



## Tunisian Judges Initiate a Week-Long Strike in Protest of President Saied's Mass Dismissal of Their Colleagues and Continued Authoritarian Actions

Judges across Tunisia have initiated a week-long strike in protest of President Kais Saied's continued anti-democratic actions, including the recent sacking of 57 of their colleagues. The strike began Monday and is the latest event in a series of escalating moves by Tunisian civil society members and democracy advocates in an attempt to counter Saied's power grabs. Saied tried to justify the dismissal of the judges by making unsubstantiated accusations of corruption and harassment. Experts and observers have pointed out that these claims are blatantly a front to get rid of judges that may challenge Saied, as he continues to seize more power and plunge Tunisia back into autocratic rule. Saied has long claimed that he has awarded himself sweeping powers to save the country from "imminent peril," but each repressive action has provided further proof of his intentions to destroy the nation's democratic institutions and mechanisms.

President Saied engaged in a major power grab back in July of 2021, and has since continually dismantled many of the democratic institutions that the Tunisian people won during the Arab Spring in 2011. He has so far suspended and then disbanded the parliament, dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council – which was responsible for ensuring the independence of the judiciary system – and has thrown out the country's constitution. The president has instead opted to write a new constitution through a national referendum, which has so far been boycotted by nearly all major political and civil entities due to the clearly biased nature of the "process." Saied has thrown out and hindered many democratic institutions and instead unilaterally elected to rule by decree. This has allowed him to grant himself additional powers and appoint people to political positions who are loyal to him. Saied has claimed that his actions are justified because they are necessary to save Tunisia from the country's political elite, however analysts have seen through this guise and highlight how the president has lost much of his public support.

There have been widespread protests in recent months from former elected officials, private organizations, and civil society groups. The UGTT, the largest trade union in Tunisia, plans for public sector workers to go on strike on June 16th. It is hoped that these protests, along with rising and widespread discontent among the public, will pose an increasing threat to Saied's grip on power. The judges' strike, along with other planned strikes, will greatly affect Saied's ability to govern, as it will bring many public services to a grinding halt. This may have damaging effects on Saied's popularity, as it could be perceived that he is unable to govern.

Protests among citizens have also been growing as economic conditions worsen and public services continue to falter. Tunisia is the only country that emerged from the Arab Spring with substantial democratic gains. If these protests and opposition initiatives continue to spread, they could present a credible challenge to Saied's ability to retain power. The recent dismantling of the judicial system may expedite this process. Jawher Ben Mharek, a connotational law professor in Tunisia, stated that "The judiciary is a sovereign institution of the Tunisian state, and now it is in conflict with the President of the Republic. It's a new fact -- for the first time, the state itself is resisting Kais Saied. This is new and I think this will be fatal for him."