to slip. In January 2011, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced to flee the country as the protests reached a critical mass. This marked the end of his 23-year reign and the beginning of a new era of political transition in Tunisia (Refle, 2019).

While the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi is often cited as the spark that ignited the Tunisian Revolution, it is essential to note that social and political unrest had been simmering in the country for years prior. The 2008 protests in Gafsa and Regueb can be seen as a precursor to the revolution, as they highlighted many of the same issues that would later define the larger movement. These protests were rooted in economic deprivation and political exclusion, and they were met with a heavy-handed response from the government. While they may not have received the same level of international attention as the later events of the revolution, they were a significant moment in Tunisia's history that served as a warning of the growing discontent among the population (Ayeb, 2011, p467 – p479).

The rigged recruitment process of the CPG (Phosphate Company of Gafsa), which offered jobs to candidates outside the region, resulted in a movement that led to a sit-in and occupation of the UGTT office, spreading to other areas and resulted in deaths and arrests. The protests were initially led by unemployed youth who were frustrated with the lack of job opportunities in the region, although it was home to significant phosphate deposits that foreign companies were exploiting. The protestors accused these companies of exploiting Tunisia's

natural resources while failing to create jobs or invest in the local economy. The protests quickly gained momentum and spread to other parts of the country, with civil society actors and trade unions joining the demonstrations. The government responded with repression, arresting and detaining protestors and imposing a media blackout on the protests. The subsequent trial of union members was denounced as a parody of justice, leading to a strong international movement that eventually revised the sentences. The closing of the border with Libya in August 2010, ostensibly to control informal trade, was, in reality, an attempt by the Trabelsi mafia to control the lucrative activity. This resulted in riots, arrests, torture, and heavy sentences. These events highlight the deep-seated grievances of the Tunisian people and the government's failure to address them (Ayeb, 2011, p467 – p479).

These events are a primary indicator of how since Tunisia's independence in 1956, development policies have primarily favored the country's coastal cities, which has led to the marginalization of the west, center, and south of Tunisia. This has contributed to the social and economic disparities that were at the heart of the protests leading up to the Tunisian Revolution in 2011. Tunisia's development policies have been characterized by neglect and uneven distribution of resources. The government's focus on developing coastal areas, such as Tunis and Sousse, has come at the expense of other regions, which have been left underdeveloped and lacking in basic services like health care and education. This has led to widespread frustration and anger among the country's youth, who are disproportionately affected by unemployment and poverty. The protests that erupted in 2011 can be seen as a response to this legacy of neglect and marginalization, as well as to the corruption and authoritarianism of the ruling regime. As El Khawas described in his work, the revolution "was not a cry for democracy but a demand for jobs" (El Khawas. 2012; Refle, 2019, p14 - p15).

It is worth noting that the economic and social factors discussed above are just a fraction of what scholars have suggested as the direct triggers of the revolution. Other researchers suggest that high unemployment, regional inequalities, corruption, and lack of political freedoms, have created a sense of frustration and deprivation among Tunisians. This sense of deprivation has contributed to developing a collective identity among the protesters, who have come together to demand change and a more just society. The psychological aspect of the revolution had a crucial role in shaping this collective identity and mobilizing people to take action. Understanding this psychological dimension is essential for grasping the full complexity of the uprising and its aftermath (Refle, 2019, p1- p37).

The relative deprivation theory helps to explain one of the underlying causes of the Tunisian Revolution and the importance of addressing social and economic disparities in creating a more just society. One of the critical factors that contributed to the psychological dimension of the movement was a collective sense of fear and deprivation among the people. For many years, Tunisian society had lived under a repressive regime that suppressed dissent, limited freedom of expression, and denied them fundamental human rights. This sense of fear and deprivation had been building up for years, along with the frustration with the lack of opportunities and prospects for a better future. This was further fueled by the moral shock of the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, which became a symbol of the desperation and hopelessness felt by many Tunisians, and it served as a catalyst for the protests that followed. Despite the initial fear and repression, people eventually broke through this psychological barrier and demanded dignity. The protests were driven by a sense of moral outrage and a desire for justice, and the rejection of the status quo. The protests also brought together people from different social classes, religions, and ethnicities, creating a strong sense of collective identity and purpose (Refle, 2019, p1- p37).

The protesters' demand for dignity was not just about their basic human rights but also their desire to be treated as equals and have a say in their future. They were no longer willing to accept a regime that denied them their fundamental human rights and dignity. Instead, they demanded a government that was accountable to its people, respected their rights and freedoms, and provided them with opportunities for a better future. This sentiment is portrayed in the chanted slogans such as "Work, Freedom, National Dignity" and "The people want the fall of the regime" during the famous revolts in the Habiba Bourguiba street, which became a symbolic place for further protests to come (Refle, 2019, p1- p37).

The Anti-Ben Ali sentiment expressed throughout the protests and highlighted by the street chants "Bread, water, and no Ben Ali" and "Ben Ali, get out" are literal translations of the shared frustration among different classes and demographics of the society with participants from all walks of life, including students, workers, professionals, and ordinary citizens. This diversity helped broaden the movement's base and make it more inclusive. Also, it made it more difficult for the government to suppress the protests by targeting specific groups or individuals. Besides the diversity of classes within the movement, and the rapid decline of the RCD party influence, the regime failed to contain the spreading of the protests from the south to the north

due to its leaderless and horizontal unstructured nature; scholars argue that this allowed for a more flexible and adaptable movement that was able to respond to changing circumstances and to the regime's attempts to quash the protests. It also made it more difficult for the regime to co-opt or hijack the movement by offering limited concessions or creating a fake opposition party. In contrast to its Egyptian counterpart, the Tunisian uprising was largely non-violent and went on without any military interference, with protesters using peaceful tactics such as sit-ins, demonstrations, and civil disobedience to make their voices heard. This non-violent approach helped to build broader public support for the movement and also helped to minimize the risk of violent confrontation with the government (Refle, 2019, p1- p37).

The use of social media platforms further intensified the development of these events and brought down the dictator in just one month. The frustrated unemployed youth turned to online activism to disseminate information faster and bypass government censorship, which was critical in framing the events that led to the revolution. Ben Ali's regime have proved on several occasions that its modernist ideology is just a façade. One of the best examples of this is his internet censorship, especially for human rights organizations and political opposition. When users attempted to access these pages, they were met with a "404 Not Found" message, effectively denying them access to information and alternative viewpoints. Despite this censorship, digital activists like Lina Ben Mhenni played a significant role in the Tunisian Revolution. Through blogs and social media, they were able to circumvent government censorship and share information about the protests with a global audience. Ben Mhenni's blog, "A Tunisian Girl," became a prominent source of information about the revolution and helped to mobilize support for the cause. Her bravery in the face of government repression and commitment to promoting freedom of expression and democracy were emblematic of the people's spirit during the revolution. The role of digital activists in the revolution highlights the importance of technology and communication in contemporary social movements. By utilizing digital tools to bypass government censorship and share information, activists were able to mobilize public support and challenge the regime's authority (Allouche, 2020)

In addition to Lina Ben Mhenni's blog "A Tunisian Girl," the NAWAAT blog played an important role. NAWAAT, which means "core" or "essence" in Arabic, is a collective of digital activists, artists, and writers who use various digital platforms to promote freedom of expression and social justice and beyond. The NAWAAT blog was a key platform for sharing information, opinions, and analysis about the revolution and its aftermath. The blog's coverage of the

revolution was unique in providing a grassroots perspective on the events unfolding. Rather than relying on traditional media sources, NAWAAT's contributors were often on the ground, reporting from the front lines of the protests and sharing firsthand accounts of the regime's repression. In addition to its coverage of the revolution, NAWAAT has continued to be an important platform for critical voices providing a space for marginalized communities to share their stories and perspectives. These digital tools helped to build a narrative of the government as corrupt, repressive, and indifferent to the needs of its citizens. As this narrative gained traction, it became increasingly difficult for the government to ignore or suppress dissent. Social media was crucial in documenting the protests and the government's response. Activists used their smartphones to capture images and videos of the protests, police brutality, and other incidents of government repression. This visual evidence was then shared widely on social media platforms, helping amplify the protesters' voices and expose the government's actions to the world. (Refle, 2019; Allouche, 2020).

One last decisive element in ending the autocratic regime was mobilizing major local organizations such as the UGTT and LTDH. The influence of the two organizations was a negotiating force in regaining political stability during the transitional period. As the largest labor union in Tunisia, with a membership base of over 500,000 workers, the UGTT had significant social and political influence. The UGTT's decision to join the protests lent legitimacy to the movement and helped to broaden its base of support beyond the usual activists and political opposition. The UGTT was vital in organizing and mobilizing workers to join the protests. They called for a general strike on January 14, 2011, which put the country at a standstill and pressured the government to step down. The UGTT's ability to mobilize workers and shut down the economy was a significant factor in the success of the protests. Furthermore, the UGTT also negotiated with the government and other political actors. In the early stages of the protests, the UGTT helped to negotiate the release of protesters whom the police had arrested. Later on, the UGTT was involved in negotiations with the government over forming a new interim government, ultimately leading to the appointment of a transitional government and holding free and fair elections (Refle, 2019, p1- p37).

