



[Hundreds of Tunisians Take to the Streets in Continued Protests Against President Saied Ahead of Planned Controversial Parliamentary Elections](#)

Protests have continued in Tunisia, as hundreds turn out to denounce President Kais Saied and his undemocratic actions. The demonstrations come in the lead-up to a scheduled parliamentary election this Saturday, December 17th that many, including the Tunisian opposition, consider illegitimate. These entities point out that the election will be held under the supervision of a biased and partial group that is loyal to Saied, tainting the results, and are therefore urging for a boycott. Among those advocating for this is the powerful and influential Tunisian labor union, UGTT. Concern of fraudulent elections is justified, as Saied has been rolling back Tunisian democratic institutions over the past 17 months. During this time, he has dissolved and shut down the parliament, removed judicial watchdog groups, and re-written the constitution to accrue more individual powers. This modified version of the constitution was only voted for by about a quarter of registered voters a few months ago, in a vote that was also largely boycotted by pro-democracy forces. Saied has been ruling by decree since instituting a power-grab back in July of 2021.

The International Commission of Jurists' Regional Director Said Benarbia warned that the new constitution "defeats the very idea of separation of powers and checks and balances." He added that the "proposed constitution provides for an unbridled presidential system, with an omnipotent president, a powerless parliament, and a toothless judiciary." Saied has attempted to claim that his actions are necessary in order to save the country from economic and political ruin, but critics have rightfully dismissed this as a mere ruse to attain more authoritarian-like powers. The major political entities are boycotting the vote, but who is actually elected to the parliament will likely have little effect on how the country is actually governed anyway, as the legislature has lost nearly all of its power to the president. As there are few checks and balances now within the new Tunisian constitution, Saied is seeking to rule unilaterally without any worry of oversight or opposition from other government forces.

All of this is happening as a growing economic crisis looms for many Tunisians, with supply shortages and rampant inflation already causing hardship. Despite his many critics, Saied still has support from some Tunisians who see him as a "man of the people" fighting political elites who they blame for the poor socioeconomic conditions. Economic crises are a common tool used by authoritarian leaders to gain power with populist ideals and false promises, and observers have outlined how this appears to be no different in Tunisia. In these cases, leaders try to justify their undemocratic actions as a means to a better end, promising that they will relent power once the crisis has been resolved. In reality, however, they very often retain these powers and use their position to enrich themselves. This trend can be seen throughout the world in many instances. The less stable a country's economic and social system is, the more likely that they can succumb to leaders with authoritarian tendencies. These dictatorial figures sometimes even continue to go through the motions of a supposed democracy, by for example, holding elections with little to no real impact on how the country will actually be governed. For this reason, it is important that the United States works to uphold true democratic ideals and principles in its dealings around the world.