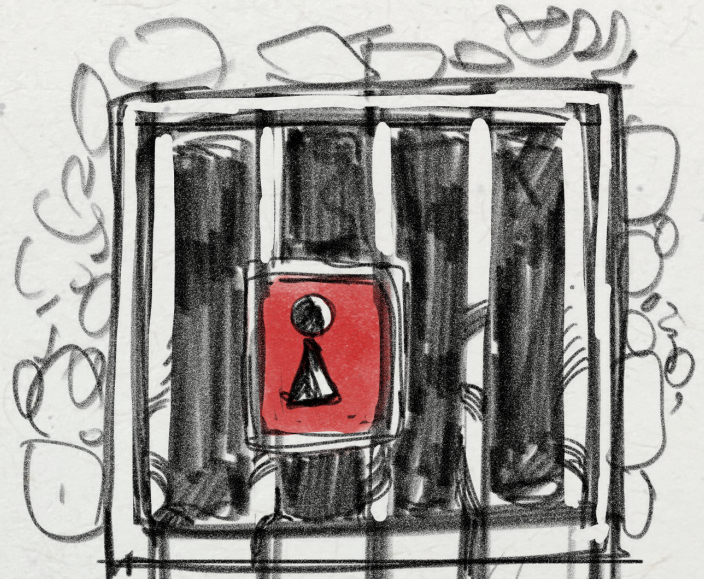


**PRISON, EXTORTION,  
AND THREAT:  
THE PRICE OF  
WOMEN'S  
PARTICIPATION IN  
PUBLIC SPACE**







# Prison, Extortion, and Threat: The Price of Women's Participation in Public Space

Mars 2024

Intersection Association  
for Rights and Freedoms (IARF)

[www.intersection.uno](http://www.intersection.uno)  
[info@intersection.uno](mailto:info@intersection.uno)







## Contents

<b>Introduction:</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Methodology:</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Background:</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Description of Violations After July 25th:</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>Women Politicians in Tunisia: Between Systemic Targeting and An Unknown Future</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Women Journalists and lawyers in Tunisia: Victims of Restrictions on Freedom of Opinion and Speech</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Feminists and Civil Activists Under Oppression:</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Gender-based Violence Against Women in The Digital Space:</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Forms of Digital Violence Against Women:</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Verbal Abuse:</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Degrading The Female Identity:</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Gender and racial insults:</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Invasion of Privacy:</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Transferring direct violence to the digital space:</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>The effects of digital violence on victims:</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Conclusion:</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>38</b>



حرارة نسوي

  
OMRANE CARTOONS

## Introduction:

Today, Tunisia faces a pressing challenge that threatens the democratic path initiated by the December 17th, 2010 - January 14th, 2011 revolution, which is the decline in women's political engagement. Several achievements have been reached as a result of the work and struggles of the feminist movement over ten years in steps towards full and effective equality, such as the inclusion of parity in the electoral law, which had increased the ratio of female representation in the 2014 parliament to 73 women at a 31% rate, representing one-third of the total number of members of parliament, the highest rate in the Arab World.

The state has also officially lifted all reservations on the Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as of April 2014, making it the first country in the region to do so. Thus, the law No. 58 of 2017 on the elimination of violence against women and children was passed by a parliamentary majority. In September of the same year, former President Beji Caid El Sebsi ordered the repeal of some legal publications such as No.73, which forbids Tunisian women from marrying non-Muslims.

After the implementation of the special procedures by President Kais Saïd on July 25th, 2021, resulting in the suspension and subsequent dissolution of the parliament months later, the dissolution of the Higher Judicial Council on February 13th, 2022, and the dismissal of the government; a new constitution was put in place, transforming the parliamentary system into a presidential one with extensive powers for the president. The electoral law was amended from elections of lists to elections of

individuals, in addition to the elimination of the parity principle without any consideration of the societal and cultural reality, which had directly led to a decline in women's presence in the parliament to 16%, a rate not seen in Tunisia since 2011.

On the other hand, Tunisia faces an alarming decline in women's rights and attempts to exclude them from the political, civil, and media scenes. Moreover, rates of violence against women have increased to reach record levels, including gender-based killings exceeding 25 murder cases in 2023 alone.

This decline has negatively impacted Tunisia's democratic path, where women's participation is crucial for building a just and balanced democratic society. To further understand these negative impacts, several overlapping factors should be taken into consideration. Foremost among them is the volatile political context, where President Kaid Said's actions have led to the marginalization of women as hate speech and violence against them increase, constituting an additional obstacle as they face numerous challenges such as verbal and physical harassment, threats, and killings; therefore undermining their possibilities of effective participation in public life. Additionally, social and cultural factors continue to play a major role in reducing women's role in society. Some practices and traditions still hinder women's participation in public life, such as the inferior perception of women and marginalizing their role in society, which may threaten gender balance based on justice and equality.

The report examines the types of violence that female activists in these different fields have experienced and the forms it has taken, based on women's vulnerability and exclusion from the civil sphere and public life. The report also aims to monitor violations against female civil and political activists and human rights defenders, as well as women who have been violated due to their participation in public life, especially those working in the press, media, and legal profession. The report also addresses digital violence against women activists in the public sphere and concludes with a set of recommendations for various decision-makers to stop these abuses against women.





## Methodology:

This report was based on direct interviews and phone calls with victims of violations, data collected from civil society organizations and parties, and information from the media and social media networks. It also included analysis of reports and research from human rights and feminist organizations. It included collecting testimonies from women who were subjected to attacks related to their work in the media or law, or as human rights activists and political activists.

The report also drew information from reliable Tunisian and international human rights sources. The accuracy of this information was verified by comparing various media reports and data. The names and identities of the victims and sources used have been anonymized to ensure their safety and prevent harassment. The cases in the report refer to some but not all violations against women human rights defenders in Tunisia, emphasizing the impunity that encompasses various security, judicial, and political bodies, especially when women are targeted.

## Background:

Since July 25th, 2022, Tunisia has taken a dangerous turn characterized by an obvious decline in liberties and human rights. Authorities have taken extraordinary measures that restricted freedom of speech, assembly, and association, imposed restrictions on the work of the media, and exercised an oppressive policy against opponents and activists. Subsequently, authorities took steps to muzzle and control the media, targeting journalists and repeatedly prosecuting them under certain legislations limiting freedom of speech and silencing any voice critical of authorities.

The country then witnessed a wave of arrests and prosecutions targeting journalists, activists, and politicians in a context of attrition to the independence of the judiciary, and trials are now being used as a tool to oppress the opposition and settle political scores. As usual, women are not safe from this authoritarian approach. Independent female activists have faced a campaign of aggression, discrimination, and defamation through the violation of their basic rights. They were subjected to multiple forms of violence. They also faced obstacles in accessing justice and enjoying their right to fair trials, which contributed to the silent majority of women's reluctance to enter the political, civil, and media space. Repressive practices were not confined to the real world but extended to the digital world where social media platforms were used to spread hate speech, defamation, and violence.

