



Research Article

Volume-02|Issue-12|2021

The Political Economy of Revolution in Modern Africa: An Analysis of Tunisian Revolution

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Article History

Received: 01.12.2021

Accepted: 10.12.2021

Published: 28.12.2021

Citation

Enwere, C. (2021). The Political Economy of Revolution in Modern Africa: An Analysis of Tunisian Revolution. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(12), 13-20.

Abstract: African revolution seeks to put an end to the relics of colonial system and neo-colonial liberal structures that impede the economic and political development African states. The Tunisian revolution is a revolution of the masses and peasants structured to emancipate the people from the web of oppression, poverty and suffering induced by the strategic application of classical neo-liberal values in Tunisia. The pillars of the Tunisian revolution are liberation, emancipation and development. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the basic issues in the Tunisian revolution by analysing the specific conditions, causes and dynamism of African revolution. However, most scholars from the West do not believe that revolution could occur in Africa; hence, they labelled the Tunisian revolution as 'Arab Spring'. This is because they see Africa as a dark, stagnant and backward continent. For this reason, this study also seeks to address this perceived negative conceptualization of revolutions in Africa. In the course of the analysis, the research reveals that unlike the French and English revolutions, the Tunisian revolution goes beyond enthroneing the principles of justice and liberty to address and promote the values of material benefits and better living conditions through the institutionalization of improved self-reliant development values in Tunisia.

Keywords: Tunisia, African Revolution, Arab Spring, Emancipation, Liberal Economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional and modern revolutions in Africa focused on addressing basic issues of political repression, economic stagnation, poverty, mass unemployment, and control of political power by a few class of elites made possible through the frameworks of colonialism and neo-colonialism. While traditional revolution overthrew the embers of repressive colonial regimes, modern revolutions in Africa seek to topple dictatorial domestic neo-colonialist regimes and enthrone democratic values and practice in governance of modern African states. The modern revolution was a call for democratic reforms in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya occasioned by political protests against authoritarian leaders, whose long rule had brought hardship and misery for the people. In Egypt, Husni Mubarak had ruled for thirty years; Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali ruled for twenty three years and Muammar Gaddafi ruled for forty two years. Their long period of rule was made possible through neo-colonial structure and exchanges with the Western powers that saw them as strategic partners for the promotion of their interests.

The International Contexts of Revolution in Africa

Jack Goldstone explicates that international environment is significant in spreading the ideas, values and strategies that not only trigger revolution but also determines its eventual outcome. He argues that international environment will be relevant to revolution only if the internal conditions are favourable. The internal condition that stands out as key factor that gradually drive revolutionary impulses in Africa is the

negative impact of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism, imperialism and capitalism go hand in hand to ensure smooth operation and domination of foreign finance capital in Africa. This strategic alliance became prominent after the Second World War, when the Western countries changed their tactics from colonialism to neo-colonialism. While colonialism seeks to exercise alien political control over conquered African territories, neo-colonialism encourages economic control and negotiated independence. In doing this, colonial powers handed over political power to a selected group of collaborators, who then became agents for the control of modern African states.

The impact of the new tactics was to give the control of the government in the hands of indigenous African political elites and to ensure that the economy is ostensibly under the dominance of foreign capital owned by Western European countries and the United States. These connote continued economic dependence on foreign capital and undermine the philosophy of self-reliance. Self-reliance represents a transformation from backwardness and authoritarianism to a modern democratic state. But neo-colonialism pays less attention on self-reliance and more on profit maximization by persuading the political elites to play the role of local compradors of and junior partners to foreign capital. To ensure their investments against the threat from progressive and patriotic local forces, the foreign mentors manoeuvre the state and the government to sign defence pacts and technical assistance agreement which invariably is used to protect

regimes that protect Western interests leading to tenure elongation and absolute authoritarianism as was seen in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other African countries.

