



A Guide to

TUNISIA'S 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

September 2019

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ABOUT THE PROJECT ON MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRACY (POMED)

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Stephen McInerney, Amy Hawthorne, Andrew Miller, Louisa Keeler, and Seth Binder participated in the drafting of this report; Essia Imjed conducted research and fact-checking; and April Brady designed and produced the report. POMED expresses its appreciation to Sharan Grewal and Anne Wolf for sharing their expertise and insights.

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Project on Middle East Democracy
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 617
Washington, D.C. 20036

www.pomed.org

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INTRODUCTION

Previously scheduled for November 17, 2019, Tunisia's September 15 presidential election represents an inflection point in the country's democratic transition. The early vote was precipitated by the July 25 death of Beji Caid Essebsi, who at age 92 was approaching the end of his five-year term as Tunisia's first president to be chosen in a free and fair popular vote. The establishment, old-guard Essebsi won a December 2014 runoff against the former dissident Moncef Marzouki, who had served since December 2011 as Tunisia's first post-dictatorship head of state, selected by the National Constituent Assembly (NCA).

While Essebsi's record as president was mixed, he nevertheless was a source of continuity, with governing experience dating back to the era of Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's leader from independence.¹ Essebsi's ability to compromise with other power centers in Tunisia, especially the Islamist Ennahda party, helped to prevent the authoritarian backlashes seen elsewhere in the region. And the peaceful transition of power to a temporary acting president, parliamentary speaker Mohamed Ennaceur, upon Essebsi's death was swift and orderly, in accordance with the 2014 constitution. Now, for better or worse, Tunisia is entering a new chapter in its history, one that is characterized by a high degree of uncertainty.

Tunisian politics have experienced substantial change since Essebsi won the presidency in 2014. Last September, the governing "consensus" forged in 2013 between Essebsi, a secularist from the traditional elite, and longtime Islamist opposition leader Rached Ghannouchi of Ennahda broke down. The consensus saw Essebsi's secular Nidaa Tounes party co-habiting with Ennahda in the government formed after the

2014 parliamentary elections. This approach had helped to contain polarization and keep parts of the democratic transition on track, but both sides ultimately became disenchanted with the repeated compromises necessitated by the arrangement. And the Tunisian public increasingly has decried the lack of vision from their leaders and the political gridlock that has stalled progress on important issues such as economic revitalization, transitional justice, and the formation of the Constitutional Court. Since the 2014 elections, Nidaa Tounes has fragmented into competing factions and splinter groups, ceding its place as the largest party in parliament to Ennahda and struggling to project a coherent platform for the country's future. Leftist parties have also fractured, and failed to gain popular traction.

For its part, Ennahda, after much internal debate, in 2016 formally partitioned its political activity from its religious activity.² It now styles itself as a "Muslim democratic" party drawing inspiration from, but not establishing its political platform upon, Islamic practice.³ The party has remained unified, but tensions have emerged over whether to take a more or less confrontational approach toward secular forces in the post-Essebsi era, with reported dissent over the recent decision to field a presidential candidate in 2019.

Nearly nine years after the Jasmine Revolution, while significant shifts are underway in the political landscape, the economy remains mired in stagnation. International Monetary Fund (IMF)-mandated austerity measures imposed in recent years were intended to stabilize Tunisia's macroeconomic outlook, but have instead placed additional pressure on Tunisians' standard of living. Unemployment currently sits at an official 15 percent, with youth unemployment report-

1. Anne Wolf, "Beji Caid Essebsi: The Old Guard Member Who Helped Build Tunisia's Democracy," Project on Middle East Democracy, July 31, 2019, <https://pomed.org/beji-caid-essebsi-the-old-guard-member-who-helped-to-build-tunisias-new-democracy/>
2. Monica Marks, "How big were the changes Tunisia's Ennahda party just made at its national congress?" *Washington Post*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/25/how-big-were-the-changes-made-at-tunisias-annahda-just-made-at-its-national-congress/>
3. Fabio Merone, "What Ennahda's Transformation Means for Tunisia" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 31, 2019, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/01/31/politicians-or-preachers-what-annahda-s-transformation-means-for-tunisia-pub-78253>

edly at 34 percent.⁴ Inflation has nearly doubled, from 3 to 4 percent pre-revolution to more than 7 percent in late 2018.⁵ As the Brookings Institution's Sharan Grewal has noted, "eight years into democracy, Tunisians have become frustrated with [the government's] failure to deliver economically."⁶

Amidst this backdrop of political fragmentation and economic hardship, voter dissatisfaction with the political system is growing, eroding support for democracy and creating an opening for populist candidates who pledge to upend the post-revolution order. According to a 2019 survey by the International Republican Institute, 46 percent of Tunisians somewhat or greatly distrust the government, 59 percent somewhat or greatly distrust parliament, and 70 percent distrust political parties generally.⁷ Sixty-five percent of Tunisians are, moreover, dissatisfied with how democracy has developed in their country. Even more concerning, the proportion of Tunisians who believe democracy is preferable to other forms of government declined from 70 percent in 2013 to 46 percent in 2018, which is

one point lower than the percentage of those who support military rule.⁸ Sounding an alarm, Laryssa Chomiak of Chatham House recently argued that the present conditions in Tunisia "are ripe for the rise of candidates and political entrepreneurs that represent...a shift away from the status quo."⁹

What is more, the September presidential election is only one part of a busy, even hectic, electoral calendar this fall. As voters go to the polls to elect their next president, they will also be preparing for the October 6 elections for the parliament, the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP). With a crowded presidential race and no clear front-runner, a runoff is likely, which would be held soon after—or possibly even on the same day—as the ARP election. At the outset of Tunisia's critical national elections, POMED has published this Backgrounder, which describes the role of the president, the electoral system and timetable, and the leading candidates for the September 15 contest. POMED will publish a separate Backgrounder for the parliamentary elections.