This decline in liberties and human rights poses a serious threat to Tunisia's democratic path. It undermines the basis of the state of law and civil society, and diminishes women's march toward emancipation and equality, returning Tunisia to the square of political authoritarianism and patriarchy.

## **Description of Violations After July 25th:**

Since July 25, 2021, several journalists, lawyers, members of the former parliament, political figures, and a former president have been prosecuted for their opposition to the president's domination of the legislative, judicial, and executive powers. The arbitrary phase began with a campaign of arrests in the form of military trials, referrals of bloggers, and house arrest decisions for several people without disclosing the legal reasons behind them.

21 people, including opposition, legal, and business figures, are being investigated as part of the so-called "conspiracy" case. At least seven people have been arbitrarily detained pending these investigations, including opposition activists Jawhar Ben Mbarak and Issam Chebbi, politicians Khayem al-Turki and Abdelhamid Jelassi, and lawyers Ghazi Chaouachi and Ridha Belhadj. Authorities released activist Chaima Aissa and lawyer Lazhar Akrami after a large advocacy campaign for their release, but the same charges are still being investigated, as is the forced displacement of feminist Bochra Belhaj Hmida and the threat of prosecution and imprisonment upon her return.

The detainees were interrogated. Many face trumped-up charges of conspiracy under the use of 10 articles of the Tunisian Penal Code, including Article 72, which stipulates the death penalty for those who attempt to "change the form of the state." They also face several charges under the 2015 counterterrorism law, Article 32 of which stipulates up to 20 years in prison for "founders of [terrorist] organizations or unions."

Their arrests and detentions come against the backdrop of exercising their right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, all of which are rights protected by international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>1</sup>, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, to which Tunisia is a state party. Many activists and lawyers stress that the conviction files for most detainees and those being persecuted do not contain any legal evidence of charges or suspicions that could amount to crimes recognized by international or domestic law and that the charges brought against them do not have any clear legal basis.

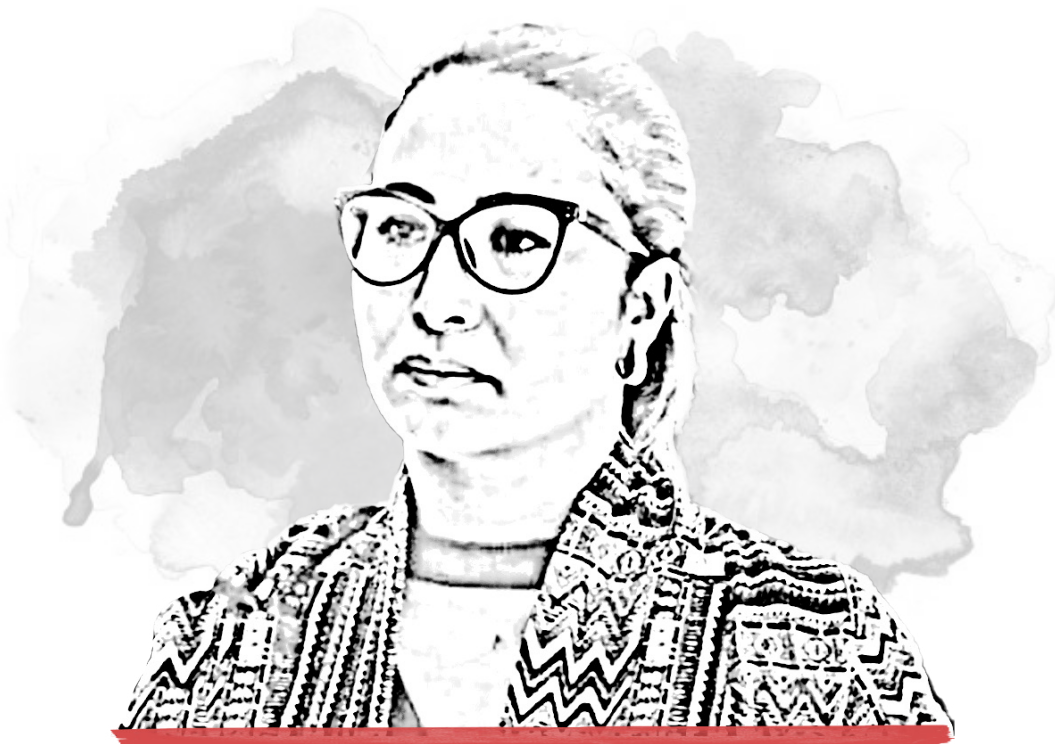
For several months, Tunisia has been witnessing a wave of political arrests and judicial prosecutions that included journalists and activists, returning the independence of the judiciary to the square that surrounded it during the pre-2011 authoritarian rule. 2023 was also characterized by an unprecedented wave of hostility against sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia, whose basic rights were violated, in addition to the continuation of the policy of muzzling and attempts to domesticate the media through the imprisonment of female journalists and the repeated judicial prosecutions against them based on a legal arsenal aimed at suppressing freedom of expression, the implicit and explicit incitement to cyber violence against opponents and activists, the violation of human dignity and defamation of the private lives of anyone who disagrees or criticizes the ruling authorities, and the corresponding procrastination and neglect of cases filed against abuse of power, in addition to libel and slander, which puts us in the face of a double standard of justice in favor of “supporters” against opponents.

---

1 United Nations, 1966, Office of the High Commissioner, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, December, accessed: 11/15/2023  
<https://www.ohchr.org/ar/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-right>



# Women Politicians in Tunisia: Between Systemic Targeting and An Unknown Future



## 1/ Chaima Aissa: Leader of The National Redemption Front

On January 19, 2023, activist and member of the Redemption Front Chaima Aissa appeared before the Ben Arous sub-department of criminal cases<sup>2</sup>, following a judicial mandate from the third investigating judge of the Permanent Military Court in Tunis. The charges relate to inciting military personnel by any means to disobey an order, committing a gruesome act against the head of state, and promoting and disseminating false news and rumors through information and communication networks and systems with the aim of harming public security and national defense. The charges were brought up following a statement about Kais Saied's instructions to army commanders. The charge of "conspiracy against state security" is a shorthand for several provisions included in the Penal Code in the "Attacks on Public Order" section of Book II, entitled "Various Crimes and Their Required Punishments," which spans more than twenty chapters, from Article 60 and its various subsections to Article 81. The stipulated penalties range from prison sentences to financial penalties and, in extreme cases, the death penalty; and relate to provisions that criminalize treason, destroying army morale, attacking the state's external and internal security, altering the state body, and inciting the people to attack each other. Political activist Chaima Aissa spent 141 days behind

---

<sup>2</sup> Intersection for Rights and Freedoms documented with the victim of the violation Chaima Aissa on January 20, 2023.

bars on the charges mentioned above. She was also subjected to extensive harassment inside prison, including incitement and verbal and moral violence, and went through a difficult and stressful mental state.