However, these authoritarian African leaders seem not to be really aware of the fact that they are unwitting vehicles of neo-colonialism. They became puppet regimes and use state powers to conquer the minds of the people through massive use of police brutality and militarization of political activities and processes. They turn to extra-continental sources for guidance on economic and political issues while the citizens wallow in poverty and uncertainties. Such feelings of uncertainty and hopeless are the hidden variables that activate emotions of frustration and aggressive instincts. As the feelings of aggression increases the supports of international actors begin to decrease because of need to protect their investment. They create an atmosphere of support for the masses and through vehicle of effective propaganda portray the government as anti-people; hence the need to transform the political system from absolutism to democracy.

Therefore, international context is important for the transformation of society to succeed. The support the international powers provide to an authoritarian regime is very critical for its survival. This support comes in two different ways; the international powers can refuse to support the government or they can restrict the government from the use of force against the citizens agitating for transformational change (Goldstone, 2011). Applying this context to Africa, the West, particularly the United States aligned with most despots and repressive regimes in Africa. They favour status quo over freedom to ensure political stability of Africa particularly the Arab or Islamic states. For the United States, support for Mubarak is significant to promote Arab-Israel peace initiatives and to contain Iran's nuclear programme. Mubarak was considered an ally despite his authoritarian rule. On the other hand, Ben Ali of Tunisia was seen as a dependable partner because of his regime's IMF inspired economic programme, democratic gradualism and secularism. Ironically this earned praises from the US and EU while ignoring his repressive political and economic policies. Their support for Gaddafi's regime was based on the premise that Libyan Arabs would play a role in keeping radical Islamist forces at bay. The support of international powers helped these regimes to earn international legitimacy and strengthened authoritarian rule in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other Africa countries (Haugbolle R.H., 2012).

Tariq Ramadan argues that international support for or inducement of uprising against authoritarian regimes depends on comparative strategic advantage. He insists that uprising against repressive regimes are possible only if international support is secured. Ramadan divided international support into two types:

Regime Level Support

This is a form of support from one government to another. The Western countries gave support to Ben Ali of Tunisia, Mubarak of Egypt and Gaddafi of Libya that strengthened their regime against internal or external oppositions. But the Western decision to continue or withdraw their support to these authoritarian regimes came with much diplomatic reluctance. The international powers did not stand by the regimes of Mubarak, Ben Ali and Gaddafi during the uprisings. The decision to withdraw support was not easy. It was done only after a long circle of debates among policy makers.

In the US, Mubarak was considered as an ally and a bulwark against Islamist terrorist threat but lost the confidence of the people. Contrary to this assumption, some policy makers under Obama government argued that the US would benefit more if they withdraw their support for Mubarak and encourage the emergence of a friendly regime that has the support of the Egyptian people. Hence it was critical for US government to withdraw support for Mubarak leading to the regime's downfall. Had the US and EU continued to support the regime the revolution would not have succeeded (Stein, 2012).

Societal Level Support

Societal support according to Ramadan involves collaboration between the people or civil society members. It comes in form of logistics and training of resistance groups aimed at exerting indirect pressure on regimes perceived to be repressive. The social media played significant role in the Tunisia, Egypt and Libya revolutions and the activists received training from American NGOs. The training was carried mainly to train the revolutionists in acts of democratic values and non-violent methods of confrontation. Some of American corporation such as Google, Twitter and Yahoo provided training and dissemination of information to help activists to mobilize local support for their struggles (Boukhars, 2011).

International context has become increasingly necessary in Africa because of nexus of globalisation. With globalisation, there is increase in communication between governments and non-governmental organisations as well as cultural exchanges among peoples of different societies. This platform provided by globalisation have made revolution to succeed in East Europe and Africa. After the third wave of democratization of East Europe through revolution, the West became keen in democratizing the Arab world. This created hope for spreading democracy to Africa. George Bush government in US launched the freedom agenda that is based on three pillars of regime change, people's rights and freedom. The invasion of Iraq was based on this agenda. Therefore, mass protests and uprisings were strategically used to remove repressive

regimes that no longer serve the interests of the West (Syed, 2014).