4. "Unemployment rate down 0.1% to 15.3% in Q1 2019 (INS)," Tunis Afrique Presse, May 15, 2019, <https://www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Society/11451211-unemployment-rate>

5. Sharan Grewal, "Tunisian Democracy at a Crossroads," Brookings Institution, February 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FP_20190226_tunisia_grewal.pdf

6. Grewal, "Tunisian Democracy at a Crossroads."

7. "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Tunisia," International Republican Institute's Center for Insights on Survey Research, March 28, 2019, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/final_-_012019_iri_tunisia_poll.pdf

8. Grewal, "Tunisian Democracy at a Crossroads."

9. Laryssa Chomiak, "Tunisian Politics Splinters as Presidential Election Approaches," Chatham House, August 20, 2019, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/tunisian-politics-splinters-presidential-election-approaches>

ELECTORAL PROCESS

POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT

Tunisia's 2014 constitution created a mixed presidential/parliamentary system, in which the head of state (president) shares executive powers with a head of government (prime minister) approved by the parliament. This post-revolution system established a balance of power across the branches of government, in contrast to the political system under dictators Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in which power was concentrated in an unchecked president under whom was subordinated a rubber-stamp parliament.

As the executive of the nation, the president must formally approve all laws passed by the ARP. The president may contest the constitutionality of a draft law or return the draft to the ARP for a second reading. Should the president return a draft law, the ARP may then vote to ratify the draft, with an absolute majority of representatives needed to pass ordinary laws and a three-fifths majority required for organic laws that relate the central principles of the system of government.¹⁰

The president is also charged with creating and implementing policy across the defense, foreign relations, and national security sectors. The president oversees the National Security Council, serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, holds the ability to declare war, and has the power to dissolve the ARP. The president holds the power of appointment for the Grand Mufti; for senior government, military, and diplomatic officials; for four members of the new Constitutional Court established by the 2014 constitution; and for the Central Bank governor. Of these appointments,

only the Central Bank governor is subject to the ARP's approval.¹¹

Similar to representatives in the ARP, the president is elected for a five-year term. He or she may serve for two terms only, regardless of whether these terms are consecutive. The president may not serve as a political party official while in office.¹²

ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The president is directly elected by universal suffrage by a majority vote. If no candidate receives an absolute majority on September 15, the top-two vote getters will compete in a run-off election, the winner of which will be declared president. In the first round of the 2014 race, held on November 23, Essebsi received 39 percent of the vote, Marzouki got 33 percent, and each of the 21 other candidates earned eight percent or less.¹³ In a December 23 runoff, Essebsi won with 56 percent to Marzouki's 44 percent.¹⁴

The Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), an independent electoral commission established in 2011, organizes and manages all elections and referenda. In this role it replaces the Interior Ministry, which under the dictatorship organized—and heavily manipulated—elections. ISIE's nine commissioners are elected by the parliament.

VOTERS

Tunisians who have turned age 18 by election day are eligible to be included on the voter registry

10. "Tunisia's Constitution of 2014," Constitute Project, August 13, 2019, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf

11. Constitute Project, "Tunisia's Constitution of 2014."

12. *Ibid.*

13. "Final Report on the 2014 Legislative and Presidential Elections in Tunisia," National Democratic Institute, [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia%20Election%20Report%202014_EN_SOFT%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia%20Election%20Report%202014_EN_SOFT%20(1).pdf)

14. National Democratic Institute, "2014 Legislative and Presidential Elections."

and to cast ballots.¹⁵ From April 10 through July 4, 2019, Tunisians could register or update their information at local ISIE offices or through their mobile phones, and Tunisians living abroad could register through the ISIE website or at 64 offices set up in diplomatic missions. According to ISIE data, nearly 1.5 million Tunisians were added to the rolls in 2019,¹⁶ bringing the total number of registered voters to 7,155,000.¹⁷ Of those, 385,546 live outside the country. (Tunisia's population is 11.8 million.)¹⁸

Turnout has fluctuated in the successive nationwide votes held since the revolution. In the October 2011 NCA elections, some 52 percent of registered voters took part.¹⁹ In the October 2014 parliamentary elections, official turnout was 68 percent of registered voters.²⁰ The first round of the 2014 presidential election saw a reported 63 percent of registered voters cast their ballots, and the runoff saw 61 percent go to the polls.²¹ In the May 2018 local elections, turnout reached just 35 percent of registered voters.²²

ELECTORAL TIMETABLE

The 2019 presidential election is taking place on a shortened timetable. On July 25, ISIE moved the election date to September 15 so that, if a second round is held, a new president can

take office within 90 days of Essebsi's death (October 23) as the constitution requires, at least in theory.²³ The ISIE will announce preliminary results by September 17, which is followed by an appeals period. On August 22, parliament amended the electoral law to shorten the period of appeals for both the first round and a runoff (from 34 days to 15 days or less). But even this compressed timetable may not produce a new president until after October 23, if the maximum time allowed for the appeals process is used.

As of this writing, it is uncertain when a runoff would take place because it is impossible to know whether the first-round appeals process will require the maximum 15 days allowed by law. Under the electoral law, voting must take place on a weekend day (Saturday or Sunday in Tunisia) or a public holiday, which limits the eligible run-off days to October 5, 6, 12, 13, 15, 19, or 20. Unless the law is amended again to further shorten the appeals period or this period is concluded in less than the full time available, it appears unlikely that a new president will be sworn in by October 23, the end of the acting president's term. This contradiction between the electoral law and the constitution is currently unresolved, and it remains to be seen how—or whether—the Tunisian parliament will address it.

15. There are two exceptions to this suffrage rule. The electoral law disallows from voting Tunisians convicted of certain crimes “until they are rehabilitated” and those “who are placed under legal guardianship on grounds of insanity.”

16. “Statement of the IRI/NDI Pre-Election Assessment Mission to Tunisia’s 2019 Presidential and Legislative Elections,” International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/PEAM%20Statement%20Draft%20Clean%29_3.1.pdf; ISIE website, “Statistics,” [Ar], accessed August 28, 2019: <http://www.isie.tn/statistiques/>

17. Mohammed Maher Ben Romdhane, “Tunisia / ISIE: more than 7 million registered voters for 2019 elections” Anadolu Agency, July 5, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/tunisie-isie-plus-de-7-millions-d%C3%A9lecteurs-inscrits-pour-les-%C3%A9lections-de-2019/1524401>

18. “Election Guide: Tunisian Republic,” International Foundation for Electoral Systems, <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/217/>

19. International Foundation for Electoral Systems, “Election Guide.”

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. “Municipales : l’ISIE avance un taux de participation de 35.6%,” Mosaique FM, May 9, 2018, <https://www.mosaiquefm.net/fr/municipales-2018/340801/municipales-l-isie-avance-un-taux-de-participation-de-35-6>

23. According to Article 84 of Tunisia’s 2014 constitution, in the event that the office of the president is permanently vacated, the speaker of the ARP assumes his/her duties for a period of no less than 45 days and no more than 90 days. Essebsi died on July 25, which means that the speaker of the assembly can exercise the powers of the presidency up until, but no later than, October 23 (90 days from the vacancy). This implies that a new president must be sworn in by that date.