In a statement issued on April 6, 2023, the Defense Commission for Political Leaders in Detention expressed that the detention and imprisonment conditions are bad and poor, as Chaima was treated like those arrested in terrorism cases. Intersection for Rights and Freedoms considers these repressive acts a violation of human rights and a clear violation of the text of the Tunisian Constitution, which stipulates in Article 36 that every prisoner has the right to humane treatment that preserves his dignity. The Penal Code includes texts that are more than a century old and have always been used politically against opponents since the era of Bourguiba, under which opponents and human rights defenders of all stripes were prosecuted and grafted onto other legal frameworks, such as the Communications Code, the Code of Procedure, military penalties, the Anti-Terrorism and Prevention of Money Laundering Law revised in 2019, then Decree No. 54 under Kais Saied, especially concerning recent investigations involving several activists and dissidents. Since the eras of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, there has been a clear intention to target political opponents and intimidate judges from acquitting them, which would greatly undermine the presumption of innocence and abuse legal texts, which in turn abuse Tunisians in favor of those in power.

The news of arrests and convictions have been successive after July 25, 2021, by using legal texts, most of which contradict international treaties and constitutional guarantees, such as Decree No. 54<sup>3</sup>, which contradicts the principles of press freedom, including the freedoms of thought, expression, and publication, and explicitly undermines the gains of Decrees 115 and 116 of 2012, which represents a serious threat to all rights and freedoms. These trials have included multiple categories of female citizens and activists including lawyers, journalists, feminists, political activists, and others. They are under the threat of prison sentences, referrals for investigation, and liberty-depriving cases filed against many of them. The easy issuance of detention orders directly contradicts the principle of freedom when under investigation, and is a clear violation of the presumption of innocence when accused. The frequency of these trials threatens freedoms in Tunisia and further exacerbates the situation in the face of these practices that have become shackles on freedom of expression, sowing fear and panic among journalists, civil society activists, and human and women's rights defenders. The situation is taking a dangerous turn of increasing gender-based violence and killings in the face of state silence on these crimes against humanity.

---

3 Decree No. 54 of 2022, dated September 13, 2022, concerning the fight against crimes related to information and communication systems.  
<https://legislation-securite.tn/en/law/105348>



## **2/ Abir Moussi: Leader of The Free Destourian Party:**

Abir Moussi, head of the Free Destourian Party, was arrested on October 3, 2023, after she went to the presidential palace accompanied by the party's lawyer and an executive justice official to file a complaint challenging the decisions of the President of the Tunisian Republic regarding the local elections. Upon their refusal to deal with her, she posted a video on social media in protest and found herself accused of assault intended to change the state body or incite the people to attack each other with weapons and provoke commotion, murder, and looting on Tunisian soil. Politician Abir Moussi has been in prison since October 5, 2023, for exercising her civil and political rights guaranteed by law. Additionally, her defense team was not allowed to meet with her during her arrest, and her family was not allowed to visit her in prison. However, the violence that Abir Moussi has been subjected to does not stop at this point, it also extends to the digital space through defamation, insult campaigns, and moral and political accusations with no evidence. The security and judicial authorities did nothing to question the perpetrators or even investigate them, in a clear double standard by the official agencies, as long as the victim is an opponent or a human rights activist independent of the ruling authority.

On January 29, 2024<sup>4</sup>, the investigation into this case, consisting of two misdemeanors, was concluded. The first misdemeanor was the processing

---

<sup>4</sup> This information was documented after a phone call with Abir Moussi's lawyer, Mr. Nefaa Al-Arabi, on February 8, 2024.



of personal data and the processing of personal data without consent. The second misdemeanor is obstructing freedom of work. The victim's defense team revealed in a statement on Tuesday, January 30, 2024, that their client will be referred to the Criminal Council at the Tunis Court of First Instance, with the arrest warrant remaining in effect until her appearance before the court. However, the prosecution appealed this decision, and the victim of the violation was subsequently referred to the indictment chamber. In his testimony to Intersection, Mr. Nefaa Al-Aribi confirmed that a second case was filed against his client by the Electoral Commission (ISIE) based on Decree 54, by which a detention card was issued against her on February 1, 2024. The interrogation session was set for February 2, 2022. On February 6, 2024, Mr. Nefaa Al-Aribi said in his testimony to Intersection that he received a letter from the regional office of lawyers informing him that his client was summoned to appear on February 13, 2024, before the investigative judge for interrogation in connection with another case filed against her by the Electoral Commission (ISIE) under Decree 54.



### **3/Yamina Zoghlami: Leader in Nahdha Party**

The Nahda political activist was subjected to verbal and moral abuse among her participation in the Al Aqsa Flood demonstrations with activists within the party. During the demonstrations, she was publicly subjected to immoral acts and verbal abuse at the hands of a citizen. The prosecution did not take any action on the matter while expediting the arrest of anyone expressing opposition or even criticizing the ruling authority. Similar to other female political opposition activists, Yamina Zoghlami continues to be subjected to cyberbullying that targets both her gender as a woman and her position as a political opponent, by fabricating political and moral accusations, insulting her person, and undignifying her without any regard for the right to opposition and the right to peaceful expression and demonstration<sup>5</sup>.

5 Phone call with politician Yamenia Zoghlami in November 2023

## Women Journalists and lawyers in Tunisia: Victims of Restrictions on Freedom of Opinion and Speech

In the same context, women journalists have been arrested and prosecuted for covering political or social events, and have faced defamation campaigns and incitement to violence through media and social media. Their freedom of work has been restricted, some have been banned from writing or appearing in the media, and their online posts have been censored. Women journalists were not spared from threats and physical attacks. They faced difficulties in obtaining information and accessing locations. They also faced discriminatory treatment by authorities, which led to feelings of fear and intimidation.

### Examples of Violations Against Women Journalists in Tunisia After July 25, 2023:



#### Aroua Baraket: Journalist, Feminist, and Human Rights Advocate:

Aroua Baraket is a Tunisian journalist and human rights advocate<sup>6</sup>. She works as a communication officer for Minority Rights Group International in Tunisia. She documented the work of social movements since 2011. She also covered anti-government protests that lasted from December 2020 to September 2021.