Conversely, the LTDH's push for democracy was multifaceted and included documenting human rights abuses, providing legal assistance to protesters, organizing protests and rallies, and advocating for democratic reform. The organization documented government abuses, including excessive force against protesters and the arrest and detention of activists. By

publicizing these abuses, the LTDH helped to raise awareness about the regime's brutality and galvanized support for the protesters' demands for democracy. The LTDH also provided legal assistance to protesters arrested or detained by the government, ensuring they had access to legal representation, and were granted a fair trial. Additionally, the LTDH organized protests and rallies in support of democracy and human rights. It helped to mobilize civil society around these demands, creating a sense of solidarity among Tunisians opposed to the regime and its abuses. By advocating for democratic reform in Tunisia, including the establishment of free and fair elections, an independent judiciary, and the protection of fundamental human rights, the LTDH helped to legitimize the protesters' demands and create a broader coalition of support for democratic change in Tunisia (Refle, 2019, p1- p37).

This analysis channelizes a connection to the principles of resource mobilization theory which the protesters effectively utilized to achieve their goals. They were able to mobilize a large number of people through effective communication and social media platforms. Digital activists used blogs and social media platforms to share information about the protests and document police brutality, while technology was used to circumvent government censorship and share information with a global audience (Tewolde-Berhan, 2017).

In addition to building alliances with the general public who shared the same goals, human rights organizations, and labor unions provided resources, expertise, and advice, which helped to strengthen the movement and expand its reach. This goes along with framing the issue in a way that resonates with a broader audience, using social media and other digital tools to create a narrative of the government as corrupt and indifferent to the needs of its citizens. This framing helped mobilize public support and pressure the government to take action. By disrupting the normal functioning of society through tactics such as demonstrations, strikes, and civil disobedience, the protesters demonstrated the urgency of their cause and the strength of their movement, ultimately leading to the downfall of the dictator and the establishment of a more democratic government (Baker, 2015, p37 – p42). This effective resource mobilization, general relative sense of deprivation and the right way of framing the events were crucial in achieving significant social and political change (Christiansen, 2017).

5. The Democratic Transition

The revolutionary period and the end of the old regime held plenty of promises for a democratic change that is yet to come as of the time of writing this thesis. When we speak about Tunisian politics for the previous 12 years, we must mention the political deadlock the country has reached and the civil unrest it has endured. The most notable uprising during the 11 years started in 2019 and throughout 2020 and 2021, which has shifted the balance of power. Since Ben Ali's departure, the country has lived through 12 governments each of them has yet to deliver the expected political and economic outcome. This does not deny that few democratic milestones have been achieved. Therefore, this chapter will provide a general overview of the political developments before discussing the role played by civil society, the latest emerging social movements, and the challenges faced during this transition (Krichen, 2021).

The revolution allowed the Islamist movement led by the Ennahdha party and its primary leading figure Rached Ghannouchi to emerge as a major political force in Tunisia. The party was established in the 1980s as a reaction to the regime's repression of political Islam. It maintained a presence through underground networks and had a well-established grassroots network, which was usually suppressed during the reign of the ex-president. Ennahdha also had a reputation for being a moderate Islamist party, which appealed to many Tunisians disillusioned with the old regime's corrupt and authoritarian nature (Baker, 2015). The country's first democratic election, the election of the National Constituent Assembly in 2011, was a landmark event that set the stage for a new political order. Since then, Tunisians have participated in seven legislative, presidential, and municipal elections. Ennahdha emerged as the winner in three of these elections, including the 2011 NCA elections with 37% of the votes, the 2018 municipal elections with 28%, and the 2019 legislative elections. However, the party's popularity declined over time, as evidenced by its reduced vote share in the 2019 legislative elections at 19.6%. In contrast, the modernist party Nidaa Tounes won significantly in the 2014 general elections, securing 38% of the vote and 86 deputies in the National Constituent Assembly. However, the party's fortunes declined significantly in subsequent years, culminating in a dismal performance in the 2019 elections, where it only managed to secure three seats. The 2014 electoral campaign was marked by intense polarization between the modernist and Islamist factions, with Nidaa emerging as the clear winner. However, the two parties decided to govern together during the five-year term, leading to economic stagnation and political infighting. The lack of a clear mandate and disagreements within the ruling

coalition prevented the government from implementing significant reforms or making substantial progress on critical issues such as unemployment, economic development, human rights violations, and corruption, leading to public dissatisfaction and disillusionment (Krichen, 2021).

In the beginning years of the transition, the state was exposed to various threats that could have destabilized the country that threatened to undermine the country's progress. The transition period was characterized by political instability, economic challenges, terrorism, and ideological conflicts between the Islamists and modernists, creating a delicate situation for Tunisia (Kéfi, 2015).

One of the most significant threats facing Tunisia after the revolution was terrorism. The country's proximity to Libya and its long porous border made it vulnerable to attacks by extremist groups. The assassination of opposition leader Chokri Belaid in 2013, followed by the killing of Mohamed Brahmi, another opposition leader, in the same year, heightened political tensions in the country. The attacks were believed to be the work of extremist groups that sought to destabilize the country and undermine the democratic transition. The political assassinations and the rise of terrorism in Tunisia highlighted the fragility of the country's transition to democracy. Another significant challenge facing Tunisia during the transition period was the ideological divide between the Islamists and modernists. The Islamist Ennahdha party emerged as Tunisia's most significant political force after the revolution. The party won the first democratic elections in the country's history and played a significant role in drafting the new constitution. However, the party's growing influence was met with resistance from secular and liberal forces, who feared that the Islamists would roll back the progress made in women's rights and democracy, especially since the spike in terrorist attacks and the two major assassinations happened during their reign over the government's prominent institutions led by Ali Laarayedh as a prime minister (Kéfi, 2015).

Despite these challenges, Tunisia stands out as an exception among other countries in the MENA region. Unlike Libya and Egypt, which witnessed a return to authoritarian rule, arguably, Tunisia has managed to maintain its democratic gains and is currently the only functioning democracy in the region. This is partly due to the efforts of civil society organizations, which played a critical role in advocating for a peaceful transition to democracy (Kéfi, 2015).

The young democracy's cracks and deficiencies began to show following the 2014 elections, the official adoption of the new constitution, and the semi-presidential system, which divided power between the president, prime minister, and parliament. The system was meant to ensure checks and balances and prevent one person or group from dominating the political landscape. This system requires that the government appointed by the head of state should gain a vote of confidence from the parliament to carry on with its duties, thus creating a conflict of interest if the three powerhouses' ideologies do not align. Besides, the vagueness of the constitution, coupled with the complex power-sharing arrangement, has only created a conflict of interest and left room for exploitation by politicians. An eminent power struggle between the head of state, government, and parliament reoccurred twice. The first occasion happened during former president Beji Caied Essebsi's rule, former head of government Youssef Chahed, and Ennahdha dominated parliament. In the second case, with the newly elected Kais Saied as head of state and Hichem Mechichi as head of government, and yet again Ennahdha party was a dominant majority in the parliament. The latter, in particular, became a hotbed of political intrigue as elected representatives used their parliamentary immunity to protect their interests. Corruption and cronyism were rife, with some lawmakers using their positions to gain financial and political benefits rather than serving the people's interests. The divide between the Islamist and secular forces further exacerbated the political deadlock. The Ennahdha party, with the largest number of parliamentary seats in the 2019 elections, failed to secure a majority. Its opponents have accused the party of pursuing an Islamist agenda and seeking to undermine democratic institutions (Krichen, 2021).

The deadlock reached its peak in July 2021, when President Kais Saied announced the freezing of parliament, the removal of prime minister Hichem Mechichi, and the suspension of the immunity of parliament members after a series of continuous uprisings fueled by economic turmoil, rise in state violence, and the mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The move was widely seen as a power grab by Saied, who justified his actions in response to the growing public frustration with the government's incompetence. In return, the freezing of the parliament has created a constitutional crisis, with the opposition accusing Saied of acting unconstitutionally and usurping powers that do not belong to him. The situation has left Tunisia in a state of uncertainty, with the future of democracy hanging in the balance (Kerrou, 2021).

It is undeniable that Tunisia's transition to democracy has faced significant challenges over the past decade. Despite some progress, the country has yet to realize its democratic potential fully, and many Tunisians are still waiting for the promised benefits of the revolution. However, it is essential to note that Tunisia has also made notable strides toward democratization, particularly compared to its neighbors in the MENA region. In the coming sections, I will explore the role of civil society in promoting democracy in Tunisia and the challenges faced by these groups in the face of a volatile political climate. I will also examine the emergence of new social movements, their impact on Tunisia's political landscape, and the state's response to these movements.