CANDIDATES

When Tunisians head to the polls on September 15 (September 13-15 abroad), they will choose from a diverse array of presidential candidates. On August 14, ISIE provisionally approved 26 candidates, after nearly 100 people submitted paperwork to run for president.²⁴ ISIE will publish the final list on August 31 following the conclusion of an appeals period. The formal campaigning period for the presidency will be between August 31 and September 11 outside of Tunisia (for expatriate voters) and between September 2 and 13 inside of Tunisia. This will be followed by an “electoral silence period,” during which campaigning is prohibited, on September 12 abroad and September 14 within Tunisia, in advance of the respective election days for expatriate and resident voters.

According to the constitution, every male and female Tunisian who is Tunisian-born, whose religion is Islam, who does not hold a second nationality, and who is at least 35 years old at the time of filing an application for candidacy has the right to run for president. In order to qualify for the presidential contest, a candidate must be endorsed either by ten members of the ARP, 40 chairpersons of local councils, or 10,000 registered voters across at least ten separate parliamentary constituencies with a minimum of 500 voters per constituency.

Several of the candidates who have qualified are notable or even controversial. The candidacy

of Nabil Karoui, a populist businessman who has been charged with money laundering, has been a particular source of contention. In June, parliament passed an amendment to the electoral law that would bar the candidacy of anyone who accepted or provided funding through “charitable associations,” received foreign funding within one year of an election, or engaged in dialogue deemed to be in opposition to democratic principles.²⁵ The bill was widely understood to be intended to disqualify the popular Karoui, who runs a charity, as well as Abir Moussi, who has advocated for returning to the system of government under the dictatorship. Essebsi did not sign the amendments before his death and Prime Minister Youssef Chahed ultimately declared them void.

Another important development in 2019 is Ennahda’s recent decision to run a presidential candidate.²⁶ Wary of the Muslim Brotherhood’s precedent in Egypt, the party had previously abstained from nominating one of its own members for the presidency in favor of supporting a consensus candidate. In putting forward Abdelfattah Mourou, the party’s vice president, Ennahda has calculated that Tunisia’s political system has matured enough to be run by a member of the once-outlawed movement.

The following are brief sketches of 12 of the most prominent candidates (in alphabetical order).

24. “Tunisia approves 26 candidates for presidential election,” *The National*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/tunisia-approves-26-candidates-for-presidential-election-1.898335>

25. Tarek Amara, “Tunisia approves law excluding presidential candidate leading in polls,” *Reuters*, June 18, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-election/tunisia-approves-law-excluding-presidential-candidate-leading-in-polls-idUSKCN1TJ234>

26. Jihen Laghmari and Tarek El-Tablawy, “Islamists Buck Regional Crackdown With Tunisia Presidential Bid,” *Bloomberg*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-06/tunisia-islamist-party-to-name-presidential-candidate-chairman>



ABBOU, 53, is a veteran human rights activist and lawyer who is running for president as the representative of his Attayar Addimoqrati (“Democratic Current”) party. The former director of the Association of Young Lawyers of Tunisia and a member of the International Association for the Support of Political Prisoners, he has focused his legal practice on defending the rights of those who have been targeted for peacefully expressing their opinions, providing legal services on a pro bono basis. As an opposition activist during the Ben Ali regime, Abbou was arrested in March 2005 and served more than two years in prison after being convicted on charges of disrupting public order and insulting the judiciary.²⁷ According to watchdog groups, the reason for Abbou’s imprisonment was likely his articles criticizing torture and corruption under Ben Ali²⁸ and condemning the former president’s invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to attend a UN summit in Tunis.²⁹ Abbou’s wife,

Samia, is also an activist and a member of Attayar, and currently represents Tunis in the ARP.³⁰

Following Ben Ali’s overthrow, Abbou was elected to the NCA as a member of Moncef Marzouki’s Congress for the Republic party (CPR), which has since merged into the al-Irada party, and appointed minister of administrative reform in Hamadi Jebali’s government.³¹ He resigned from the cabinet in 2012, expressing frustration that he had not been given sufficient authority to pursue reforms and to fight corruption,³² and in 2013 left the CPR to found his own party.³³ Attayar, a center-left party, has gained traction among young voters in marginalized areas of central and southern Tunisia who want strong action against corruption and a break with the status quo.³⁴ Abbou says he is running for president to fight endemic corruption and to redress the socio-economic inequities pervasive in the country’s marginalized regions. Abbou supports gender equality in inheritance, pledging to hold a referendum on Tunisia’s inheritance law, and has vowed as president to sign the June 2019 amendments to the electoral law that Essebsi opposed.³⁵ In pre-moratorium polling, Abbou garnered backing in the low-to-mid single digits. He has drawn support from independent and undecided voters seeking a candidate they believe is “clean” and committed to fighting corruption.