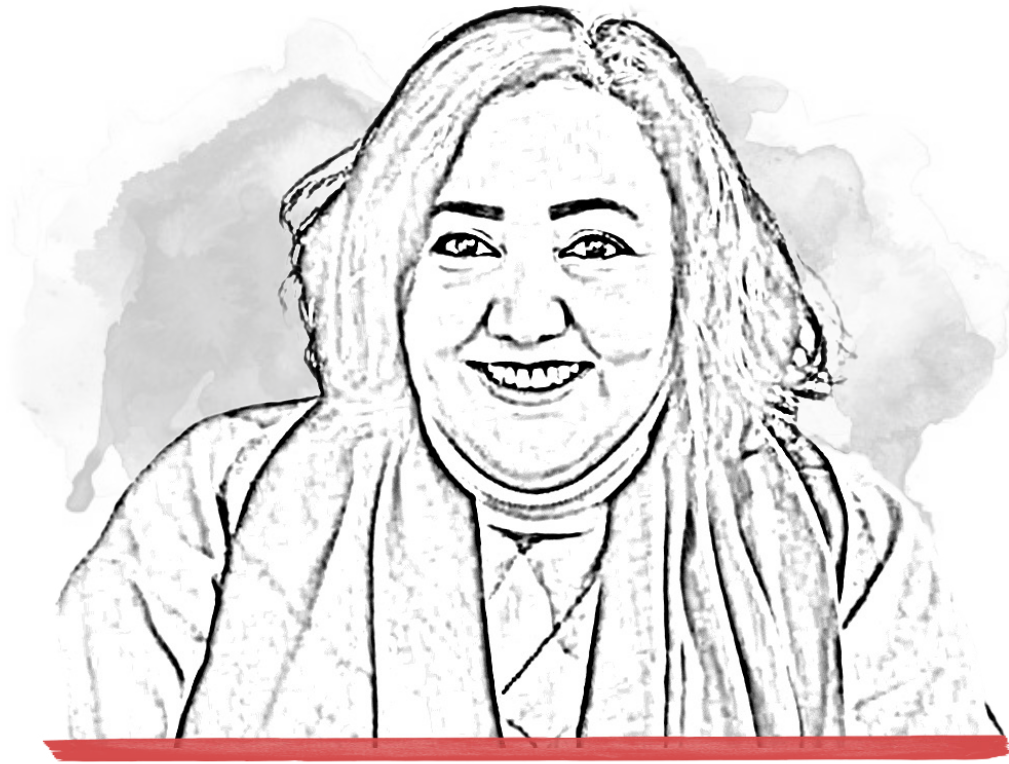
<sup>6</sup> Intersection, 2021. Faces of Freedom Platform, Case of violation against journalist Aroua Barakat, December 17, last accessed on 02/26/2024  
<https://intersection.uno/freedom-faces/%d8%a3%d8%b1%d9%88%d9%89-%d8%a8%d8%b1%d9%83%d8%a7%d8%aa/?fbclid=IwAR0tdC4cXJLKtKzQu3i1DAWIEiFzK9I8oP7yNoMLNqv9zr2z6iinWOT>

On December 17, 2021, Aroua was brutally assaulted by a police patrol. Upon filing a complaint, she was accused of aggravated assault on the perpetrating officer while on duty.

On Tuesday, September 21, 2023, Aroua was brought before the Beb Bnet Court of First Instance of Tunis. She was heard by the public prosecutor and was able to testify in response to the allegations against her. The Tunis prosecutor decided to return Aroua's file to complete the investigation in a neutral location at the National Guard Headquarters in Bardo.

On Thursday, September 30, the public prosecutor released Aroua Barakat on remand until the next hearing date. The court also issued an order for another hearing on October 22, 2021, where Aroua will face charges of "aggravated assault with extreme violence on an employee in the performance of his duties." However, the complaint of violence filed by Aroua against the security officer on September 22, 2021, was not heard in the office where it was filed.

The case of activist Aroua Barakat has been postponed until January 18, 2023. The police officer's assault on journalist Aroua Barakat is a blatant violation of bodily integrity and human rights in general, and the failure to consider Aroua's complaint at the police station is a violation of the right to a fair trial and the right to litigation guaranteed by local charters and international norms. What happened to Aroua can be understood in two frameworks. The first is gender-based violence: Because women are the weakest link, they are harassed, raped, and even killed, as happened with the victim Refka Cherni, who was killed by her policeman husband. The police consider themselves above the law and continue to enjoy impunity for crimes of torture and excessive use of force. The second context is that she is a human rights activist and journalist who was present at most of the social protests documenting police attacks on protesters. Aroua Barakat is a prominent human rights activist who has covered most social protests and documented police attacks on protesters and human rights defenders for years. She has been covering the social movement since January 2021, and has participated in the founding of the most important intersectional feminist movements active in Tunisia during the recent period, such as "Falgatna" (We Are Fed Up) and in feminist movements condemning police violations against women, including violence, harassment, and rape.



## **Monia Arfaoui: Journalist at Al-Sabah Newspaper**

Monia Arfaoui is a Tunisian journalist working for Al-Sabah newspaper. The victim of the violation has been subjected to several harassments and prosecutions for her journalistic work.

On Friday, March 24, 2023, Monia appeared before the Criminal Police Brigade in Gorjani. It turned out that she was summoned because of two complaints filed against her by the Minister of Religious Affairs, Ibrahim Chaibi. The first case was based on Decree No. 115 on freedom of the press, printing and publishing, following Monia's publication of an article on suspicions of corruption related to the Minister of Religious Affairs about the Pilgrimage file, in addition to several posts on her personal Facebook page. She was heard in this case and later released.

In the second case, Monia was accused of "using information and communication networks and systems to produce, promote, publish, send, or create false news, statements, rumors, or documents that are fabricated, forged, or falsely attributed to others"... per the provisions of Article 24 of Decree No. 54. The accusations came after Monia had published posts on her personal social media page in which she criticized the Minister of Religious Affairs and his management of the ministry concerning several files.



The defense team asked for a postponement of the case due to procedural irregularities, as there was no inspection of her account. According to the victim's testimony to the Intersection for Rights and Freedoms<sup>7</sup>, she was accused of spreading Western and extremist ideas among imams, as she was working on a program on countering extremism in mosques as part of a partnership between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR).

On March 30, 2023, Monia Arfaoui went in for interrogation on the second case, where the file was referred to the court and she was kept in custody. The victim of the violation considered that referring her to the judiciary based on Decree No. 54 is a violation of Decree No. 115, which in turn regulates the work of journalists and is sufficient to consider cases that concern journalists within their field of work.

In a statement issued on March 24, 2023<sup>8</sup>, the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT) expressed its condemnation of the government's insistence on enacting Decree No. 54 of 2022 on combating information and communication systems crimes, which human rights and press freedom organizations<sup>9</sup> had previously warned of the dangers of its publication in the official bulletin in September 2022, focusing on the consequences of Article 24 that would result in the imprisonment of journalists, as the text aims to silence journalists and opponents.

Article 24<sup>10</sup> in subsection III of the decree, titled "Rumors and Fake News", serves as a tool of intimidation against Tunisians. It provides for a prison sentence of up to five years and a fine of 50 thousand dinars. The penalty can be up to 10 years in prison if the person targeted is a public or quasi-public official. However, the article does not provide a clear definition of either fake news or rumors.