THE TUNISIA REVOLUTION

The modern Africa revolution originated from Tunisia, a symbol of democracy and secularism of the new Islamic world. But Ben Ali regime in the process of consolidating power drove the nation from the hills of democracy to the valley of authoritarianism. The revolution in Tunisia was generated from legitimate crisis which emanated from regime repression, growing alienation of the people, inflation, excess borrowing and corruption that retarded economic growth and increased mass unemployment. These economic problems culminated into political alienation of the people. Since coming into power in 1987, Ben Ali had won five presidential elections with almost ninety percent of the vote. The activities of opposition were also under strict surveillance as political participation and freedom of expression were out rightly curtailed (Masoud, 2011). The twenty-three yearlong rule of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali came to an end in January 14, 2011 when he fled the country. The success of Tunisia revolution sparked region-wide revolutionary struggles in Africa.

THE SUCCESS STORY OF BEN ALI'S REGIME BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

Tunisia under Habib Bourguiba leadership operated a one party system characterized by authoritarian rule. Opposition groups were stifled and not permitted to organise political activities or even form political parties. Membership to the ruling party was selective as most political elites were excluded from political processes; hence there were many political prisoners in Tunisia. Following the successful coup of November 1987, Bourguiba regime was brought to an unexpected end. Ben Ali took over and introduced new constitutional reforms that would uphold the tenets of democracy to end the era of totalitarianism (Parkins, 2004). His success story was:

To end epoch of political repression, Ben Ali brought together a multiparty system to replace the one party structure. He removed restrictions on formation of political associations and allowed opposition groups to form political parties. A new structure of political inclusiveness was erected to strengthen popular participation in politics. Political prisoners were released and those on exile were allowed to return home to form political associations. The political scene became more vivacious and inclusive. The name of the ruling party was changed from Neo-Destour Party to Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD); its membership was opened to all Tunisians (Alexander, 2010).

Also, Ben Ali made remarkable achievement in the area of national reconciliation because the

totalitarian regime of Habib Bourguiba brought instability, dissatisfaction and division among elites in the political system. To this end, in November 1988 he collaborated with the released political prisoners and representatives of the Islamic Tendencies Movement (MTI) to discuss and approve the National Pact. The Pact was designed to promote pluralism, human rights and fundamental freedom among the peoples of Tunisia. The Pact was also spectacular in the following areas of constitutional amendments (Alexander, 2010):

- Through constitutional amendment, the office of president-for-life was abolished. This allows a two-term limit for the president, with a maximum age limit of seventy years.
- A new electoral law was initiated, that prohibited the establishment and running of political parties base on religion. So, the Islamic Tendencies Movement changed its name to Hizb Ennahda (Renaissance Party). The party was the constitution permitted to run independent candidates for parliamentary elections.

Similarly, Ben Ali sustained and promoted values of secularism and pluralism by separating religion from partisan politics. Political parties based on Islamic religion were banned. Tunisia then became the most secularized nation in the Arab world by promoting progressive laws on women's rights, religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. These measures became a bulwark against domestic terrorism, which had caused civil war in Algeria.

In addition, economic prosperity and stability contributed to the survival of Ben Ali's regime. He took bold steps to implement an International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programme. The nation's currency was devalued and the economy was able to sustain an annual economic growth rate of 5 percent for a decade. Through cooperation with IMF, he established close economic relations with European Union. In 1993, Europe emerged as Tunisia's major trading partner, purchasing over 80 percent of its exports and supplying 70 percent of imports, resulting in increase in exports, foreign direct investments and tourism. The economic boom produced more jobs annually for university graduates and expanded the education and healthcare sectors. Living standard of the Tunisian working class tremendously improved and the country turned out to be politically stable. Tunisians were satisfied with economic stability and cared less about changing the political system (Parkins, 2004).

THE RISE OF AUTOCRACY

Feelings of fear and threat of possible rise of secular opposition party stimulated impulse of autocracy in Ben Ali's regime. This fear became high when Hizb Ennahda won over 15 percent of the national parliamentary elections through their independent candidates. They secured high number of votes in in the

suburbs of Tunis, the capital as well as in some areas of the south (Perkins, 2004). Ben Ali interpreted this victory as sudden rise of strong opposition to his party's hegemony. In November 1989, he announced that there was no room for religious party in Tunisia. Under such guise, the regime started to decimate the party using covert force. In response, the leader of Ennahda, Rachid Ghannouchi went to Algeria and called on the people of Tunisia to rise against the government leading to escalation of Islamist militancy in Tunisia. In his bid to contain the spread of Islamist militancy, the regime introduced certain coercive measures which included but not limited to the following strategies.