27. “IBAHRI welcomes release of Tunisian lawyer and human rights activist Moahammed Abbou from Kep Prison,” International Bar Association, August 3, 2007, <https://www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid=62A7A6A0-3D7A-4A46-BE71-1A71B005C7E0>

28. “Human rights activist Mohammed Abbou is freed after two and a half years in jail,” Reporters Without Borders, July 24, 2007, <https://rsf.org/en/news/human-rights-activist-mohammed-abbou-freed-after-two-and-half-years-jail>

29. “Freedom for Mohamed Abbou,” Index on Censorship Statement, July 26, 2007, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2007/07/freedom-for-mohamed-abbou/>

30. Yassine Essid, “Portrait croisé: Mohamed et Samia Abbou ou les deux font la paire,” Kapitalis [Fr], March 3, 2019, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2019/03/03/portrait-croise-mohamed-et-samia-abbou-ou-les-deux-font-la-paire/>

31. “Mohamed Abbou, candidat du Courant Démocrate (Attayar) à la présidentielle,” HuffPost Maghreb [Fr], April 22, 2019, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/mohamed-abbou-candidat-du-courant-democrate-attayar-a-la-presidentielle_mg_5cbd8161e4b068d795ce7728

32. Jill Langlois, “Tunisia: Mohammed Abbou resigns,” Public Radio International, June 30, 2012, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-06-30/tunisia-mohammed-abbou-resigns>

33. HuffPost Maghreb, “Mohamed Abbou, candidat du Courant Démocrate (Attayar) à la présidentielle.”

34. Chomiak, “Tunisian Politics Splinters as Presidential Election Approaches.”

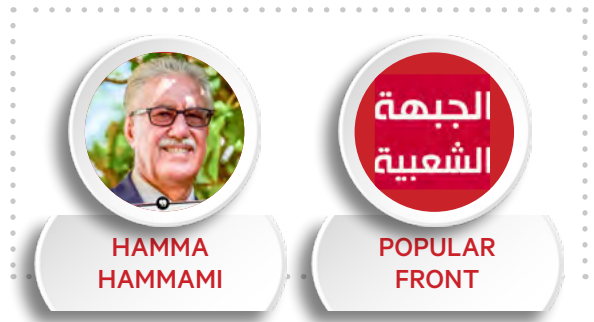
35. “S’il était élu président, Mohamed Abbou promulguerait la loi électorale amendée et l’égalité successorale,” African Manager [Fr], August 23, 2019, <https://africanmanager.com/sil-etait-elu-president-mohamed-abbou-promulguerait-la-loi-electorale-amendee-et-legalite-successorale/>



CHAHED, 43, who became head of government (prime minister) in August 2016, was long anticipated to announce his candidacy for president. Polling published earlier this year suggested he was one of the frontrunners, garnering as much as 20 percent in one poll, but more recent polls, released before the pre-election moratorium, put him at between seven and eight percent.³⁶ (In accordance with the electoral law, a moratorium on publishing election polls has been in effect since mid-July.) Upon formally announcing his candidacy on August 9, Chahed declared, “Tunisia needs a president to challenge old mindsets and restore hope among young people.”³⁷ His candidacy will likely be a referendum on his record as prime minister, including his controversial campaign against corruption that opponents have criticized as politicized, his promotion of economic reforms mandated by the IMF that have antagonized Tunisia’s powerful labor union, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT), and his efforts to secure the country following several deadly terrorist attacks.

Formerly a member of Nidaa Tounes, Chahed was expelled from the party in 2018 following a fallout with Essebsi over control of the

government, and with Essebsi’s son Hafedh over control of the party, pushing Chahed to lead his own party, Tayha Tounes.³⁸ Before becoming prime minister, Chahed was trained as an agronomist and served as secretary of state for fisheries from 2015 to 2016 and as minister of local affairs in 2016. He is the grandson of Radhia Haddad, a feminist activist who became the first female member of Tunisia’s parliament in 1959.³⁹ On August 20, Chahed announced that he would renounce his French citizenship, as the Tunisian constitution does not allow presidents to hold dual nationality.⁴⁰ (Chahed had not previously revealed publicly that he held dual French-Tunisian citizenship.) He also delegated his powers to the Minister of Public Service, Kamal Morjane, in order to focus on the campaign and avoid perceptions of a conflict of interest.⁴¹



HAMMAMI, 67, is a prominent leftist activist, having been involved with El Amal Ettounsi and the Communist Workers’ Party for much of his life.⁴² Persecuted by both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes for his political activity, Hammami spent significant time in prison and experienced physical torture at the hands of regime members.⁴³ He is the presidential candidate of the Popular Front, a coalition of nine leftist parties,

36. Maher Chaabane, “Tunisie: Le duo Youssef Chahed – Kais Saied, reste le favori des sondages,” Tunis Webdo [Fr], March 27, 2019, <http://www.webdo.tn/2019/03/27/tunisie-le-duo-youssef-chahed-kais-saied-reste-le-favori-des-sondages/>

37. Tarek Amara, “Tunisian PM Chahed enters crowded race in presidential vote,” Reuters, August 9, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-election/tunisian-pm-chahed-enters-crowded-race-in-presidential-vote-idUSKCN1UZ0TE>

38. “Tunisia’s secular opposition forms new party,” Al Jazeera, January 27, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/tunisia-secular-opposition-forms-party-190127184640202.html>

39. “Qui est Youssef Chahed?” Business News [Fr], August 3, 2016, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/qui-est-youssef-chahed-,520,66172,3>

40. “Youssef Chahed says he held 2nd nationality before filing presidential nomination papers,” Tunis Afrique Presse, August 20, 2019, <https://www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Politics/11743911-youssef-chahed-says>

41. “Tunisian PM delegates his powers to focus on presidential race,” Reuters, August 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-election-chahed/tunisian-pm-delegates-his-powers-to-focus-on-presidential-race-idUSKCN1VC24X>

42. “Qui est Hamma Hammami?” Directinfo [Fr], November 6, 2014, <https://directinfo.webmanagercenter.com/2014/11/06/qui-est-hamma-hammami/>

43. Najma Kousri Labidi, “Hamma Hammami, de la clandestinité à l’élection présidentielle (INTERVIEWS, PHOTOS, VIDÉOS),” HuffPost Maghreb [Fr], November 27, 2014, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/11/27/hamma-elections-2014_n_6210830.html

for the second consecutive election. Hammami exceeded expectations in 2014, finishing third with nearly 8 percent of the vote.⁴⁴

Hammami's appeal stems from his perceived integrity as a long-suffering activist, his opposition to both the secular authoritarianism of the ancien régime and to the Islamist politics of Ennahda, and his critique of unpopular economic reforms pursued by successive Tunisian governments. Distancing himself from communism, he has advocated for reforming the nation's security apparatus and spoken out against the 2017 Administrative Reconciliation Law that grants immunity from prosecution for corruption to public officials from the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes.⁴⁵ Most polls released prior to the election moratorium put Hammami in the low single digits. Hammami likely will struggle to compete with better-funded populist candidates who share his aversion to neoliberal economic policies and suspicion of Islamism.