---

7 Phone call with the violated victim in April 2023

8 National Syndicate of Journalists, 2023, Prosecution of Al-Sabah journalist Monia Arafoui, March 24, <http://snjt.org/2023/03/24/%d8%aa%d8%aa%d8%a8%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d8%ad%d9%81%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a8%d8%ac%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%af%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d8%a8-%d8%a7%d8%ad-%d9%85%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b1>

9 Reporters Without Borders, 2023, Tunisia: Charges against Mounia Larfaoui bring back memories of the dark era, March 30, <https://rsf.org/ar/%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA-%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B0%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%B8%D9%84%D9%85>

10 Decree No. 54 of 2022 dated September 13, 2022, on combating crimes related to information and communication systems.



## Chadha Haj M'barak:

On July 22, 2023, Tunisian journalist Chadha Haj M'barak was arrested and incarcerated at the Messadin civil prison<sup>11</sup>, following the verdict issued by the indictment division of the Souse Court of Appeals, in the case known in the media as the “Instalingo” case. The case witnessed serious developments after controversy erupted over the journalist’s deteriorating health condition in prison. Chadha was accused of several charges including disturbance of peace, committing a gruesome act against the head of the state, and money laundering, even though she had nothing to do with the financial management of the company, as she was editor-in-chief of the newspaper. In a televised testimony, her mother recounted that police forces raided the family, and arrested Chadha. On June 19, the court initially issued a ruling to release Chadha, before reissuing another arrest warrant against the journalist, who has been in jail for more than five months. In her testimony to Intersection, journalist Khawla Boukrim stated that Chadha suffers from several hearing and vision impairments, in addition to the deteriorating prison conditions and the harassment of her family to put more pressure on her, in a clear violation of the law.

---

11

A November interview with journalist Khawla Boukrim documenting Chadha Mbarak’s case



## **Amira Mohamed: Executive Board Member of The National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists**

Amira Mohamed is a Tunisian journalist who was subjected to a systematic campaign of cyber violence as a result of her journalistic activity. She is an elected member of the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists for the past and current term. She has been pestered, harassed on social media, defamed, and threatened with death due to her prominent syndicate activity in defense of journalists and what they are subjected to<sup>12</sup>. She is also a defender of press freedom and media independence. Journalism is a profession that has been subject to harassment before and after the Tunisian revolution on January 14, 2011, and more so after July 25, 2021. Many journalists were investigated, including Mohamed Boughaleb, Haitham Mekki, Elyes Al-Gharbi, Khalifa Guessmi, and the list goes on. Because Amira was at the forefront of defending her colleagues, she was repeatedly targeted on social media with curse words and insults, spreading false rumors about her behavior and moral exposure of her private life, affecting her dignity and the dignity of her family against the backdrop of her union positions and her adherence to press freedom and media independence. While many journalists have been subjected to online violence and defamation on social media, women journalists are subjected to double violence, often larger in terms of its consequences and its social and familial effects, through moral accusations and rumors about “financial and moral corruption,” as is the case with this journalist and other women journalists, who met the same fate as punishment for their positions supporting democracy and exposing the political deviations the country has experienced since 2011, especially by those who support the current government.

---

12 Phone call with journalist Amira Mohamed in October 2023



## Sonia Dahmani: Lawyer and Media Figure

The regional branch of lawyers informed lawyer and IFM media figure Sonia Dahmani that a complaint was filed against her by the current Minister of Justice, Ms. Leila Jaffal, based on Article 24 of Decree No. 54, which provides a punishment of five years in prison and a fine of 50,000 dinars to anyone who deliberately uses information and communication networks and systems to produce, promote, publish, send, or prepare false news, statements, rumors, or documents that are fabricated, forged, or falsely attributed to others. This is against the backdrop of a statement Sonia made on a radio program about the state of prisons in Tunisia. In her testimony to the Intersection for Rights and Freedoms, Attorney Sonia Dahmani<sup>13</sup> stated that the complaint filed by the Minister of Justice against her was about her mention of the violations inside Tunisian prisons to which prisoners, especially political ones, are exposed, and the systemic abuse against them by depriving them of their most basic rights, such as the right to health and medical follow-up, according to the statements of their defense commission about their living conditions and their reference to using a “pit” instead of a toilet. On Jan. 4, she was scheduled to appear before the court to be interrogated on the charges against her, which the current authorities considered a punishable offense.

---

13 The case of the violation was documented after Intersection for Rights and Freedoms contacted Ms. Sonia Dahmani on January 17, 2023 <https://intersection.uno/freedom-faces/%d8%b3%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%af%d9%87%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a-sonia-dahmani/>



## Feminists and Civil Activists Under Oppression:

Feminists and civil activists in Tunisia also faced a wave of serious violations of their basic rights. This period was characterized by campaigns of defamation and incitement to violence against them, in addition to targeting them with judicial prosecutions and arbitrary arrests.



### **Bochra Belhaj Hamida: Feminist and Former President of The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women:**

In a statement issued on Monday, March 27, 2023, the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women expressed its support and solidarity with its former president, human rights and feminist activist Bochra Belhaj Hamida, condemning all the “distortion, intimidation, threats and attempts to cram her into fabricated cases” on social media sites by leaking information about the possibility of arresting her against the backdrop of falsely accusing her in the so-called “case of conspiracy against state security”. The human rights defender was subjected to a torrent of verbal abuse and false accusations by supporters of the authorities, because of her involvement in drafting a report on individual freedoms and equality prepared by a committee of human rights defenders to present a draft law guaranteeing equal inheritance, individual freedoms, and minority rights. However, “this political climate fraught with tensions and intimidation, amid attacks opponents of the current political authority, based on

the language of intimidation, incitement, and threats, has threatened everyone who defends the gains of the revolution or who tries to develop them for the better". The association, along with many civil associations and human rights advocates, called for an end to the smear campaigns targeting its activists. Many activists held the authorities responsible for the deterioration of the status of public and individual freedoms and rejected any infringement on the freedom of movement of its former president, Bouchra Belhaj Hamida, and is actively calling on the authorities to secure her return to the national territory and stop all prosecutions against her.

The solidarity campaign statement emphasized that Bochra Belhadj Hamida "was and still is a flag-bearer of the war against corruption, oppression, injustice and dictatorships throughout her proud career, and that the series of movements in support of Bouchra has begun, as those who were not intimidated by Bourguiba, Ben Ali or terrorism will not be silenced by populism," because "the policy of intimidation and restrictions on public freedoms that affected many opposition figures and some civil society representatives is only a blatant expression of a failed policy based on the unilateral monopoly of power and stifling every opposing voice." "Stifling freedoms and harassing activists in the political, civil, union and media fields," believing that "the imprisonment of political activist Chaima Aissa and threatening her with rape through social media is a disgrace due to its violence, discrimination and retrospective masculinity, which is added to the list of the authority's progress in striking the gains achieved by Tunisian women after the revolution, especially their involvement in the political field and public affairs and the adoption of parity in various electoral stations, with the exception of the recent elections."