In his first move, Ben Ali regime adopted a counter-insurgency strategy aimed at cracking down on Ennahda. The government arrested over three hundred Ennahda leaders and activists whom they accused of plotting to overthrow the government. In July 1992, 279 Islamists were tried in Tunis Military Tribunal and were sentenced to periods of imprisonment ranging from fifteen years to life imprisonment. Forced confessions, torture and police brutality were used to get evidence needed for prosecution (Murphy, 1999). Ben Ali became more intolerant of any demand to liberalize the political system. He out rightly clamped down on human rights advocates and outspoken critics. Khemais Chammari of the Tunisian League of Human Rights was arrested for writing an open letter to Ben Ali over his restrictive political policies.

However, indirect method of censorship was introduced to silence critics and opinion leaders. Although there was no official censorship, freedom of expression was curtailed through intimidation and harassment. Newspapers prefer to have blank space or pages than to write articles that run contrary to the views of government. Newspapers were seized for having blank spaces and editors were forced to fire reporters; threat of becoming unemployed inhibited some reporters from being critical of public policy and corrupt practices of the government. Editors and reporters were given lists of public policies and subjects that they should not report on. Many reporter avoided writing on sensitive issues to play safe and avoid arrest or imprisonment. Freedom of press was lost and restrictions on news coverage increased unabated (Garon, 2003).

However, to perpetuate himself in power, Ben Ali enacted a self-serving electoral reform. Prior to 1999 presidential election, he established an independent electoral commission and appointed its members. Though independent by name, the electoral body has no authority to make decisions or funds to investigate violations. The electoral law was changed to allow candidates to compete for the presidency, but the new law was restrictive that most potential candidates were disqualified. Also, in 2002, a referendum was held to amend the constitution to allow Ben Ali to run again

when his term expires in 2004. It was approved by a vote 99.5 per cent. This was possible because he sustained bureaucratic control over electoral politics to dominate the political system. In 2008, he introduced new eligibility requirements to limit the number of candidates seeking the presidential office. One of the requirements was that a presidential candidate must have headed a political party for two years. Through this process, he eliminated most of the candidates for 2009 election (Chrissafis, 2011). Only three less popular candidates were left to contest election. None of them were expected to win, but their participation gave credibility to the electoral process as being democratic. The electoral process and voter registration were under the interior ministry which also controlled the police and security services that were used during the elections. This new arrangement created voters apathy and opened up possibilities for rigging. The opposition parties were rendered incapable of challenging Ben Ali's autocracy or political domination (Watch, 2011).

Ben Ali held five elections and he won all through manipulation of the country's electoral laws. This made it possible for him to hold onto power for twenty-three years. These laws were designed to stifle civil society, diminish judicial independence, limit political participation and shield him from accountability (Watch, 2011). In his quest to hold power, the regime drifted into authoritarianism and relied heavily on the police to control the state in order to preserve political power and hegemony. Tunisia lost its democratic values that were a mark of reference to other Islamic countries. The new road of autocracy provided and stimulated collective struggle and resistance against Ben Ali's regime.

The Tunisian Revolution Catalysts

The causes of the revolution in Tunisia were neither economic nor political in nature. There was a convergence of factors brought about by a variety of demands and factors. These factors range from issues relating to lack of legitimacy, repression and corruption to issues on performance of the state. The convergence of causative factors unified opposition elites in their quest to start show of resistances to the regime. The factors are analysed in detail below.

The first contradictions that led to the revolution were the economic downturn in Tunisia which was worsened by Europe's financial crisis. Europe purchase 80 percent of Tunisia exports and the sudden drop in the European market demand for Tunisian products resulted in a decrease in exports. This gave rise to contraction in the industrial sector and a slower expansion in services. Though the economy rebounded in 2010 due to injection of capital by IMF and World Bank but economic opportunities decreased as state resources also reduced. The reduction in state resources can be attributed to fall in revenue, failure to adjust revenue with inflation, excess borrowing and

increase in the prices of key commodities. The masses became stark and frustrated over time as income disparity widens. The middle and lower class saw no window of opportunity for fulfilling their dreams. This resulted in show of resistance to the regime through demonstrations.