5.1 Bridging the Divide: Civil Society as Mediator and Opposition

The toppling of the Ben Ali regime led to a new political climate that allowed civil society to flourish. The old laws that once suppressed dissent were dismantled, and new avenues for political participation were created. In this context, several democratic committees and non-governmental organizations emerged, playing a significant role in the first five years of the political transition (Kéfi, 2015).

One of the most significant achievements of Tunisia's civil society was the formation of the Quartet, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (ONAT), and the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) formed an unlikely alliance to help bridge the gap between the two blocs and end the political stalemate. This group of four organizations acted as a mediator in the national dialogue that led to the constitution's finalization and forming a technocratic government. Their efforts were so influential that they won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. The Quartet was formed after the country reached a political deadlock between inexperienced political parties that could not agree on the constitution. The clash between two factions, the Islamists and the Modernists, was at the heart of the impasse. After several terrorist attacks, including the Bardo and Sousse attacks in 2015, and the assassinations of two left-wing politicians, Chokri Bel Aid and Mohammed Brahmi, in 2013, tensions between the two blocs were high, and neither side was willing to concede (Kéfi, 2015).

It was in this context that the Quartet intervened. They sought to ensure that the new constitution did not infringe on any civil rights or serve the interests of one group over the other. Thus, their work was instrumental in breaking the political deadlock and facilitating the national dialogue that led to the formation of a technocratic government. The Quartet's success was due in no small part to the thriving civil society that emerged after the revolution. The new political climate allowed for the formation of several democratic committees and non-governmental organizations that were influential during the transition. These groups worked to ensure that the new government was inclusive and accountable to all Tunisians, regardless of their political affiliation. Some of them were crucial in the transition phase, for instance, Mourakiboun (Observers), the Association Tunisienne pour l'Intégrité et la Démocratie des Élections (ATIDE, the Tunisian Association for the Integrity and Democracy of Elections) or I Watch, which have contributed, together with the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), to ensuring that electoral operations take place properly (Kéfi, 2015).

The national dialogue serves as a testament to Pateman's work on activism and democracy theory; her work emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in ensuring a healthy democracy. In the case of Tunisia, civil society organizations played a crucial role in the country's transition to democracy. Under the dictatorship, civil society had been suppressed and controlled by the state, but with the fall of the Ben Ali regime, new avenues for political participation opened up. In addition to the practical contributions of civil society organizations, their mere existence helps to foster a vibrant and participatory democracy. They provide spaces for individuals to engage in political discourse and contribute to policy discussions, creating a sense of ownership and empowerment among citizens (1970).

The Tunisian secular civil society served not only as a mediator during this period but was also a major opposing force against the rise of the Islamist movement led by the Ennahdha party on several occasions. This movement was heavily suppressed under the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, and its resurgence in the political sphere have raised the concerns of several human rights activists and organizations (Baker, 2015).

One of the key ways civil society groups opposed Islamist ideology was through their work to promote human rights and challenge the Islamist view of women's roles in society. The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) played a crucial role in this regard. They worked to promote women's rights and raise awareness of the need to protect them in the new

democratic Tunisia. Through their work, the ATFD aimed to challenge the Islamist view of women's roles and ensure that women's rights were protected under the new constitution. One early sign that raised alarm bells was the proposed Article 28 in the third constitution draft, which was highly controversial, as it would have enshrined a legal framework for gender inequality. The article stated that "the state guarantees the protection of women's rights, as codified by law, in consideration of the rules of sharia" - essentially allowing religious laws to override constitutional protections. This would have been a major setback for women's rights in Tunisia, as it would have opened the door to a range of discriminatory practices, including limitations on women's education, work, and political participation. The proposal sparked widespread protests from civil society organizations and women's rights activists, who argued that it would violate Tunisia's commitment to gender equality and undermine years of progress (Baker, 2015). The ATFD public demonstrations, forums, seminars, and workshops to raise awareness about the challenges and the regressive views propagated by Islamist groups. By actively participating in the drafting of the new constitution, the ATFD utilized legal advocacy to influence the legal framework and ensure the protection of gender equality. They also provided crucial support services to victims of gender-based violence, including counseling, legal aid, and shelter, working to empower survivors and combat the culture of impunity. The ATFD further engaged in international advocacy, collaborating with international human rights organizations and utilizing global platforms to draw attention to the challenges faced by Tunisian women. Additionally, the ATFD actively collaborated with other civil society organizations, forming coalitions to amplify their collective voices. Through these diverse actions, the ATFD effectively mobilized resource and made significant contributions to advancing gender equality and protecting women's rights (Kammoun, 2020, p12 – p17).

Similarly, the LTDH called attention to the need to protect civil liberties and prevent the establishment of an Islamic state. They also worked to raise awareness of the risks associated with the rise of Islamist extremism and advocated for measures to prevent its spread. The LTDH was particularly active in advocating for freedom of expression, which was threatened by Islamist groups and the government. Other civil society organizations also played an active role in countering Islamist ideology. For example, the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT) worked to defend press freedom and challenge attempts by Islamist groups to restrict freedom of expression. The SNJT was critical in exposing human rights abuses and promoting accountability during the transition period (Baker, 2015, p38 – p52).

Civil society groups also worked to promote democratic values and prevent the establishment of an Islamist state. They did so by advocating for a transparent and inclusive democratic process, raising awareness of authoritarianism's risks, and promoting a pluralistic vision for Tunisia's future. Through public statements, media appearances, and other forms of advocacy, civil society groups helped to mobilize public opinion against Islamist ideology and promote a democratic, pluralistic vision for Tunisia's future (Baker, 2015).

In addition to their work on the ground, civil society groups held an important role in shaping public opinion and influencing the national discourse on the issue of Islamist extremism. Resource mobilization theory can provide a theoretical framework to understand the strategies used to counter Islamist ideology and promote human rights. According to this theory, social movements are successful when they have the necessary resources, such as funding, skills, and networks, to achieve their goals. Given this scenario, civil society organizations mobilized resources through public demonstrations and media campaigns to draw attention to human rights issues and challenge the Islamist narrative. Additionally, legal advocacy was used to challenge laws deemed unconstitutional, and coalitions were formed with other organizations and political parties to amplify the impact of their voices. Moreover, civil society engaged in dialogue and negotiations with Islamist groups and politicians to promote a more inclusive and pluralistic vision for the future (Baker, 2015, p42 - p52).

Overall, the Tunisian civil society serves as a testament to the importance of citizen participation in ensuring a healthy democracy. Their existence helps to foster a vibrant and participatory democracy, providing spaces for individuals to engage in political discourse and contribute to policy discussions. The success of Tunisia's transition to democracy shows that civil society can play a vital role in challenging the status quo, promoting democracy and human rights, and ensuring that political power is held accountable to the people it serves (Kéfi, 2015).

5.2 Emerging Social Movements: Challenging Traditional Activism

Despite the efforts of civil society to bridge the divide between modernists and Islamists and secure a new constitution and the first official elections in 2014, Tunisia's economic and social situation has not improved. In 2021, the country recorded a record-breaking economic growth rate below 1% and an unemployment rate of 18.4%. As a result, Tunisians took to the streets in disorderly protests as well as organized movements throughout the year to remind the government of their demands, with a record-breaking 12,025 protest movements documented in the FTDES report (2021). The people's frustration with political parties was showcased during the 2019 presidential and legislative elections, which witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon resulting in Kais Saied, an independent candidate, becoming the head of state and a fragmented parliament that hosts representatives that are allegedly involved in corruption¹, sexual harassment, and violence against women cases². However, Saied's rise also meant the rise of a populist discourse that threatened the newly found individual freedoms, and the increase of police brutality cases under total impunity, as evidenced in the Civil Collective for Individual Liberties annual report (2020).

In this political and social turmoil environment, Tunisia has witnessed the emergence of new movements that have taken the lead in advocating for change. The Wrong Generation movement, Ena Zeda (literal translation of Me Too), the feminist movement against sexual harassment and assault against women, the LGBTQ+ movement, and the anti-police brutality movement are some of the most prominent examples of these new social movements that have emerged in recent years. These movements have challenged traditional activism modes and garnered support through social media platforms and public demonstrations. Their emergence has signaled a new phase of social and political activism in Tunisia, as citizens continue to

¹ Corruption: this article written by Mohamed Kerrou provides further information and reference:

<https://www.iemed.org/publication/youth-political-activism-and-resilience-in-tunisia/>

² Violence against women cases: The Civil Collective for Individual Liberties 2020 annual report, page 8, provides further information about violence against women in the Tunisian parliament:

<https://tn.boell.org/en/2020/07/07/etat-des-libertes-individuelles-en-2019>

demand change and push to realize their rights and freedoms (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

This part discusses the emergence of these movements and the role of digital activism during the new wave. Also, it explores how these movements have challenged traditional notions of activism and how they have succeeded in shaping the political discourse and agenda in Tunisia. Furthermore, it will examine challenges faced by these movements, including state repression, fragmentation, and co-optation, and discuss their impact.