## **Asrar Ben Jouira: President of Intersection Association For Rights and Freedoms**

Asrar is a feminist, human rights activist, and President of Intersection for Rights and Freedoms Association. She was subjected to several violations<sup>14</sup> and harassment as a result of her human rights activism and her right to peaceful expression, after carrying a sign containing the phrase “Name: Kais Said, Occupation: Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi” at a protest against the referendum held by the Tunisian president on July 18, 2022. As a result, six lawsuits were filed against her, including “insulting a public official”, and “civil disobedience” against ten people for disrupting the freedom of movement and violating the decisions of the governor of Tunis. She was also subjected to a defamation campaign, online harassment, and numerous threats that affected her personal and civil life. Asrar met the same fate that every opponent or critical figure faces on Facebook, where abuse and violence multiply when it comes to women through the spread of immoral rumors and ready-made charges. Thus, Asrar was subjected to curse words and insults in terms degrading to human dignity.

---

14 Phone call with activist Asrar Ben Jouira in Nov. 2023



## **Mariem Bribri: Human Rights Defender**

During the 2015 “Manich Msemah” movement, civil society activist Mariem Bribri<sup>15</sup> was subjected to verbal and physical abuse by police forces in Tunis. This abuse caused her health to deteriorate and left severe scars on her body. The incident not only affected her physical well-being but also her mental health, as she suffered a severe psychological crisis and trauma.

In 2020, following the publication of a video on Facebook criticizing the police work within the framework of freedom of opinion and expression, Bribri was surprised by a summons from the public prosecution, a campaign of harassment against her and her family, and pressure by police on the public prosecutor to arrest her. At the beginning of October of the same year, she appeared before the Sfax Court of First Instance and was sentenced to four months in prison and a fine of 500 dinars with a suspended sentence. During this period, Bribri was followed by police officers at her workplace and subjected to arrests, extortion, and harassment. On appeal, the court sentenced her to one month in prison with a suspended sentence.

All these events affected the activist’s psychological and physical situation, as she had to close her workplace for a long period, and she and her family lived in a state of fear, panic, intimidation, and police harassment.

---

15 The case was documented with the violated victim through a phone call on Feb.7, 2024.



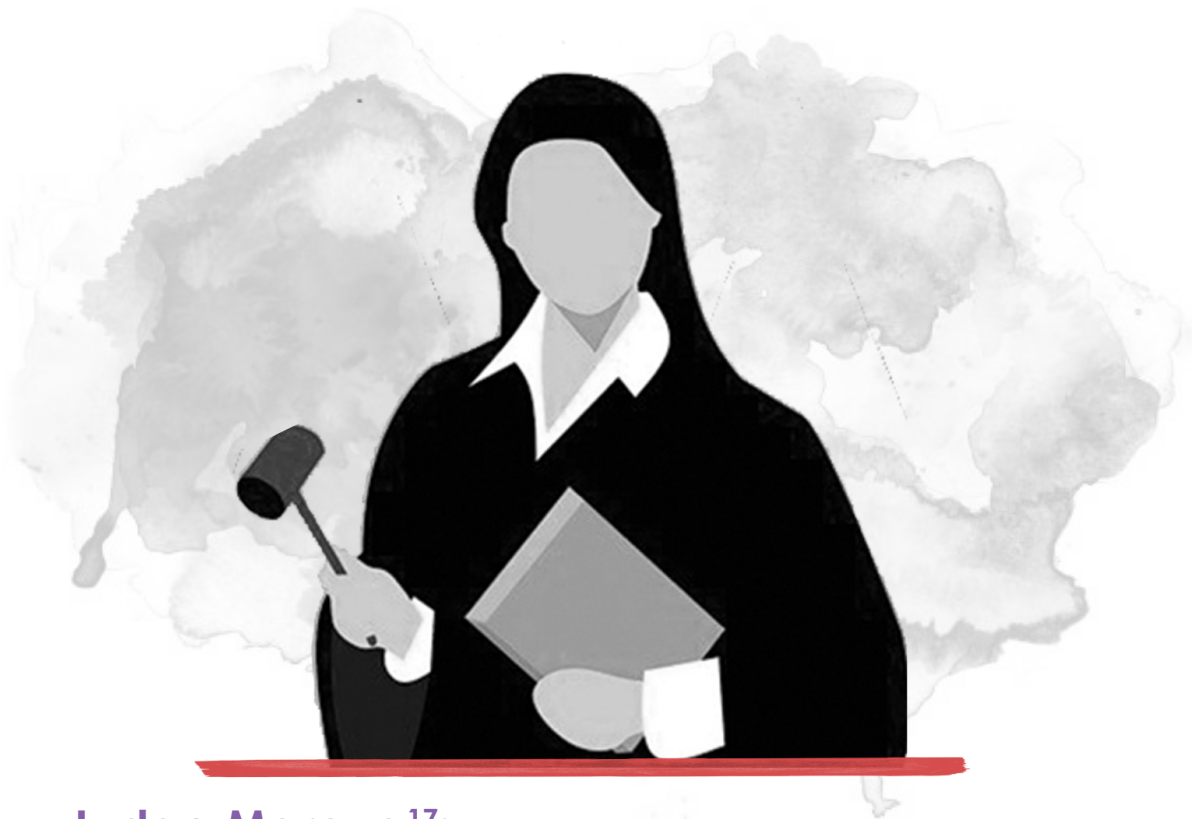


## Chaima Jebali: Human Rights and Political Activist

Human rights activist Chaima Jebali participated in a peaceful demonstration in Tunis on July 22, 2022<sup>16</sup>, to denounce the referendum process and protest against the draft constitution that President Kais Saeed submitted to the referendum. These protests witnessed several acts of repression and police violence against young men and women protesters, including Chaima, who was beaten by police forces, in addition to the deterioration of her health condition due to suffocation from intense tear gas used during the protest. Chaima is one of many women activists who have been subjected to police violence while attending protests and peaceful gatherings in Tunisia.

---

16 Intersection documented with activist Chaima Jebali <https://intersection.uno/freedom-faces/2553-2>



## Judge Maroua<sup>17</sup>:

Judge Maroua was dismissed<sup>18</sup> from her position, along with several other judges, by a decision of the President of the Republic in 2022, against the backdrop of a case related to her personal life. The President of the Republic did not stop at the dismissal decision, as he mentioned her in one of his speeches, which contributed to her defamation, followed by campaigns against her by those who call themselves “supporters of July 25” and publication of her personal information to the public. After the court had ruled in her favor on her case, the victim told a radio station that she had a relationship with a person who was in the process of divorcing his wife, according to her account, and that she was harassed by the latter, who conspired with certain parties to trap her. The judge said that the man in question felt sick around curfew time, which forced him to stay for a few hours at her house for “only three hours,” according to her. Shortly after, police forces broke into her house. When she inquired about the matter, the victim was accused of obstructing a police raid, falsifying charges, and facing moral charges challenging her integrity and honor, exposing the degrading social judgments against women and their bodies, which made her undergo a virginity test. The issue spread like wildfire after official documents related to the case were leaked, contributing to the defamation of the judge and making her subject of ridicule, scorn, and insults with the worst moral epithets. Since the accused is a woman, this increased the social stigmatization that women are subjected to whenever it comes to moral issues, perpetuating gender-based violence against women and the internalization of a patriarchal and masculine culture by state institutions.