The youths were caught in between a rock and a hard place as unemployment rose tremendously. The 2010 economic recovery plan created substantial regional disparities between Tunis and the coastal areas in the east. Unemployment was more than 22 per cent in Kasserine and Gafsa. Unemployment for youths was 30 per cent in 2009 and for university graduates it was 45 per cent (Cavatorta & Haugbølle, 2012). The university graduates were excluded from the economy as tourism only require low skilled workers; their high expectations were frustrated having neither prospects of jobs at home nor prospects for migrating and seeking employment abroad. These conditions convinced many graduates and poor people that the government did not care and was not going to reverse unemployment (Arieff, 2011).

Economic conditions became stringent for people in Tunisia. Remittances from Tunisians dropped considerably due to austerity measures in Europe. Food inflation was very high, as much as 36 per cent of the house budget was spent on basic food. This was worsened by over two decades of job-cuts by state owned companies and 350 political hiring with links to Ben Ali and his regime; the poverty ridden areas in with few job opportunities exploded with riots. The regime responded ruthlessly and quelled the riots. The fresh graduates who were unemployed staged a sit-in-front of trade union's office, joined by low salaried workers, widows and other poor people. The movement lasted for six months due to lack of leadership and prominent activist figures. The authority was unable to suppress it immediately. The Gafsa movement set a new pattern of protests acting in a concerted action (Khusrokhavar, 2012).

The economic miseries of the people were accentuated by endemic corruption of the regime. The corruption of Ben Ali's family increased unabated and caused discontent among the unemployed youths and accelerated the collapse of the regime. The ruling family, including the extended family of over a hundred and forty people were involved in widespread corruption. This network was referred as 'the family' in Tunisia (Anderson, 2011). Tunisians were particularly wary of the lavish spending life styles of Ben Ali's family (Arieff, 2011). They owned over one hundred and eighty companies and other lucrative businesses including a shipping cruise line, pharmaceutical firm and real estate companies. The privatization programme was highly mismanaged giving room to people of his clan to control major chunk of business in Tunisia. Import licenses were given on selective basis creating a

wide imbalance in the society that undermined the economy. Contracts for tourism and construction were allotted on favouritism, excluding over 95 percent of the population from the economy. The discontentment among the people was aggravated by sight of Ben Ali's family and members of his clan having access to a better life. The wealth of Ali's family added to the frustration of masses, at a time of high rate of unemployment among youth under the age of twenty-four, who accounted for 40 percent of the population (Anderson, 2011).

Another remote catalyst that drove the Tunisian revolution was the exclusion of the military from the regime's security and political structure. Revolution cannot succeed without the support of the military, because the military's decision to support or refusal to stand by a particular regime determines the success or failure of a revolution. In Tunisia, the army was always been excluded from politics even under three decade long rule of Habib Bourguiba, Ben Ali's predecessor. Ali followed this trend and kept the military out of politics. The Army was poorly funded and its role was strictly limited to defence of the border. The regime gave more powers to the police and other security agencies than the military. These agencies were more in number and adequately funded by the ministry of interior. For these reasons, the army had no interest in the survival of the regime and when the regime was unable to surpass the protesters, General Rachid Ammar was asked to deploy troops; he refused and placed the troops between the protesters and the security agencies. The army sided the revolutionaries and deserted the regime and this act decisively resulted in the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime (Khashan, 2012).