5.2.1 The Wrong Generation Movement

The Wrong Generation Movement emerged in 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis it brought about. The movement gained momentum throughout 2021, fueled by the mishandling of the pandemic by Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi's government and the ensuing economic downturn. Mechichi's government was criticized for its incompetence and lack of accountability, leading to growing public anger and frustration. In addition, there was a power struggle between Mechichi and President Kais Saied, destabilizing the political landscape and contributing to the movement's mobilization. The movement primarily comprises young people, including students, graduates, and the unemployed, who have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis and are demanding greater economic opportunities, an end to police violence, and political reform. Besides, it is characterized by its decentralized and leaderless structure, with activists using social media to organize and coordinate protests across the country (Abdselm, 2021).

The Wrong Generation Movement is not only a response to Tunisia's current economic and political crisis but also reflects a more significant societal trend. The movement is an umbrella for various social groups that do not identify with the older generations, whom they see as responsible for the current state of affairs in the country. These groups include a younger generation of Tunisians who were born with the 2011 revolution and grew up with the promise of a better future. Many of these young people are highly educated but face high levels of unemployment and economic insecurity (Kerrou, 2021). They feel that the older generations have failed to provide them with the opportunities they were promised, leading to a sense of relative deprivation and frustration (Christiansen, 2017). Resource mobilization theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how the Wrong Generation Movement has mobilized

resources to achieve its goals. The movement has effectively used social media platforms to mobilize and coordinate protests, allowing them to reach a wider audience and engage young people who might not have otherwise been involved in political activism. By using creative tactics such as street art and music, the movement has also captured the media's attention and gained public support for its cause (Kerrou, 2021).

Additionally, the younger generation's defiance of traditional manifestations and protesting can be depicted from the January 2021 protests after the 10th anniversary of the revolution. In anticipation of rising tension and demands for the government's resignation, the Mechichi government imposed a four days lockdown right before the revolution's anniversary; this further provoked night and day protests across all regions of the country. The night protests were generally anarchic and violent, with recorded property damage cases, clashes with the police forces, and multiple arrests. Meanwhile, the day protests were more organized and planned through social media networks such as Facebook groups. They supported the night protestors and demanded to release of the detainees, who accounted for more than 1600, including children, according to the LTDH's reports (Abdselm, 2021). This reflects a broader trend of social movements turning to violence when they feel that peaceful means of protest are ineffective in achieving their goals. However, the movement has also faced violence from the police, who have been criticized for their heavy-handed response to protests (Christiansen, 2017).

The movement represents an umbrella for various social causes, challenging the status quo and pushing for more progressive and inclusive policies. One example is the demonstration on 6 March 2021, where left-wing groups demanded the release of young detainees, including queer activists. During the protest, the youth tagged the statue of Ibn Khaldun, which had just been renovated and inaugurated by an Islamist mayor. This act of defacing a public symbol was met with criticism, but the youth eventually returned to remove the anti-police/system tags and refurbish the memorial. The movement also embraces the personal and the political, as seen during the protest on 26 January 2021, where a couple of protesters defied the riot police by kissing each other on the lips. These acts represent a rejection of anachronistic laws and codes that do not align with the evolving values of Tunisian youth. Article 226 of the penal code criminalizes offenses against public moral, a vague article that has been the cause of several arrests during this movement. The Wrong Generation movement represents a new form of

activism that is more inclusive, intersectional, and creative in its approach to challenging the political elite (Kerrou, 2021).

Challenging the authorities and the country's conservative values has garnered several critics for the movement. One major criticism is that the movement is perceived as too radical and violent. Some critics argue that the movement has gone beyond peaceful protest and has engaged in acts of vandalism and destruction of public and private property. This criticism has been amplified by state media and some political parties who have accused the movement of being destructive and unpatriotic. Another criticism of the movement is that it lacks a clear and coherent political program. Some Tunisians feel that the movement's demands are too vague and that the movement is not offering any concrete solutions to the country's problems. This has led some to dismiss the movement as a collection of disgruntled young people without a real agenda. At the same time, critics accuse the movement of being manipulated by outside forces with their agendas. This criticism is stemmed from the movement's use of social media platforms and the involvement of international NGOs and human rights organizations in supporting the movement's demands. Tunisians are suspicious of foreign interference in their country's affairs and view the movement as being influenced by external actors. Finally, some movement critics have accused it of being overly focused on identity politics and neglecting issues such as the economy and unemployment. They argue that the movement's emphasis on gender and sexual orientation issues distracts the country from more pressing issues (FTDES, 2023).

In conclusion, the Wrong Generation Movement in Tunisia emerged as a response to the economic and political crisis. However, it also reflects a larger societal trend of younger generations feeling frustrated and deprived of opportunities promised to them. It is challenging the status quo and pushing for more progressive and inclusive policies that are also depicted in simultaneous emerging social movements.

5.2.2 The Fight for LGBTQ+ Rights

Tunisia, a country with a history of colonialism and Islamic traditions, has long been plagued by systemic discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. Many people in Tunisia believe that homosexuality is a sin and that LGBTQ+ individuals should be punished for their sexual orientation. This belief is perpetuated through various means, such as state-run media, which often portrays homosexuality in a negative light, and religious leaders who condemn homosexuality from the pulpit. This conservative interpretation of Islam has also been institutionalized through the legal system. For example, articles 226, 226 bis, and 230 of the penal code, which the French colonizer installed, criminalize same-sex sexual conduct, leading to the imprisonment of LGBTQ+ individuals. This legal framework has been reinforced by societal norms and attitudes, which perpetuate the marginalization of queer people (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

Nevertheless, the movement has gained momentum in recent years since the lifting of restrictions on associations providing a safer space for a legal and social network to form. Resource mobilization can be seen through the establishment several associations after the revolution to promote universal human rights and form legal and social programs to aid the community. For example, Damj L'Association Tunisienne pour la Justice et l'Egalité (Damj, The Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality) and Mawjoudin We Exist promote LGBTQ+ rights and provide legal and social assistance, including asylum programs, the Mawjoudin Queer Film Festival, and Colors of April in collaboration with other organizations. The LTDH and ADLI (The Association for the Defense of Individual Liberties) also provide legal assistance to people arrested under suspicion of homosexuality. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, the situation for the LGBTQ+ community in Tunisia remains bleak. Human Rights Watch and the LTDH have recorded arbitrary arrests and abuse in custody. Men are forced under Article 230 to take anal tests, with over 100 cases in 2019 alone. Also, police officers can harass and raid the homes of queer activists, publish their personal information online, or arrest them based on their looks (Human Rights Watch, 2018) (add references for the organizations)

The systemic oppression further solidified the collective identity of the queer community. It enforced the sense of deprivation that galvanized resource mobilization through well-connected networks to push back against the system. The internet and social media platforms were critical factors for queer individuals to connect and minimize the risk of being

identified. Organizations such as Damj and Mawjoudin interact with the community through online platforms to raise awareness about the movement. Furthermore, social media has allowed the movement to reach beyond national borders and connect with other global LGBTQ+ movements. This has provided an opportunity for the Tunisian queer movement to learn from the experiences of other movements and gain international solidarity. However, the use of social media has also made the LGBTQ+ community vulnerable to online harassment and cyberbullying. The government has also used social media to monitor and intimidate community members, creating an environment of fear and uncertainty (FTDES, 2023).

In spite of the stigma and challenges the movement faces, it still managed to break through; in 2019, the Shams Association gained legal status to become the first Tunisian association for LGBTQ+ rights. Besides, national associations launched an advocacy project to promote the adoption of a code on civil liberties. This project was not only for LGBTQ+ rights but also because of the intersectionality between the LGBTQ+ movement and the feminist movement. Individual liberties also include the right to medical healthcare, especially for people with HIV. LGBTQ+ and women, in general, are discriminated against when seeking medical treatment for HIV. Additionally, the right to freedom of conscience is violated by authorities, especially during Ramadan; non-fasters are arrested under Article 216 and the pretext of offending morality. Also, international organizations and foreign governments have played a significant role in promoting LGBTQ+ rights in Tunisia. The European Union, for instance, has been actively involved in advocating for the decriminalization of homosexuality and partnering with civil society organizations to promote LGBTQ+ rights. This international pressure has encouraged Tunisian civil society organizations and activists to continue their advocacy efforts and to work toward legal reform and social change. (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

Despite the numerous social and legal hurdles encountered by the LGBTQ+ community in Tunisia, the movement has made significant strides in recent years. Through the establishment of associations and resource mobilization efforts to promote universal human rights, there is more work to do and new challenges to face.

