

## Democracy in crisis

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Democratic leaderships are usually exposed in times of crises. Climate change and environmental degradation are examples of catastrophes that reflect the responsiveness of democratic institutions and lead to political transformations.

COVID-19 has been a global crisis that constitutes the main test for governments around the world, and very few people can claim that many governments have passed that test. Governments stumbled in the dilemma between safety vs. growth, freedom vs. order, collective vs. individual needs. Institutional capacities and social policies of the most democratic governments are questioned; and the states are under the pressure of coping and responding to the future risks.

The notions of democracy are evolving amid emerging disasters. The procedural definition of democracy is based on the consecutive rotation of power among competing political actors through peaceful electoral means.

Some political scientists categorize a given country as democratic if it has two rounds of uninterrupted power rotation. This procedural definition has not been proven sufficient in real democratic practice. It also doesn't take into consideration the hollowing of democracy where the governing capacity of nation states becomes less adequate and less responsive to the aspirations and well-being of the citizenry as a whole.

Is the failure of a democratically elected government to deliver on necessary governance and developmental needs a failure in governance or in democracy?

According to "The Crisis of Democracy in a Time of Crisis" research paper published by Neil Walker, professor of Public Law and the Law of Nations at the University of Edinburgh – School of Law, "talks of crises and catastrophes often engender and motivate new democratic energies and transformative claims. It therefore reflects the fragility and radical openness of every political order" (Mouffe, 2005).

People sometimes mistake the failure of a given political coalition to perform with failure of the idea of democracy to create sustainable growth and development. This misconception has a detrimental effect on democracy and good governance because it often leads countries into vicious circles of incomplete political transformations.

Tunisia is nowadays facing a crisis in democracy after the president ousted the government and froze the activities of the Parliament. Some people are in the streets supporting his decision and others considered it a coup and are protesting it. The president claims his decisions are based on the people's grievances due to the increasing COVID-19 cases, political dysfunction and economic malaise that have been in Tunisia for years. This discrepancy in perspectives represents another example when a crisis puts democracy under a real stress test.

Although Tunisia relatively managed to handle the pandemic's first wave, it is completely lagging in the second or third waves. With COVID daily cases approaching 10,000, the small Mediterranean country is unable to effectively open up partially or fully in order to rejuvenate the economy. At the same time, the government has failed in securing an extensive vaccine program that could decrease hospitalization and facilitate some degree of normal social and economic interaction.

For observers of the Middle East affairs, what's happening in Tunisia is important and critical for the future of democracy in the whole region. Tunisia is where the Arab Spring was born. The echo of Tunisians' calls for freedom and democracy are still being heard in all corners of the Arab world. Youth, with some degree of confidence, say that Tunisia is the birthplace for the latest democracy awakening in the Middle East. From a constitutional perspective, executive decrees and suspension of the democratically elected Parliament put the newly born democratic system under the spotlight. Thus, the upcoming period will prove how crises will impact the trajectory of democracy in Tunisia.

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