Therefore, the above factor was compounded by cracks and divisions among the elites. The unity among the ruling and opposition elites makes a government to be immune to resistance and reinforces the stability of a state. In Tunisia, the fissures in elite unity were very visible with the introduction of anti-terrorism law to build up the repressive powers of the regime. Various political parties, civil society organizations and individuals were given restricted freedom by the regime. Threat of repression was always there in case of non-compliance. The regime outlawed political expression. Reacting to this law, the elites including the leftists, liberalists, and Islamists came together and formed a political alliance to oppose the regime. They formed a movement called Movement for Rights and Freedom, whose primary aim was to oppose the ruling elites in Ben Ali's party. Their demands include legalization of all political parties, release of political prisoners, freedom of media and general amnesty. The refusal of the regime to meet these demands led to intra-elite struggles and disunity. The failure of the regime to create alliance with the elites gave rise to popular revolt against the regime; comprising of the elites, peasants, workers and ethnic,

regional and religious groups working together to see to the success of the revolution.

Crescendos of Tunisian Revolution

The Tunisian revolution was an intensive campaign of street demonstrations and civil resistance aimed at the ousting of Ben Ali's regime in January 2011. The revolution was caused by a variety of problems ranging from food inflation, corruption, lack of political freedom to issues on human rights. But the most striking factor that triggered it, was not the cry for democracy but a demand for jobs. The revolution was also called the Sidi Bouzid revolt to reflect the city where the initial protests started; or the Jasmine revolution called after the Tunisian national flower to keep with the geopolitical classification of revolution.

The protests were sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010. Mohamed, a street vendor, set himself on fire in front of Sidi Bouzid's municipal building to protest the acts of humiliation and brutality of police officers on street traders and other peasants. The incident became a symbol of the regime's corruption and its inability to provide jobs for young people who are struggling to support their families in Tunisia. Bouazizi's act of self-immolation united people in Sidi Bouzid and encouraged them to mobilize protests against widespread unemployment in many parts of Tunisia. Also, on 22 December 2010, another youth, Houcine Falhi, killed himself in the midst of a demonstration in the town of Sidi Bouzid. These two incidents turned the local protest to regional violence spreading to neighbouring towns (Garon, 2003).

The police responded by using brute force and instruments of state violence against the protesters. Police fired on protesters who were rallying to demand jobs in solidarity with the youths in the impoverished regions, using tear gas and ammunition. The security forces also arrested and beat protesters. When the government website was hacked and shut down, they began to arrest bloggers, reporters, activists and journalists. As the degree of police brutality increased, other groups of professionals joined the protests. On 2 January 2011, ninety-five percent of the country's lawyers went on a general strike protesting the arrest of some lawyers. They demanded an end to police brutality and attacks on demonstrators. In solidarity with the protesters, the teachers and the working class in Tunis joined the nationwide protests (Arieff, 2011).

Since the protesters were denied access to media coverage, they resorted to the use of social media to express their grievances and demands. They made good use of Facebook and Twitter to transmit pictures of the police beating and arresting demonstrators. The effective use of social media made other passive actors to join the protest which had spread to almost all the streets in the capital. The opposition Democratic

Progressive Party (PDP) criticized the government use of force on the young people of Tunisia and demanded that they should focus on job creation instead of arresting and detaining the protesters. The protest became widespread to the extent that the police could no longer contain it. Therefore, the failure to end the protests in the streets led Ben Ali to change tactics. On 13 January 2011, he announced that he would not run for re-election when his term expired in 2014. He also promised to allow more freedoms, introduce reforms and investigate the killing of protesters. To demonstrate his commitment, he directed the police to stop shooting at protesters and dismissed the interior minister who many Tunisians accused of being responsible for the killings and injuring of demonstrators. Similarly, he lowered the prices of sugar, milk and bread, so as to reduce the excruciating impact of inflation (Garon, 2003).

Despite these promises and reforms, protests across the entire country continued unabated. The trade union held a huge rally demanding that Ben Ali should step down immediately because he had lost his legitimacy. These protests and rally put more fears in the minds of Ben Ali and he became more desperate to hold on to power by all costs. He came up with repressive tactics to protect his regime. He declared a state of emergency, banned the gathering of more than three people in public places, and imposed a night curfew on the capital. He also, closed schools and universities in order to keep the youths off the streets. He ordered the army to shoot anyone who violates state of emergency laws. The refusal of the army to carry out the directive increased the tempo and horizons of the protests. At this moment, the army chief-of-staff advised Ben Ali to quit. He left the country and flew first to Malta and then France; because he was refused landing permission, he ended up in Saudi Arabia. While in exile, Ben Ali was tried in absentia and sentenced to thirty-five years imprisonment for corruption. With his departure, his regime was classified as the most repressive and corrupt regime in the Islamic world (Goldstone, 2011).