5.2.3 The Ena Zeda (MeToo) Movement

The two previous movements intersect with the feminist movement, as I have mentioned before. The struggle for women's rights that started during the colonial period is still ongoing. Even though the law criminalizing violence against women in Tunisia is considered one of the most comprehensive and progressive in the Arab world, Women's rights in Tunisia are protected by various legal frameworks. The Tunisian Constitution, adopted in 2014, prohibits discrimination based on gender and recognizes the principle of gender equality. Article 21 of the Constitution states, "All citizens, male and female, have equal rights and duties and are equal before the law without any discrimination." This constitutional guarantee provides a foundation for legally protecting women's rights in Tunisia (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

Tunisia has also ratified several international conventions and treaties protecting women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These international agreements commit Tunisia to eliminating discrimination against women and promoting gender equality. Moreover, the legal system includes laws that specifically address issues related to women's rights. The Personal Status Code (PSC), adopted in 1956, governs family law and includes marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance provisions. The PSC is considered one of the most progressive family laws in the MENA region, as it grants women rights such as the ability to initiate divorce, the right to child custody, and the right to inherit from their parents and spouses (Mahfoudh, D & Mahfoudh, A. 2014, p15 – p33).

Efforts have been made recently to further strengthen the legal framework for women's rights in Tunisia. In 2017, a law was passed criminalizing violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape. This law was a significant step towards addressing gender-based violence in Tunisia. Despite these legal protections, however, women in Tunisia still face various forms of discrimination and inequality, such as underrepresentation in politics and the workforce and the prevalence of gender-based violence. There are also concerns about the implementation of laws related to women's rights and the effectiveness of the judicial system in protecting women's rights (United Nations Women, 2017).

One of the challenges is the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination against women. Many people in Tunisia still hold traditional views about gender roles and believe that men are entitled to certain privileges and power over women. This attitude perpetuated the increase in sexual harassment cases until it reached the parliament. In October 2019, Zouhir Makhlouf ³, the newly elected representative in parliament, was caught in broad daylight harassing a young girl in front of her high school; the incident was published on social media platforms. Thus, the hashtag #EnaZeda (#MeToo) and several sexual harassment victims have come forward to testify and share their stories. The movement was initially started by a group of women on social media who created a Facebook page where women could anonymously share their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. The page quickly became popular, and thousands of women shared their stories, creating a sense of solidarity and support among survivors. Social media again proved to be a major contributor to social movements by creating a space for survivors to come forward and share their stories regardless of gender, race, age, or social status. The anonymity provided by social media has allowed survivors to share their experiences without fear of retaliation or stigma. The movement helped break psychological barriers that kept women silent. This helped the movement mobilize to street action through protests and public events to raise awareness about sexual harassment and assault in collaboration with national associations like Aswat Nisaa (translates to Voices of Women). The movement's demands include the adoption of a law criminalizing sexual harassment, the establishment of a national database to track sexual offenders, and the inclusion of sex education in school curriculums (Ghazayel, 2020).

Ena Zeda successfully created a shared identity among its supporters, many of whom were young Tunisians passionate about promoting women's rights. The movement created a sense of community among its supporters, which helped sustain its momentum over time and connect with various issues and influential organisms such as the ATFD, LTDH, and LGBTQ+ associations to mobilize and allocate more resources to combat all forms of discrimination. This highlights the importance of coalition-building and collective action in achieving social change (Doelker, R., Scheicher, P. 2020).

³ Zouhir Makhlouf: for further details about this case, check this article:

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-metoo-mp-sentenced-jail-sexual-harassment-minor>

Overall, social movement theory provides a helpful framework for understanding how the feminist movement in Tunisia has been able to build upon legal frameworks, international agreements, and cultural norms to mobilize for change. The movement has had to confront persistent challenges, such as patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms. However, it has utilized social media and formed alliances to sustain its momentum over time (Christiansen, 2017).

5.2.4 The Anti-Police Brutality Movement

Police brutality has been a longstanding issue in Tunisia, exacerbated during the era of former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Since his fall in 2011, civil society in Tunisia has been advocating for police reform and greater accountability for officers. This movement gained renewed attention in 2015 with the proposal of Draft Law N.25, which aimed to grant security forces greater legal immunity for actions taken in the line of duty during the fight against terrorism. The draft law was met with widespread criticism, leading to several campaigns against police brutality in Tunisia (Ben Mbarek, 2020).

The theoretical frameworks on social movements suggest that collective action arises from a combination of structural factors, such as social inequality, and individual grievances, such as experiences of injustice. These factors can be mobilized through framing processes that create a shared sense of identity and purpose among participants. In the case of the anti-police brutality movement in Tunisia, the structural factor of police impunity, combined with individual grievances stemming from experiences of police violence, led to the mobilization of various campaigns against the draft law (Christiansen, 2017). Hasebhom (Literal translation of Hold Them Accountable) and Manich Msemah (literal translation of I Will Not Forgive) are among the campaigns that have emerged in opposition to Draft Law N.25. Hasebhom, which translates to "hold them accountable," began as a social media campaign in 2015 and has since grown into a nationwide movement advocating for police reform and accountability. Manich Msemah, which translates to "I will not forgive," began as a response to the 2018 austerity measures and included anti-police brutality demands (Ben Mbarek, 2020).

Despite the peaceful nature of the campaigns, police have used excessive force in response to protests and demonstrations. One notable example is the October 6th, 2020⁴, protests against the proposed amnesty law for corrupt officials, during which police used tear gas and batons to disperse protesters. Several activists and organizations, including the Tunisian Human Rights League and the Tunisian Association for the Defense of Individual Liberties, have documented and condemned these violent tactics used by the police. Social media platforms are again a common denominator in the anti-police brutality movement and the previous ones. Online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to organize protests, share information about police violence, and spread awareness. Social media has also been a tool for documenting police brutality and sharing evidence of human rights abuses with the international community. One particularly disturbing example of police violence was the case of Saif Ayadi, a queer activist who was beaten and arrested during a demonstration in Tunis on October 6th, 2020. The police reportedly targeted Ayadi after he attempted to help another protester who had been pushed to the ground and was being beaten by police officers. This kind of violent response by police forces is a clear violation of human rights and underscores the need for reforms to ensure police accountability and transparency. The proposed law, N.25, which would have granted police officers immunity from prosecution for their actions, would only further entrench police impunity and hinder efforts to hold officers accountable for their abuses (Ben Mbarek, 2020).

Saif's case is just one among hundreds of cases; notable mentions are the case of Omar Laabidi in 2018, an excessive use of force by the authority while dispersing football fans, and Refka Cherni in 2021, a femicide case, where the husband, a police officer, murdered his wife after she dropped charges of domestic violence under social pressure. The excessive use of force by police forces is driven by the impunity they hold against the law, and this has become again the state's strategy to push back against political and social demands to intimidate civil society and activists; arbitrary arrest, plainclothes officers kidnapping or raiding activists' homes reemerged again as intimidation tactics (FTDES, 2022).

⁴ For further detail about the events of this date can be found in this article:

<https://nawaat.org/2020/10/10/they-choked-me-kicked-me-cops-assault-protests-against-police-immunity-law/>

Regardless of the suppressive approach that the state has been following, this movement was able to gain the support of key civil society actors that have been providing legal and logistical support that help in spreading awareness about this systemic violence human rights organizations, such as the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), has been an active ally with legal support to victims. They have also been working to raise public awareness about the issue through campaigns and public events. Meanwhile, Trade unions, such as the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), have also been active in the movement. They have organized strikes and protests in solidarity with victims and have called for reforms to the police force. Their efforts have resulted in some successes, such as withdrawing the controversial draft law N.25 in 2020. Yet, there is still a long way to go in achieving meaningful reforms to the police force and addressing police brutality in Tunisia (FTDES, 2022).

5.3 Theory and Practice in Tunisian Social Movements: An Empirical Analysis

The previous section analyzed the emergence of new social movements in Tunisia and their impact on challenging traditional modes of activism. This section aims to delve into the relevance of social movement theories in understanding and interpreting the dynamics of these movements. Specifically, three key theories will be discussed: resource mobilization theory, relative deprivation theory, and framing theory. By examining the applicability of these theories to the Tunisian context, we can gain insights into the factors driving these movements and their strategies for mobilization and impact (Christiansen, 2017).

Resource mobilization theory provides a lens through which we can examine how social movements in Tunisia mobilize resources to achieve their goals. This theory highlights the importance of resources, both material and symbolic, in facilitating collective action and sustaining movement mobilization. By analyzing resource mobilization in the context of four significant movements in Tunisia - the Wrong Generation Movement, the Ena Zeda (Me Too) Movement, the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, and the anti-police brutality movement - we can gain insights into their strategies and impact (Christiansen, 2017).