JEBALI, 70, is a former prime minister and a former member of Ennahda. An engineer by training, he joined Ennahda in the late 1970s and was the editor-in-chief of *al-Fajr*, its now-defunct weekly newspaper. Jebali was imprisoned on multiple occasions due to his opposition to the Ben Ali regime, including from 1992 to 2006,

and spent ten years in solitary confinement.⁴⁶ A reformist within Ennahda who served as the party's secretary-general and emphasized national reconciliation after the 2011 revolution, he is running as an independent in the 2019 race.

After the revolution, Jebali served for just over a year (December 2011-March 2013) as prime minister in the Troika government, which comprised the Ennahda, Congress for the Republic, and Ettakatol parties. After the shocking February 2013 assassination by radical Salafis of Popular Front politician Chokri Belaid, for which some anti-Islamist Tunisians held Ennahda at least indirectly responsible, Jebali called for the Troika to be replaced by a technocratic national unity government. Ennahda rejected the idea, and Jebali stepped down.⁴⁷ In 2014, Jebali left Ennahda because of policy differences with the party leadership, including over its preference for Essebsi in that year's presidential race.⁴⁸ Jebali is running on his purported competency and ability to forge consensus across political divides.⁴⁹ In polling released before mid-July, he was supported by just one to two percent of respondents.



JOMAA, 57, is running on behalf of the Al Badil Ettounsi ("Tunisian Alternative") party, which he founded in 2017. Prior to joining the government in 2013 as minister of industry

44. "Hamma Hammami, officiellement candidat du Front populaire à la présidentielle," HuffPost Maghreb [Fr], March 20, 2019, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/hamma-hammami-officiellement-candidat-du-front-populaire-a-la-presidentielle_mg_5c925689e4b0d952b2222ca0

45. Labidi, "Hamma Hammami."

46. Cecile Feuillatre, "Hamadi Jebali: The face of moderate Islamism in Tunisia," *National Post*, October 26, 2011, <https://nationalpost.com/news/hamadi-jebali-the-face-of-moderate-islamism-in-tunisia>; see also Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (New York: Hurst Publishers, 2017), xvii.

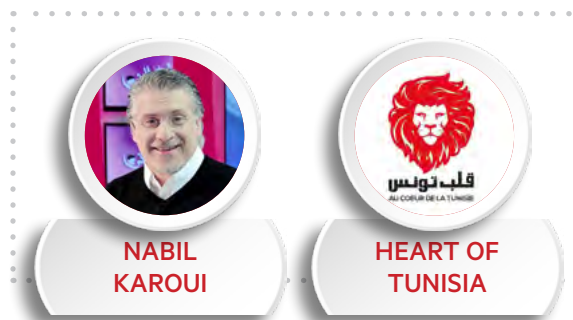
47. Angélique Chrisafis, "Tunisian PM resigns sparking credit rating downgrade," *The Guardian*, February 19, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/20/tunisia-prime-minister-turmoil>

48. Alex MacDonald, "Former Tunisian PM Hamad Jebali leaves Ennahda party," Middle East Eye, December 11, 2014, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/former-tunisian-pm-hamad-jebali-leaves-ennahda-party>

49. "Hamadi Jebali: 'I will run for president, I might lead Ennahda movement again,'" Middle East Monitor, September 21, 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180921-hamadi-jebali-i-will-run-for-president-i-might-lead-ennahda-movement-again/>

under Ennahda Prime Minister Ali Larayedh (Jebali's successor), Jomaa, an engineer, had no political experience.⁵⁰ In 2014, he was named interim prime minister by the national dialogue convention convened to forge a new consensus on the democratic transition after it was nearly derailed by the Belaid assassination and the July 2013 killing of another Popular Front leader, Mohamed Brahmi.⁵¹ Jomaa served as prime minister for just over a year, a tenure that included overseeing the successful completion of the new constitution in January 2014. His performance as interim prime minister was viewed favorably by the Tunisian public, as he was credited with keeping the democratic transition on track during a time of heightened political polarization.

In announcing his candidacy for president, Jomaa emphasized the lack of "trust" between the political elite and citizens in Tunisia, which he said is making the democratic process difficult.⁵² Jomaa has previously expressed opposition to the Chahed government's economic policies,⁵³ and has proposed a technology-centered economic program to provide more opportunities to young Tunisians.⁵⁴ In polls, Jomaa, known as a centrist technocrat, has consistently earned support in the low single digits.



KAROU, 56, an advertising and media mogul who was close to the Ben Ali regime, will run on behalf of his new Qalb Tounes ("Heart of Tunisia") party. Since 2017, Karoui has been engaging in charitable work through his Khalil Tounes Foundation, named for his son, who died in a car accident in 2016. Karoui co-owns Nessma TV, one of Tunisia's major television broadcasters, which he has used to publicize his philanthropy and promote political causes including his personal political standing.⁵⁵ Following the revolution, Karoui was a major supporter of Beji Caid Essebsi, helping to put him back on the political radar soon after Ben Ali's overthrow, and was one of the founders of Nidaa Tounes in 2014. He has since become a vocal critic of Chahed, arguing that he is trying to turn Tunisia into a "police state."⁵⁶

When Karoui announced his candidacy in May 2019, he stressed his experience in charitable work across the country, saying he "met people [and] helped them, neighborhood by neighborhood" and "saw the difficulty in which these people live."⁵⁷ Short on specifics, Karoui has sought to appeal to voters by positioning himself as a champion of the poor. His populist

50. "Tunisia's PM-designate is a little-known newcomer," Daily News Egypt, December 15, 2013, <https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/12/15/tunisia-pm-designate-is-a-little-known-newcomer/>

51. Daily News Egypt, "Tunisia's PM-designate."

52. "Election présidentielle: Mehdi Jomaa annonce sa candidature," Tunis Afrique Presse [Fr], August 4, 2019, <https://www.tap.info.tn/fr/Portail-Politique/11701373-election>

53. Frédéric Bobin, "Mehdi Jomaa: 'The current leaders of Tunisia lack vision,'" *Le Monde* [Fr], January 24, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/01/24/mehdi-jomaa-les-dirigeants-actuels-de-la-tunisie-manquent-de-vision_5246491_3212.html