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES

The key achievement of the revolution was to drive all the corrupt elites associated with Ben Ali out from holding political power. With the emergence of AL-Bajji Caed Essebsi as interim prime minister, measures were taken to build confidence of the people that the new government would restore democracy, curtail corruption and improve the economy for the benefit of all and not for the select few. As part of the confidence building measure, he arrested some members of the ruling party and close relatives and political associates of Ben Ali. On 9 March 2011, he dissolved and confiscated the assets of Ben Ali's ruling party; banned over nine thousand officials of the party from running for elected office (Eileen, 2011).

Similarly, to restore effective security system devoid of police brutality, he solicited the help of the military in maintenance of order. Peace was restored to many parts of the country and all the secret security services used by Ben Ali to arrest and detain people were dismantled. To this end, all political prisoners were released and restrictions on print and electronic media were removed, giving room for more press freedom in the country. Political repression and abuse of human rights gave way to a new democratic values and practice that encouraged people to participate in the political process.

Another remarkable gain of the revolution was the establishment of an independent Tunisian Higher Election Authority (ISIE) on 9 May 2011. It was primarily created to watch over the Constituent Assembly elections, the new electoral register and give confidence to the electoral process. The duty of the Constituent Assembly was to draft a new constitution that would usher in a new democratic process. The ISIE embarked on voter registration across the country and by the deadline of 14 August 2011, over 4 million out of an estimated 7.5 million eligible voters registered (Kirkpatrick, 2011). To prevent electoral fraud, voters were required to come in person to register and to cast their vote. With these improvements, citizen apathy was increasingly reduced and the ruling class began to have confidence in the process.

To give credence to the electoral process, a new electoral law was enacted, that made it difficult for a single political party to gain an absolute majority. The new law instituted a proportional representation system, which allocates Constituent Assembly seats according to the number of votes secured by each party. Under this new political arrangement, the political party with the highest number of votes was required to form a coalition government. Also, the law allowed for the inclusion of women in each party's candidate list and Tunisians living abroad are allowed to vote in the elections (Arieff, 2011). The Constituent Assembly election was held on 23 October 2011 under watchful eyes of both domestic and international observers. Many Tunisians for the first time participated in the election. According to the electoral commission, 54 percent of eligible voters participated in the election, which was declared free and fair by observers. This election marked a significant step in the Tunisian democratization process. All the parties accepted the results, making an end to five decades of dictatorship.

In post revolution period, the ban on civil society organisations' participation in politics was lifted and over five hundred new civil society organisations were established. The removal of restriction on political participation and processes created new opportunities to promote democracy, gender equality, social justice and human rights. The new political class promoted unity and collaboration between the governing elite and the masses to achieve the revolutionary goals of

establishing a new civil state based on rights, law and citizenship and not on repression, exclusion and corruption. The new governing elite reaffirmed its commitment to the country's progressive and secular character and pledged not to include sharia in the constitution. In the spirit of elite cooperation, the coalition government put the national interest above party interest by agreeing to retain the first article of the 1957 Constitution which stipulates that Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state. To reduce the high incidences of dictatorship by the executive president, new subjects of checks and balances were instituted to strengthen the legislature and the judiciary. The legislature was given more powers to carry out legislative oversight over the executive to prevent misuse and abuse of powers; and a new constitutional court was established to adjudicate on constitutional matters.

Therefore, The Tunisian revolution is the first popular revolution in modern post-Cold War Africa. It was a non-political, non-religious and non-ideological revolution that drew its strength from street protests by youths, peasants and activists without a recognisable leader. The revolutionaries made effective use of social media to expose the repressive tenets of Ben Ali's regime and they particularly used Facebook and Twitter as a rally centre to create impulsive resistance against the regime. The efficacy of the protests led to the collapse of Ben Ali's regime and the enthronement of new democratic values characterized by free and fair multiparty elections.

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