---

17 Pseudonym

18 Video of the judge’s testimony including details of the case against her



## Ghofrane Binous: Human Rights Activist

Journalist and human rights defender Ghofrane Binous<sup>19</sup> was subjected to a fierce online campaign after she criticized the speech of President Kais Saied, who considered the entry of sub-Saharan migrants into Tunisia as a foreign conspiracy and compensatory colonization. She criticized the speech and the July 25, 2021 process as part of her work as a journalist and analyst on a social program on **Carthage Plus** and IFM radio.

She was subjected to racial slurs and comments such as “monkey”, “ousifa (servant)”, and “God forgive Ahmed Bey for freeing the slaves” simply because of her skin color. They also reposted personal photos of Ghofrane in a swimsuit, making numerous other racist and misogynistic comments. Binous also stated that since she entered the field of television journalism in September 2022, she has been the subject of defamation and harassment for her universal human rights positions and for expressing her opinions freely and without hesitation. This harassment was not limited to her but also extended to her family members, who also became victims of harassment and insults. She added that some parties also accused her of participating in the settlement process aiming to change the demographic composition and receiving foreign funding for this.

---

<sup>19</sup> The violations were documented with journalist Ghofrane Binous through a phone call on Feb 12, 2024



## Dalila Ben M'barak M'ssadak:

Dalila Ben M'barak M'ssadak is a lawyer. She is currently accused on two cases based on Decree No. 54 of 2022. This past December, She was summoned to appear before an investigating judge following a case raised against her by the public prosecutor, after she had submitted a request to hear diplomats to look into the “conspiracy case” against several politicians opposed to the July 25, 2021 process, according to her statement Intersection for Rights and Freedoms. After hearing her, the investigative judge decided to keep her at liberty until the investigation is concluded. She stated that the investigative judge and the assistant public prosecutor “did not charge her with criminal acts, but only with mere accusations, since no criminal acts were identified<sup>20</sup>”.

A few days after her interrogation, she appeared again before the investigative judge at the Tunis Court of First Instance on a second case, also based on Decree 54, articles 13 and 87 of the Personal Data Protection Law, and article 315 of the Criminal Code, for violating the public prosecution’s decision to ban media circulation in the case of “conspiracy against state security”, and her statements on the television program **100 Minutes** on **Hannibal TV** with journalist Borhane Bssais, who also appeared before the court on the same case. Attorney Dalila M'ssadak used terms such as “empty file,” “fabricated case” and “confused judge” to express her opinion on the case of political detainees. They were released after hearing their statements pending the completion of the investigation. Attorney Ben M'barak told Intersection for Rights and Freedoms that these charges are malicious and repressive and aim to intimidate opponents and their lawyers<sup>21</sup>.

---

<sup>20</sup> The violations were documented through an interview with Attorney Dalila Ben M'barak M'ssadak on Feb 15, 2024

<sup>21</sup> [Dalila M'barak M'ssadak: Lawyer:” What drives the world’s oppressed is the quest for freedom.” \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



## Gender-based Violence Against Women in The Digital Space<sup>22</sup>:

Despite the remarkable progress in gender equality that Tunisian society has witnessed compared to other regions in the Middle East and North Africa, whether in legislation or women's participation in politics, professional fields, and leadership positions, there are still many challenges that stand in the way of women achieving true equality and guaranteeing all their rights. One of the most prominent of these challenges is the escalation of violence against women, which is not limited to traditional forms, but has increased dramatically and alarmingly in digital spaces, especially against women active on social media platforms, where this type of violence finds room to express biases more openly due to the lack of face-to-face interaction with victims and the difficulty of holding perpetrators accountable.

### Digital Violence: An Extension of Physical Violence

The concept of cyber-violence, digital or electronic violence refers to acts of violence mediated by digital tools, whether social networks, photo-sharing applications, or online comments, regardless of the sites used, "Thus, we use the term cyberspace to designate the area in which this type of violence occurs, which targets individuals, groups or institutions by technological means." Digital violence is a type of violence that is carried out using modern communication technologies, social media, smartphones, email, text messages, and other means to inflict harm on individuals or groups with the aim of domination and exclusion<sup>23</sup>.

Gender-based digital violence includes all harmful acts that target women because of their gender according to the aggressors' shared social representations of stereotypes of women's inferior or discriminatory roles according to the patriarchal culture's undermining of their social status and expectations of their negative reactions to acts of violence, as it leads to inflicting harm, humiliation and degradation on the victim

---

22 This part of the report was mainly based on a newspaper article by Yusra Belali, 2023, Digital Violence Against Women: When digital technology becomes a means of psychological intimidation. October 5. Last accessed 10/12/2023. <https://alqatiba.com/2023/10/05/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d9%86%d9%81-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b1%d9%82%d9%85%d9%8a-%d8%aa%d8%ac%d8%a7%d9%87-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%b9%d9%86%d8%af%d9%85%d8%a7-%d8%aa%d8%aa%d8%ad%d9%88%d9%91%d9%84/>

23 Open Edition Journal. Analyser les cyberviolences au prisme du genre. 28 novembre 2023 <http://journals.openedition.org/questionsdecommunication/27108> <https://alqatiba.com/2023/10/05/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d9%86%d9%81-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b1%d9%82%d9%85%d9%8a-%d8%aa%d8%ac%d8%a7%d9%87-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%b9%d9%86%d8%af%d9%85%d8%a7-%d8%aa%d8%aa%d8%ad%d9%88%d9%91%d9%84/>

and leaves her with psychological effects such as fear, frustration, guilt, physical pain or social effects such as loss of a sense of security and reassurance, so she tends to withdraw and accept male domination. Some field studies in this area have also shown that the threat of digital gender-based violence often has the same effects as direct violent behaviors: “any assault or threat of physical, moral, sexual, or economic assault against women based on gender discrimination using a communication network”, as violence practiced within a framework of male dominance and imbalance in favor of males according to the shared representations of the aggressor and the victim of what is considered violence. Like many forms of patriarchal violence against children, women, and people of different sexual orientations, gender-based violence is not only defined by the intent of the perpetrator when it is motivated by punitive, disciplinary, or even narcissistic motives to prove virility but also by the tangible effects experienced by victims. This is also the case of digital violence when it aims to exclude women from participating in the virtual space or refuse to let them express themselves and their opinions with equal freedom as men, producing the same psychological, physical, and social effects produced by violence intended for its own sake<sup>24</sup>.