The Wrong Generation Movement, driven primarily by young Tunisians frustrated with the economic and political situation, exemplifies the mobilization of resources to achieve movement objectives. The movement effectively utilizes social media platforms, such as Facebook groups, to coordinate protests and engage a wider audience. By leveraging digital tools and networks, the movement mobilizes resources, including the collective energy and

support of young people who have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis. For example, during the protests after the 10th anniversary of the revolution, the movement utilized social media platforms to organize both day and night protests across the country. These platforms served as mobilizing resources, allowing them to reach a large audience and coordinate their actions effectively. Moreover, the Wrong Generation Movement utilizes creative tactics, such as street art and music, as mobilizing resources. These artistic expressions not only capture public attention but also serve as powerful symbols of resistance and solidarity among participants. For instance, the movement's use of street art to convey their demands and frustrations resonates with the wider population and helps mobilize support for their cause. By harnessing the power of artistic expression, the movement effectively mobilizes resources to amplify their message and engage the public (Abdselm, 2021).

In a similar vein, the Ena Zeda (Me Too) Movement demonstrates resource mobilization strategies within the context of gender-based activism in Tunisia. The movement effectively utilizes social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, to raise awareness, share stories, and organize protests. By leveraging these digital resources, the movement facilitates collective action and provides a platform for survivors to come forward and share their experiences. For example, the movement's use of hashtags, such as #EnaZeda (Me Too), helps mobilize resources by creating a sense of solidarity and unity among survivors and allies. These hashtags allow for the collective sharing of experiences and create a powerful platform for mobilizing public support and raising awareness about the issue of sexual harassment and assault (Ghazayel, 2020).

Furthermore, the establishment of organizations like Damj (The Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality) and Mawjoudin We Exist showcases the LGBTQ+ rights movement's effective mobilization of both material and digital resources. These organizations mobilize resources such as funding, legal expertise, and social programs to provide support and advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals in Tunisia. For instance, Damj has played a significant role in offering legal assistance to LGBTQ+ individuals facing discrimination or persecution, bolstering the movement's credibility and providing avenues to challenge discriminatory practices (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

The LGBTQ+ rights movement demonstrates resource mobilization efforts through various channels, including social media platforms, websites, and public events. Activists and organizations utilize these resources to raise awareness, educate the public, and mobilize

support for LGBTQ+ rights. Leveraging digital and material resources enables them to offer crucial services such as legal assistance, safe spaces, and platforms for dialogue and activism. Mawjoudin We Exist, for example, has utilized crowdfunding platforms to mobilize financial resources for their advocacy work, facilitating awareness campaigns, events, and vital support services like counseling and healthcare. This resource mobilization plays a pivotal role in empowering individuals and fostering a sense of community and solidarity within the LGBTQ+ movement in Tunisia (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

In addition to examining how social movements in Tunisia mobilize resources, it is essential to consider the role of framing and narrative theory in shaping their strategies and impact. By exploring the interconnections between these movements and international frameworks, we can gain a deeper understanding of how framing and narrative techniques are employed to construct messages and mobilize support (Christiansen, 2017).

The Ena Zeda (Me Too) Movement stands as a powerful example of how framing and narrative strategies can transcend national boundaries. By drawing inspiration from the global Me Too movement, activists in Tunisia effectively connected their struggle against gender-based violence and discrimination to the broader international discourse on these issues. Through social media platforms and hashtags, the movement amplified the experiences of survivors, fostering a sense of solidarity and raising awareness not only within Tunisia but also among international audiences. This international framing provided the movement with a broader platform, enabling it to mobilize support and challenge societal norms on a global scale. Moreover, the Ena Zeda (Me Too) Movement have used strategic framing through organized campaigns such as “The harasser doesn’t teach” which targets sexual predators in schools that are protected by the system (Aswat Nisaa, 2021), the movement seeks to reshape societal narratives surrounding gender and power dynamics, mobilizing individuals who resonate with the shared narrative of victimhood and resilience (Ghzayel, 2020).

Similarly, the fight for LGBTQ+ rights in Tunisia can be understood within the context of the broader international struggle for LGBTQ+ equality. Activists in Tunisia have leveraged international narratives and movements, such as the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States, to frame their own struggle for equal rights and recognition. By drawing parallels and highlighting shared experiences, the movement in Tunisia gains visibility and legitimacy, both domestically and internationally. This framing allows them to challenge societal norms and

advocate for inclusivity, fostering solidarity with LGBTQ+ communities worldwide. By framing the movement as a struggle for equal rights and recognition through several campaigns that denounce the dehumanizing practice of Article 230 that forces individuals to be physically tested against their will, activists construct a narrative that emphasizes the experiences and aspirations of LGBTQ+ individuals to be treated as equal. The movement's narrative highlights the injustices and discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community, aiming to reframe public perception and challenge heteronormative narratives. The application of the framing theory in this movement allows it to foster empathy and understanding, mobilizing individuals who identify with the shared narrative of marginalization and the desire for equality (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

Furthermore, the Anti-Police Brutality movement is deeply rooted in the country's history of police repression during the Ben Ali regime. By framing their resistance within the context of Tunisia's past, activists have been able to draw attention to the potential regression towards a "police state" and mobilize resistance against excessive force and human rights violations. This historical framing not only resonates with Tunisians but also invites international solidarity, as similar struggles against police brutality have been witnessed in various parts of the world. By highlighting the systemic nature of police violence and demanding justice, the movement challenges the existing narrative surrounding security and authority, garnering support and solidarity both domestically and internationally (Ben Mbarek, 2020).

By examining the resource mobilization efforts of these movements through the lens of framing and narrative theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the strategies employed to shape discourse and mobilize individuals for collective action. The international connections and transnational framing of the Ena Zeda Movement and the LGBTQ+ rights movement demonstrate the power of global narratives in mobilizing support and challenging societal norms. Furthermore, the historical framing of the anti-police brutality movement in Tunisia underscores the importance of context and memory in shaping resistance movements. Through effective utilization of framing and narrative theory, these movements not only effect change within Tunisia but also contribute to broader global conversations on social and political transformation (Christiansen, 2017).

Given the resource mobilization strategies employed by these movements, it becomes imperative to explore the underlying motivations that propel individuals to engage in collective action. Relative deprivation theory serves as a valuable lens through which we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics shaping these movements and the factors that drive people to mobilize. By examining the concept of relative deprivation, we can shed light on the sense of injustice and perceived disadvantages experienced by individuals, which in turn motivate them to join these movements and seek societal transformation (Christiansen, 2017).

The Wrong Generation Movement that is propelled primarily by the youth frustrated with the economic and political situation, reflects a sense of relative deprivation. These young people perceive a relative disadvantage compared to previous generations and experience frustration due to the lack of opportunities and unfulfilled expectations. In one of the interviews conducted by *Al Monitor* magazine, one of the interviewees declared the following: “There are many people suffering; they can’t afford to buy everything. We cannot live like this anymore. They kidnap people from their homes. We say stop lying to us” (Volkmann, 2021). The movement's emphasis on economic opportunities and political reform highlights their desire to address the relative disadvantage they perceive in their current socio-economic conditions. By mobilizing and demanding change, the movement seeks to rectify the perceived injustice and attain a more equitable society (Ben Mbarek, 2020).

Following the same theory, survivors of sexual harassment and assault in Tunisia often experience a sense of relative disadvantage compared to those who have not encountered such experiences. The *Ena Zeda* (Me Too) movement aims to address this perceived injustice and raise awareness about gender-based violence and discrimination. By highlighting their stories and demanding justice, the movement seeks to rectify the relative deprivation experienced by survivors. The mobilization of individuals who have personally experienced harassment or assault showcases the power of relative deprivation as a motivator for collective action (Ghzayel, 2020).

The last testament of this theory is the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, queer individuals in Tunisia face systemic discrimination, marginalization, and legal penalties for their sexual orientation or gender identity especially with Article 230 that puts these individuals’ safety at risk. This relative disadvantage and the perception of being treated unfairly motivate LGBTQ+ activists and their allies to mobilize and advocate for equal rights. By challenging societal

norms and demanding legal reforms, the movement seeks to address the relative deprivation experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals. Their struggle for equal rights and recognition highlights their desire to rectify the perceived injustice and attain a more inclusive and tolerant society (Civil Collective for Individual Liberties, 2020).

By shifting the focus from resource mobilization and framing and narrative to relative deprivation theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and aspirations that underlie these movements. The mobilization of resources and the collective actions taken by these movements serve as vehicles for addressing the relative disadvantage and perceived injustices faced by different segments of the Tunisian population. Through their mobilization efforts, these movements strive to create a more equitable and just society, where all individuals have equal opportunities and protection under the law (Christiansen, 2017).

5.4 Challenges Facing Tunisian Youth Movements: A Closer Look

Over a decade has passed since the 2011 revolution, which sparked a wave of uprisings across the MENA region. Despite the progress made since then, young Tunisian activists, civil society actors, and social movements continue to face significant challenges in their struggle for change. These challenges are diverse and multifaceted, ranging from internal issues such as organizational fragmentation and ideological differences to external barriers such as state repression (Weilandt, 2019).