54. LM, "Tunisie – Alors qu'ils sont utilisés pour le souiller, Mehdi Jomaa appelle à la promotion des réseaux sociaux," *Tunisie Numérique* [Fr], August 18, 2019, <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-alors-qu'ils-sont-utilises-pour-le-souiller-mehdi-jomaa-appelle-a-la-promotion-des-reseaux-sociaux/>

55. Layli Foroudi, "Rise of Nabil Karoui, the Arab Berlusconi on course for Tunisian presidency," *The Times*, June 17, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rise-of-nabil-karoui-the-arab-berlusconi-on-course-for-tunisian-presidency-0tn7v82kz>

56. "Dans une interview accordée au Figaro, Nabil Karoui s'en prend à Youssef Chahed et au gouvernement," *HuffPost Maghreb* [Fr], May 7, 2019, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/dans-une-interview-accordee-au-figaro-nabil-karoui-sen-prend-encore-a-youssef-chahed-et-au-gouvernement_mg_5cd19e81e4b0548b73605948

57. "Tunisia media magnate announces presidential bid," *France 24*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190528-tunisia-media-magnate-announces-presidential-bid>

message is likely to strike a chord with many Tunisians faced with unemployment, shoddy government services, and other economic difficulties since the revolution.

In July 2019, Tunisia's judiciary charged Karoui and his brother on money laundering charges in relation to a complaint filed by local watchdog group IWATCH that accused them of committing tax fraud.⁵⁸ As the complaint was originally filed in 2017 and the government did not take action on it until this summer, there have been accusations that the charges, which were accompanied by an asset freeze and a travel ban, were politically motivated.⁵⁹ On August 23, Karoui and his brother were arrested, and on the same day, the Tunisian media authority banned Nessma TV (and two other media outlets) from reporting on the election for broadcasting "illegally" without a license.⁶⁰ Notably, Tunisian law does not prohibit individuals suspected (but not convicted) of criminal activity from running for office and, even in the event of conviction, a candidate is only disqualified if the verdict explicitly says so.⁶¹

The government has denied any political motivations behind its treatment of Karoui. The ARP's June electoral law amendments, however, would have banned him from running for office because he allegedly has used his charity and TV station to support his campaign. As mentioned above, Essebsi did not sign the amendments before he died⁶² and Chahed indicated that the matter will not be pursued further.⁶³ Karoui is widely perceived as one of the frontrunners for

the presidency, having consistently polled above 20 percent.



MARZOUK, 54, is the founder of the Machrou' Tounes (Project Tunisia) party and was the campaign manager for Essebsi's 2014 presidential campaign. During the Ben Ali era, Marzouk was an activist with the far-left El Amal Ettounsi movement, joined the El Taller Foundation, an international NGO affiliated with Nelson Mandela, and founded the Al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center, an organization that connects democracy activists in the Middle East and North Africa with like-minded actors around the world.⁶⁴

Marzouk served as secretary-general of Nidaa Tounes until January 2016, when he resigned in protest over its alliance with Ennahda and over Essebsi's son Hafedh's rising influence within the party.⁶⁵ Like several other candidates, including Karoui and Abdelkrim Zbidi, Marzouk has expressed support for revising the post-revolution political system to return to a presidential system

58. "Qui est Nabil Karoui, ce magnat des médias et candidat à la présidentielle tunisienne inculpé pour blanchiment d'argent," La Libre [Fr], July 10, 2019, <https://www.lalibre.be/international/qui-est-nabil-karoui-ce-magnat-des-medias-et-candidat-a-la-presidentielle-tunisienne-inculpe-pour-blanchiment-d-argent-5d24c6fb9978e235faf00925>

59. Tarek Amara, "Tunisian police switch off broadcasts of private TV station," Reuters, April 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-censorship/tunisian-police-switch-off-broadcasts-of-private-tv-station-idUSKCN1S110J>

60. "Tunisian media mogul and presidential candidate Nabil Karoui arrested," France 24, August 23, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190823-tunisia-media-mogul-presidential-candidate-nabil-karoui-arrested-tax-evasion>; "Authorities ban 3 broadcasters from covering Tunisian poll campaign," Agence-France Presse, August 23, 2019, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/authorities-ban-3-broadcasters-from-covering-tunisian-poll-campaign/ar-AAgedPK>

61. "Tunisian media mogul 'still presidential candidate' despite arrest," France 24, August 24, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190824-tunisia-nabil-karoui-media-mogul-election-president-candidate-arrest-essebsi>

62. "Amendement de la loi électorale: Béji Caid Essebsi refuse de signer une loi d'exclusion annonce son conseiller politique," HuffPost Maghreb [Fr], July 20, 2019, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/amendement-de-la-loi-electorale-beji-caid-essebsi-refuse-de-signer-une-loi-dexclusion-annonce-son-conseiller-politique_mg_5d3308e8e4b0419fd32d7f07

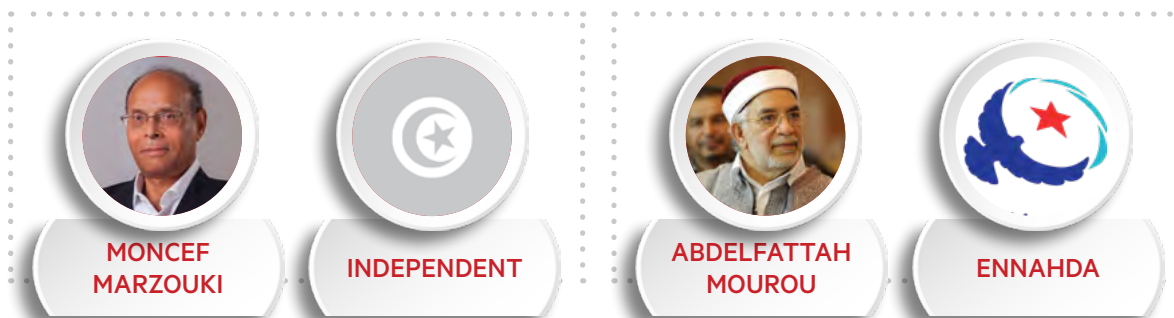
63. Simon Speakman Cordall, "Tunisia prime minister says controversial electoral law changes now 'buried,'" The National, August 3, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/tunisia-prime-minister-says-controversial-electoral-law-changes-now-buried-1.894067>

64. Scott Carpenter, "Dissident Watch: Mohsen Marzouk," *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2008, <https://www.meforum.org/1973/dissident-watch-mohsen-marzouk>

65. Tarek Amara, "Tunisia's ruling party faces splits as lawmakers quit," Reuters, January 8, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-politics/tunisias-ruling-party-faces-splits-as-lawmakers-quit-idUSKBN0UM23U20160108>

that would grant the executive more power to implement national priorities relative to the parliament.⁶⁶

for which he was arrested by Israeli authorities.⁶⁹ In polls for the 2019 contest, Marzouki's support has hovered in the mid-single digits.



MARZOUKI, 74, is competing as an independent in the 2019 race, but enjoys the support of opposition alliance Another Tunisia, which includes Marzouki's social-democratic al-Irada party, the left-leaning Wafa Movement, and a handful of independent political actors. Marzouki, a lifelong human rights activist, was formerly the head of the Tunisian League for Human Rights⁶⁷ and was imprisoned in 1994 by the Ben Ali regime for attempting to run for president.⁶⁸ Marzouki served as president from December 2011 until Essebsi took office in December 2014.

One of Marzouki's first acts as head of state was to nominate Hamadi Jebali as prime minister, a significant move in light of the long ban on the Ennahda movement under the Ben Ali regime. While in office, Marzouki also helped to establish the Truth and Dignity Commission, Tunisia's transitional justice body. In 2015, he participated in the Freedom Flotilla III to Gaza,

MOUROU, 71, is a trained lawyer and Ennahda's first presidential candidate.⁷⁰ One of the three founders of Ennahda, along with Rached Ghannouchi and Hmida Ennaifir, Mourou was arrested in 1981 and spent two years in prison. In 1991, he left Ennahda over his concerns that some of its members had incited violence, and then tried, unsuccessfully, to launch a new party.⁷¹ He subsequently kept his head down for the remainder of the Ben Ali era, continuing his work as an attorney. During the 2011 NCA elections, Mourou ran as an independent, but failed to win a seat.⁷² He subsequently rejoined Ennahda and became its vice president in 2012. In the October 2014 elections, Mourou won a seat in parliament, representing Tunis, and was then elected as the deputy speaker of parliament. Following Essebsi's death, Mourou has served as the acting interim parliamentary leader after Speaker of Parliament Ennaceur became the acting president.⁷³

66. Taieb Khouni, "Pour sortir de la crise, Mohsen Marzouk recommande un régime présidentiel," HuffPost Maghreb [Fr], January 7, 2019, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/pour-sortir-de-la-crise-mohsen-marzouk-recommande-un-regime-presidentiel_mg_5c332ce6e4b0bc4c25dbf11?utm_hp_ref=mg-machrou-tounes

67. "Chatham House Prize 2012 - Rached Ghannouchi and Moncef Marzouki," Chatham House, November 26, 2012, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-prize/2012>

68. "Tunisia's assembly elects human rights activist as interim president," Associated Press, December 14, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20111214235404/http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/assembly-set-to-elect-veteran-human-rights-activist-as-interim-tunisian-president/2011/12/12/gIQA4rC6oO_story.html

69. "Tunisia's ex-president Marzouki arrives in France after detention in Israel," Ahram Online, June 30, 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/134162/World/Region/Tunisia-expresident-Marzouki-arrive-in-France-af.aspx>

70. Jihen Laghmari and Tarek El-Tablawy, "Islamists Buck Regional Crackdown With Tunisia Presidential Bid," Bloomberg, August 6, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-06/tunisia-islamist-party-to-name-presidential-candidate-chairman>

71. "Moderate Islamists Make New Power Quest in Tunisia," *New York Times*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2019/08/21/world/middleeast/21reuters-tunisia-election-islamists.html>

72. Elizabeth Dickinson, "Can Tunisia's New Democracy Bridge the Islamist-Secular Divide?" *The Atlantic*, October 24, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/10/can-tunisia-new-democracy-bridge-the-islamist-secular-divide/247219/>

73. "Tunisie: Abdelfattah Mourou, candidat du parti islamiste Ennahda à la présidentielle," *Le Monde* [Fr], August 7, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/08/07/tunisie-abdelfattah-mourou-candidat-du-parti-islamiste-ennahda-a-la-presidentielle_5497425_3212.html

Mourou has been described as a moderate political figure, seeking to promote a more liberal understanding of Islam in politics. He has argued for strictly separating Ennahda's political and religious functions, and expressed support for a Muslim woman's right to marry a non-Muslim man. Mourou has not hesitated to criticize Ennahda publicly, a posture that has bolstered his standing with some Tunisians.⁷⁴ While Ennahda's Shura Council overwhelmingly supported him as the party's candidate in an August 6 vote, the decision to nominate a party member for the presidency is deeply controversial within Ennahda. The party resorted to fielding its own candidate only after repeated attempts to agree on a candidate from outside of Ennahda to support proved divisive. With Ennahda behind him, Mourou is nevertheless widely considered to be a frontrunner in the 2019 race.

dictatorship, and her outspoken rejection of the revolution.⁷⁵ If the ARP's June 2019 electoral law amendments had been enacted, Moussi could have been disqualified for allegedly "engaging in dialogue deemed contrary to democratic principles" through her defense of Ben Ali.

Embraced by supporters for her provocative statements, Moussi has refused to withdraw from the race in favor of Minister of Defense Abdelkrim Zbidi, despite pressure from some secular parties to rally behind a single anti-Islamist candidate. She has supported an outright ban on Islamist parties, the abolition of the parliamentary system in favor of the presidential system that existed under Ben Ali and Bourguiba, and the systematic imprisonment of LGBTQ people in Tunisia.⁷⁶ Early polls placed Moussi as one of the top candidates.