In this section, I will analyze the challenges facing these emerging social movements in Tunisia, examining their internal dynamics and the external factors shaping their struggle. Through a comprehensive examination of the political landscape and activism scene in which these movements operate, I will explore how the complex interplay of these factors affects their ability to effect change. Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of young activists' obstacles as they strive to realize their vision for a more just and equitable society.

5.4.1 Fragmented Unity: Exploring Divisions Within Civil Society

While the discussed social movements in the previous section portray an intersectional and unified front against the social and economic crisis, studies suggest a severely fragmented and divided civil society network. One study by Paul Weilandt identified core issues within the Tunisian activism hub (2019).

Weilandt sheds light on the tension between local and international NGOs in Tunisia. One key issue is access to funding, with international NGOs often having more significant financial resources and access to foreign funding. This creates suspicions among local NGOs about the external influence on the organizations' agendas, which can hinder their ability to engage with their constituencies. This suspicion can also create a sense of competition and mistrust among local NGOs. Some local NGOs may feel that international NGOs have more legitimacy or resources. In contrast, others may feel that international NGOs are too removed from the local context and do not understand the needs and priorities of local communities, a suggested example of this is the involvement of a Brussels-based NGO named The European Partnership for Democracy, that had no field expertise in Tunisia in an EU funded project dedicated to aiding Tunisian civil society actors. This can create a sense of fragmentation within civil society, where some organizations are considered more legitimate or effective than others (2019).

One approach encouraged by EU funding programs to gain better access to funding for local organizations is the collaboration with their international counterparts, yet this has revealed another discord and weakened structures. Many foreign donors, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), award large amounts of project funding to professionalized NGOs. These NGOs have full-time staff who have substantial grant-writing and project-management skills. However, many local Tunisian civil society organizations rely on volunteers and need more organizational capacity and experience to manage large budgets. As a result, Tunisian civil society activists often feel that foreign organizations implementing projects in Tunisia spend too much on organizing conferences and conducting studies rather than doing work on the ground. They also argue that activism professionalism can alter the motivations behind the organization's members. Conversely, professionalized activists and NGOs perceive their counterparts as underperformers and short-term-oriented, arguing that volunteerism can hinder the impact of the movement. The tension

between volunteerism and professionalism further deepens the sense of unfair competition resulting in further division (Weilandt, 2019).

Furthermore, movements like The Wrong Generation, Anti-Police Brutality, Ena Zeda, and LGBTQ+ Rights are all characterized by promoting and calling for the implementation of more progressive universal human rights, provoking another barrier and clashing with a conservative society that is in a dire economic situation. Some activists believe the focus should be on promoting the perfect implementation of universal human rights. Meanwhile, others argue that such a narrow focus may lead to a backlash from the more conservative parts of society. They suggest that more attention should be given to pressing social and economic issues, such as job opportunities, health infrastructure, and social security services, which are currently neglected by many civil society organizations (Weilandt, 2019).

The clash between conservative and progressive activists also signals a clash between two generations, another faultline in the Tunisian activism scene. The first source of tension is the claim to leadership. The older generation sees themselves as entitled to lead post-2011 civil society because they have a long history of activism since the Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras. Their history enabled them to form an inner circle and have direct access to political figures; therefore, they were able to influence change and hold positions of power. However, the younger generation feels they are the natural leaders as they made the revolution possible and are more connected to ordinary Tunisians' issues. They see the older generation as a closed circle, hesitant to include the younger generation in decision-making processes. Another significant factor contributing to the generational divide is the different approaches to activism. The older generation's activism was more confrontational and focused on direct action and advocacy, while the new generation prefers a more collaborative approach that involves dialogue and consensus-building. Resulting in criticism as the former tends to view the new generation's approach as too accommodating and ineffective, while the new generation sees them as overly confrontational and lacking in practical solutions (Weilandt, 2019).

One last stark contrast between the two generations is their resource management and adaptability to the changing environment; while the eldest has stuck to its traditional mobilization resources, the latter is adapting to the ever-changing technologies. In the previous part of this chapter, I have highlighted the role of social media platforms in all the movements I have discussed because it is one common feature that brings me again to highlight its role in

this generational gap. The younger post-2011 generation, often referred to as digital natives, is seen as making extensive use of modern online communication tools, such as social media. This contrasts with the older generation's limited understanding and usage of modern technology. The younger generation's use of social media is shown through the example of the "Jomaa Meter" set up by the anti-corruption watchdog I-Watch. The website listed promises made by former prime minister Mehdi Jomaa and tracked whether he delivered on them. This shows how social media can be used to hold public officials accountable and increase transparency. On the other hand, the older generation is depicted as having a more traditional approach to activism, often relying on issuing press releases and organizing press conferences to get their message across. This shows how the older generation's limited use of technology may hinder their ability to reach a wider audience and engage with younger generations (Weilandt, 2019).

To summarize, Tunisian civil society's internal issues are multiple and could hinder the social movements' outcomes; therefore, local and international organizations need to address these divisions and tensions, collaborate more effectively, and for the generations to bridge the divide and embrace new approaches to reach a wider audience and engage with all generations effectively.

5.4.2 Political Marginalization: Pitfalls of Unclear Vision and Leadership Void

The movements discussed earlier share a common characteristic: a lack of clear leadership and vision. These movements have deliberately distanced themselves from mainstream political figures and institutions, viewing them as corrupt and unresponsive to the needs and demands of the people. This distancing from political institutions has left these horizontal movements with limited connections to authority figures or institutions, resulting in a lack of resources and long-term political projects. Instead, these movements fall under the category of reactionary protests that express frustration with the system and the lack of trust in the political parties and government (Weilandt, 2019).

The Tunisian left wing, a significant political force after the revolution, dissolved after it had to transition from opposition to participation in the system. Due to the political context during the first years post-revolution, it had to form unusual alliances with old regime figures and Islamist parties to reach a middle ground. However, this compromise has damaged the left wing's credibility among the people (Abdelmoula, 2022).

From a psychological aspect, after ten years of accumulating frustration, participants of these movements are expressing their rejection of the system, which they feel has failed them. The lack of concrete results from democratic participation has led many to believe democracy was an illusion. The oppressive police force further exacerbates the situation, and protests often result in violent clashes between protestors and authorities. It is crucial to understand that these movements are not apolitical; instead, they are political movements that reject the existing political system and demand change. By distancing themselves from traditional political institutions, they have created a space for alternative forms of politics, such as direct democracy and horizontal organization. However, the lack of clear leadership and long-term vision has made it challenging for these movements to achieve their goals and sustain their momentum (FTDES, 2023).

In conclusion, the lack of clear leadership and vision in Tunisian social movements have created a leadership void that leaves them vulnerable to repression, co-optation, and failure. To overcome this challenge, these movements must find ways to build durable and practical structures that can sustain their momentum and advance their goals. It requires balancing the horizontal organization that characterizes these movements and the need for clear leadership, accountability, and strategic planning (Abdelmoula, 2022).

5.4.3 Kais Saied: Populist Turn or Revolution Correction?

One last remaining challenge facing the Tunisian civil society and the emerging social movements is the current political context at this time of writing. Kais Saied's rise to the presidency in the 2019 Tunisian elections has been attributed to his populist rhetoric and promise to give power back to the people. His lack of political affiliations and background as a constitutional law professor added to his appeal as a candidate who could potentially replace the corrupt ruling class. Populism can be defined as a political approach that appeals to the interests and prejudices of ordinary people rather than to the elite (Mudde, C., Rovira Kaltwasser, C. 2017). In Saied's case, he presents himself as the champion of the people and their interests, claiming to be the antidote to a corrupt political establishment (Yee, 2021).

Saied's suspension of the parliament and the Mechichi government in a controversial move on 25 July 2021 by enacting Article 80 of the constitution permitting him to have broad emergency powers as a head of state. This has raised questions about his authority style and

whether it aligns with populist politics or a push for democracy. Some critics have labeled it a coup, while Saied has defended his actions by referencing his campaign slogan, "The people want," and claiming that he is correcting the course of the revolution and returning control to Tunisians. Kais Saied's populist rhetoric is evident through his use of compelling language and appeals to the desires and frustrations of the Tunisian people. With statements like "Late students will not be admitted" and warnings against talking in class, he showcases his strict teaching style as a constitutional law professor, creating an image of discipline and order that resonates with those yearning for a strong leader. Saied presents himself as a reluctant candidate, stating, "I am running against my own will... Responsibility is a hateful thing. It is like a soldier standing on the front. He does not want to kill, but has been ordained to battle." By framing his political career as a test assigned by God that cannot be refused, he taps into a sense of duty and religious obligation. He emphasizes the sovereignty of the people, stating, "Sovereignty belongs to the people... Everything must start from them," positioning himself as a champion of the people's will. Furthermore, his opposition to homosexuality and his support for traditional values resonate with conservative segments of the population. Saied's populist language and promises of addressing corruption and uplifting the marginalized contribute to his appeal as a figure who can bring about change and restore hope in Tunisia (Yee, 2021).