MOUSSI, 44, is president of the pro-ancien régime Free Destourian Party, comprised of former members of the Ben Ali regime, and is running as her party's nominee. A staunch secular nationalist, she previously served as an official in Ben Ali's ruling party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD). When the RCD was outlawed shortly after the 2011 revolution, Moussi made a name for herself by serving as the lawyer for many former party officials. She is one of the most controversial candidates in this year's election due to her virulent opposition to Ennahda and Islamism, her praise of the Ben Ali

SAÏED, 61, a constitutional law professor at the University of Tunis, is new to electoral politics. A populist with deeply conservative views on social issues and law and order, he supports the resurrection of the death penalty, which Tunisia suspended in 1994, and has referred to homosexuality as an illness and a foreign plot.⁷⁷ Nicknamed "the robot" for his use of classical Arabic in speeches and his stiff mannerisms, Saïed has nevertheless cast himself as a man of the people, vowing that if elected he would continue to reside in his home instead of in the presidential palace in Carthage.⁷⁸

74. Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, xix-xx.

75. Brahim Oueslati and Fawzia Zouari, "Tunisie: Abir Moussi, portrait d'une Benaliste convaincue," *Jeune Afrique* [Fr], March 19, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/749576/politique/tunisie-abir-moussi-portrait-dune-benaliste-convaincue/>

76. Ayda Labassi, "LADHEOS appelle à interdire l'espace Schengen à Abir Moussi," *HuffPost Maghreb* [Fr], August 31, 2018, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/ladheos-appelle-a-interdire-lespace-schengen-a-abir-moussi_mg_5b8825c3e4b0162f4720c0a4

77. "Kaïs Saïed: j'éliminerai les élections législatives et je suis pour la peine de mort," *Business News* [Fr], June 11, 2019, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/Ka%C3%AFs-Sa%C3%AFed--j%E2%80%99%C3%A9liminerai-les-%C3%A9lections-l%C3%A9gislatives-et-je-suis-pour-la-peine-de-mort,520,88453,3>

78. Yusra Nemlaghi, "Kaïs Saïed affirme qu'il ne votera même pas pour lui même," *Kapitalis* [Fr], June 11, 2019, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2019/06/11/presidentielle-kais-saied-affirme-quil-ne-votera-meme-pas-pour-lui-meme/>

Saïed is an independent who has never belonged to a political party, and his candidacy appeals to the growing number of Tunisians who have become disillusioned with the country's political parties. He is campaigning on a series of measures designed to "restore power" to the Tunisian public, including allowing voters to recall elected officials, and abolishing parliamentary elections in favor of having parliamentarians chosen by local and regional councils.⁷⁹ One Tunisian newspaper described Saïed as a "free electron shaking up the political scene."⁸⁰ In pre-moratorium polling, he was one of a few candidates who consistently garnered double-digit support.



ZBIDI, 69, who recently resigned as minister of defense, is running as an independent and is seen as a technocrat with support from several secular parties. Prior to his career in government, Zbidi was a medical doctor, occupying a variety of academic positions.⁸¹ Under the Ben Ali regime, he was a member of the RCD, serving as secretary of state to the prime minister for scientific research and technology (1999-2000), minister

of public health (2001), and minister of scientific research and technology (2002). Following the 2011 revolution, Zbidi was appointed minister of defense on two separate occasions, in 2011 and 2017.

Upon declaring his candidacy, Zbidi indicated that he would be "the president of all Tunisians, whatever their membership and their orientations," an apparent reference to a willingness to work with Islamists in contrast to other candidates who have adopted a harder anti-Islamist stance.⁸² He has repeated an openness to power-sharing on other occasions.⁸³ At other times, however, Zbidi has assumed a more anti-Islamist stance, vowing to accelerate investigations into Ennahda's alleged "secret apparatus" and any connection it may have had to the Belaid and Brahmi assassinations. He has also come out in support of amending the constitution to "create a balance between democracy and freedoms and the effectiveness of state institutions," which appears to be a reference to strengthening the presidency and diminishing the powers of the parliament; reopening the Tunisian embassy in Damascus; enhancing counterterrorism efforts; and pursuing a comprehensive political, economic, and social reconciliation with members of the Ben Ali regime.⁸⁴ On August 1, Afek Tounes party president Yassine Brahim announced that his party would back Zbidi, declaring, "We do not see today a better candidate...I saw his work and I especially saw his influence abroad."⁸⁵ Parts of Nidaa Tounes also have declared support for Zbidi.⁸⁶

79. "Kaïs Saïed: 'Je me présenterai aux Présidentielles en tant qu'indépendant,'" Tunis Webdo [Fr], March 23, 2019, <http://www.webdo.tn/2019/03/23/kais-saied-je-me-presenterai-aux-presidentielles-en-tant-quindependant/>

80. Yüstra Nemlaghi, "Présidentielle: Kaïs Saïed affirme qu'il ne votera même pas pour lui-même!" Kapitalis [Fr], June 11, 2019, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2019/06/11/presidentielle-kais-saied-affirme-quil-ne-votera-meme-pas-pour-lui-meme/>

81. "Portrait de Abdelkrim Zbidi, ministre de la Défense nationale," Tunisie Numerique [Fr], December 25, 2011, <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/portrait-de-abdelkrim-zbidi-ministre-de-la-defense-nationale/92239>

82. Maher Chaabane, "Abdelkrim Zbidi révèle pourquoi il a décidé de briguer la magistrature suprême," Tunis Webdo [Fr], August 7, 2019, <http://www.webdo.tn/2019/08/07/abdelkrim-zbidi-revele-pourquoi-il-a-decide-de-briguer-la-magistrature-supreme/>

83. Tarek Amara and Angus McDowall, "Tunisia's Zbidi says he will amend constitution if elected president," Reuters, August 28, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-election-zbidi/tunisia-zbidi-says-he-will-amend-constitution-if-elected-president-idUSKCN1V11DR>

84. "These are Abdul Karim Zbidi's five pledges," Tuniscope [Ar], August 15, 2019, <https://www.tuniscope.com/ar/article/182529/arabe/politique/zbidi-292718>

85. "Présidentielle anticipée: Afek Tounes soutiendra Abdelkrim Zbidi, s'il est candidat," HuffPost Maghreb [Fr], August 1, 2019, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/presidentielle-anticipee-afek-tounes-soutiendra-abdelkrim-zbidi-sil-est-candidat_mg_5d42ffdb4b0ca604e2e6ed0

86. "Tunisia's Nidaa Tounes party 'supports Minister of Defence as presidential candidate,'" Middle East Monitor, August 7, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190807-tunisia-nidaa-tounes-party-supports-minister-of-defence-as-presidential-candidate/>