One way to analyze Saied's authority style is to consider his actions since taking office. He has made several moves that suggest a desire to centralize power and limit opposition, including appointing technocrats to key positions and cracking down on protests and dissent. However, he has also made efforts to engage with the public directly, holding public meetings and listening to citizens' concerns. A more optimistic perspective suggests that Saied's populist rhetoric and promise to return power to the people could be seen as a positive move towards greater democracy and accountability. By suspending the parliament and the government, he could be interpreted as taking decisive action to address corruption and inefficiency in the political system. On the other hand, his authoritarian tendencies raise concerns about the potential for a return to a more centralized and repressive political system. The suspension of the parliament and government could be seen as a power grab and a violation of democratic norms. In addition to his suspension of parliament, Saied rewrote the Tunisian constitution, a move many criticized as a power grab. He argued that this was necessary to address issues with the country's political structure and that he was acting in accordance with the will of the people. However, the process of rewriting the constitution was not transparent, leading to concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions (Cordall, 2023).

Kais Saied took measures that raise further concerns, as he recently dissolved municipal councils and amended the electoral law, effectively dismantling the political institution-building of the 2014 constitution (Bessalah, 2023). This turn of events has created a deep divide with the population, between Saied's supporters and his fragmented opposition lays more uncertainty on where the situation is headed to. According to different political analysts, the opposition can be categorized into three main groups; the National Salvation Front, composed of the Ennahdha party, former figures of Nidaa Tounes, and independent political figures, has rallied against Saied's power grab. The second group includes social democratic parties such as the Democratic Current and Ettakatol. The third group is Abir Moussi's Free Destourian Party, which defends the former president Ben Ali but has been isolated in the last parliament (Bessalah, 2023).

Initially, many parties were hesitant to oppose Saied's measures. However, after the promulgation of Decree 117, which consolidated his power, opposition grew. Nevertheless, most, including the Democratic Current, continue to distance themselves from an open alliance with the National Salvation Front due to grievances and mutual blame for socioeconomic issues. The national salvation initiative led by the UGTT and other organizations aims to break the political deadlock. Yet, its impact has been limited, primarily because the UGTT holds most of the political weight and the initiative refuses to engage with parties that consider Saied's actions a coup. Thus, prospects for reaching a middle ground between major opposition factions and alignment with opposition parties remain unlikely (Bessalah, 2023).

President Saied adamantly refuses dialogue with what he labels as "traitors" and "corrupt" entities. His attacks on the media and attempts to weaken parties' influence through individual-based ballots serve to consolidate his power and purify the country. The absence of self-accountability among political parties further contributes to the prevailing political status quo (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The question remains whether Saied's leadership style is paving the way for populist politics or whether he is pushing to bring democracy back to Tunisia. The rewriting of the constitution and the suspension of parliament raise concerns about the state of democracy in the country. This is a potential challenge for Tunisian civil society, and at the time of writing, it is still being determined where the country is heading under Saied's rule. Resources are limited to study this aspect, and it remains to be seen how his leadership will impact Tunisia's democratic future.

6. Conclusions

This thesis aims to explore the role of social movements in shaping Tunisia's political and social landscape over the past century, with a particular focus on post-revolution social movements. The study began by tracing the origins of social movements in Tunisia and highlighting their critical contributions to the country's struggle for independence, workers' rights, democracy, and social and economic justice. It then delved into the challenges and responses of post-revolution social movements, examining the Tunisian civil society's role as a government monitor, the prominent social movements that have developed and solidified, and the instruments that have shaped the mobilization process of these social protests.

In direct response to the primary research question, "What are the challenges and responses of post-revolutionary social movements in Tunisia in achieving substantive social and political change?" this thesis has revealed several key insights. The challenges faced by post-revolutionary social movements in Tunisia are multifaceted, encompassing political, resource-related, and foundational deficiencies. The political atmosphere, marked by the country's democratic transition following the Arab Spring, has presented both opportunities and obstacles for these movements. While Tunisia's transition has allowed for increased civic participation and the resurgence of civil society, it has also posed challenges in translating social demands into tangible political outcomes. Resource constraints, including limited funding and institutional support, have further hindered the effectiveness of these movements in achieving their objectives. Additionally, foundational deficiencies, such as divisions within and between movements and the need to bridge generational gaps, have impacted the overall success of activism in Tunisia.

However, despite these challenges, the responses of post-revolutionary social movements have demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to effecting change. The Tunisian civil society's role as a government monitor has been instrumental in the country's democratic transition, providing oversight and holding governmental institutions accountable. Prominent social movements, such as those focused on workers' rights, feminism, and the demands of newer emerging movements, have shown promise in mobilizing collective action and influencing relative change. The mobilization process of these social protests has been shaped by various instruments, including resource mobilization and relative deprivation theories, highlighting the importance of theoretical approaches in understanding and supporting

social movements. By uncovering the challenges and weaknesses of post-revolutionary social movements, this research provides actionable insights for improving their effectiveness and their contribution to Tunisia's ongoing democratic transition. It underscores the need for continued efforts to strengthen civil society, address resource constraints, bridge generational gaps, and foster unity and collaboration within and between movements. Furthermore, the findings emphasize the importance of leveraging technological developments and embracing innovative approaches to mobilization and communication, while being mindful of the potential divisions and conflicts that can arise in the digital age.

The research has found that social movements have played a crucial role in driving Tunisia's democratic transition, as evidenced by the resurgence of civil society and the growing number of social organizations in the country over the past 12 years. The January movements, in particular, have demonstrated the Tunisian people's growing interest in social movements and activism and the vital role of civil society in shaping the country's political and social agenda. However, the study has also highlighted the challenges and limitations of these social movements in achieving their demands, given the country's transition period and the difficulty of translating social demands into concrete political outcomes. The challenges and responses of Tunisian activism highlight the importance of understanding the history, the evolution of demands, the changing instruments of mobilization, the successes and failures of civil society organizations, and the theoretical approaches that shape our understanding of social movements. It is clear that activism in Tunisia has a long and rich history, starting with the colonial era and the rise of National Liberation, Worker's rights, and feminist movements.

The establishment of key organizations like UGTT and AFT laid the foundation for successful social movements, despite the state's repression and aggression. Over time, the demands of change evolved from liberation to more inclusive social, economic, and political rights. As regimes changed and demands evolved, the instruments of mobilization also changed. The transformation from Bourguiba to Ben Ali to Kais Saied highlighted the common points and differences in the ruling style that transitioned from authoritarian to a transitioning democracy.

Civil society actors like UGTT, LTDH, ATFD, and others played a critical role in this transition, displaying their strengths and internal flaws. Theoretical approaches, such as resource mobilization and relative deprivation theories, played a significant role in contributing

to the success of workers' and feminist movements. These theories highlighted the difference between social protests and social movements. New emerging movements, such as the Wrong Generation, Ena Zeda, LGBTQ+ Rights, and Anti-Police Brutality, showed promise. However, their horizontal structure and lack of leadership put them at friction points with the authorities, manifesting in violent episodes caused by repression. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, these movements managed to influence relative change in the activism scene caused by technological developments that affected the mobilization methods.

Nevertheless, the future of Tunisian democracy is at a crossroads in the face of populism that threatens the democratic course of the revolution. Activism in Tunisia faces ongoing challenges and opportunities. The success of these movements will depend on their ability to navigate the complex political landscape, find new and innovative ways to mobilize and maintain their commitment to inclusive and participatory democracy.

In addition to the challenges facing these emerging social movements, their non-traditional forms of activism have also created friction with more established groups. Many of these movements have eschewed traditional hierarchical structures in favor of more horizontal decision-making processes, which can lead to difficulties sustaining collective action and creating a unified front.

One factor that has facilitated the emergence of these movements is the proliferation of social media and digital technology. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter have allowed activists to communicate and mobilize on a scale that would have been impossible in earlier eras. The decentralized nature of social media has also made it more difficult for authorities to monitor and suppress dissent. However, the downside is that social media can amplify divisions and exacerbate conflicts within and between movements.

For these movements to have a lasting impact, they must also work on bridging generational gaps and reaching out to wider audiences. The fact that many of these movements are led by younger activists who may have different priorities and communication styles than their predecessors can create challenges in building coalitions and gaining the support of more established actors. However, it is also an opportunity for these movements to tap into new energy and creativity sources and build a more inclusive and diverse activism landscape.

To summarize, the post-revolutionary period in Tunisia has been marked by a series of challenges and responses in the realm of activism. While earlier social movements like the National Liberation, Worker's Rights, and Feminist movements laid the foundation for successful collective action, newer movements have faced unique obstacles in achieving their goals. Despite the difficulties posed by state repression, limited resources, and divisions within and between movements, activists have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of changing political contexts. By learning from the experiences of past movements and embracing new forms of mobilization and communication, these emerging movements have the potential to continue driving change in Tunisia and beyond.



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