Today, social media plays a major role in transferring digital violence to real-life violence through the rapid exchange of information and the ease of interaction between individuals. Some individuals may use social media to threaten actual violent acts against women, whether they are users of social networks or others. Threats of physical violence or sexual harassment online can turn into actual violence outside the digital world. Incitement to violence on social media can also encourage real-life violence by posting racist or hateful content that calls for violence and sedition against certain individuals or groups. However, the relationship between digital violence and direct real-life violence appears to be complex and multifaceted. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that digital violence must be taken seriously, and necessary measures are needed to prevent and address it, to avoid its effects on victims and most culturally and socially vulnerable groups, such as children, women, and those with special needs.

With reference to some reports and studies, as well as field data from testimonies and interviews, it is clear that the majority of the victims affected by digital violence represent the following groups:

- Girls who are active on social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter...) from high school and university student by targeting bodily expression and aesthetics of anyone who posts their pictures on the digital network.

---

24 The same previous source

- Real-life or online girlfriends: Former or current girlfriends of some abusers who choose to break up with them and become the subject of threats of physical violence and rape or threats of being trapped and closely monitored.
  
- Political and civil activists: Women with political opinions and positions, whether opposing or supporting the authority, syndicate members, or feminists, who publish their positions on social networks that the supervisory authorities do not like and once they incite them, they become a distinctive target for many forms of violence.
  
- Female journalists who report on events or express opinions that may be considered on one side or the other, whether it is related to the period of polarization formed since July 25, 2021, or to the political and ideological polarization that preceded it, such as the late Najiba Hamrouni, Maya Kassouri, and most recently Monia Arfaoui and Amira Mohamed.
  
- Sub-Saharan migrant women: Exposure to racist content or justification of racism against sub-Saharan African migrants after the racist and inflammatory speeches made by the President, and the racist measures taken by the state in forcibly displacing irregular migrants and relocating them to the deserts on the Algerian and Libyan borders in the heat of the day.
  
- Explicit female artists such as actresses and dancers when they appear in the media or on social media networks, whether with some postures or expressive poses that do not appeal to the aggressors of the network's users.

Given the post-July 25 regime's deliberate tendency to eliminate the role of intermediary bodies and not recognize political and civil parties and even official state institutions, several pages on social media turned to declaring allegiance and forming a new political bloc when they did not find a party or civil outlet to use "fanatical tendencies that have become entrenched with anger and hostility to political opponents, civil activists, and all those who disagree with their opinions." They found in political and civil activists and feminists in particular a typical subject ready to be vulnerable and subjected to various types of violence using stereotypes and social inheritance.

Thus, this category of women was singled out for a special type of gender-based violence targeting their identities based on the same stereotypes circulating in society, through the publication of posts and comments on social media platforms targeting all women who disagree with their opinions and positions in general and feminists in particular. Most of them are based on discrimination against women. They justify the use of violence against them because they are women and therefore have no right to stand up to the hegemony of patriarchal guardianship and express a dissenting opinion, especially when it comes to political management and issues of public concern. The other type of content of this violence refers to a lexicon of commonly used words that aim at moral and psychological humiliation and the destruction of the female being by excluding and devaluing women and minimizing their role in issues of public concern.

## **Forms of Digital Violence Against Women:**

Each type of digital violence against women takes diverse forms, due to digital communication technologies that enable abusers to diversify and amplify their methods. These technologies allow violence to expand in ways that emphasize the permanence of its impact, as it can be continuously reproduced, updated, and endlessly exchanged between users on the same network. This has a scandalizing effect on the victims, which can be continuously exploited by the perpetrators. These tactics can be used either for intentional motives related to spite for political or social reasons, or random motives related to misogyny in general. Abusers also track and target victims, whether through comments on their posts, misrepresenting previous photos, or posting private posts to harm and defame the victims. This type of digital violence manifests itself in the persistent humiliation and defamation of victims in unethical ways. These forms are visible through interviews and testimonies.

## **Verbal Abuse:**

Insults, slander, and cursing refer to the use of hurtful and insulting expressions that engage in attacks on human dignity. Slander and defamation show the use of gratuitous accusations such as “immorality and corruption.” It also includes the derogatory expression of honor, with the desire to defame and discredit through stigmatization and cursing, whether by accusing the parent or the offspring, with a focus on harming the human and social value of the targeted person. These methods also include derogatory analogies between the victim and certain animals, using them to indicate ugliness, stupidity, malice, and even dirt and uncleanness. Swearing and cursing also include racial stigmatization, whereby abusers go beyond the boundaries of aggression by blaming with derogatory descriptions, showing that they do not hesitate to use these derogatory tactics to harm their victims.





### **Degrading The Female Identity:**

This includes recalling inferior feminine stigmas (You're just a woman, lacking mindfulness and faith, Satan's offspring) and other shaming of female characteristics, such as the example of international tennis player Ons Jaber, who is subjected to continuous violence with conservative religious backgrounds and a hostile attitude towards successful women (Cover your thighs, She's constantly exposing her body), or by denouncing the manifestations of female emancipation of some victims from patriarchal control (You're a whore with no man to control you). To this category of abusers, women are accused of the sin of female identity unless they are subjected to male grooming.

### **Gender and racial insults:**

Using the same violent verbal lexicon (Man face, Wood face, No one will ever look at you) or with the added violence of racist and feminine insults towards sub-Saharan African migrant women during the racism crisis that began in the summer of 2023 (What are these servants... They walk around and give birth. What do they do to with the little ones if they don't want to settle in the country?) without knowing some of the peculiarities of sub-Saharan African culture in the practice of free sexual and reproductive relations.

### **Blasphemy and excommunication:**

The insults, slander, and praying against the victims are also based on takfirist backgrounds to reject their equal participation with men and their mere competition in the public space with positions that are contrary to the aggressors' representations or critical of dominant ideas (May God

destroy you, heathen, I am sure you are an atheist, you are an atheist, Zionist, and Masonic) in explicit calls for incitement and spreading hatred, which poses a clear threat to the lives of these victims. Some girls on Instagram or TikTok are also subjected to this same form of takfiri violence simply for posting pictures, dancing, entertaining, or celebratory situations that some stalkers who are hostile to female beauty do not like (you are ignorant of religion and your sentence is immediate death and you will be cursed by the angels until the Judgement Day).

## **Invasion of Privacy:**

### **Exposing one's private life to the public:**

This is another form that stems from some of the previous forms of voyeurism and spying, characterized by deliberately posting photos, videos, and posts on social media platforms that may be real or altered, but reveal private secrets, such as displaying their past intimate relationships, their intimate past, or their civil statuses (she was dating my friend... she's pretending to be honorable, she's twice divorced...she was in prison, what good is she for?). One of the most famous violations of private life that expanded on the Internet was the case of a female judge in 2022 who was dismissed and publicly accused of adultery by the President. Some assailants with access to confidential documents, likely security officials, were quick to publish legal and judicial records that exposed her private life in nominal detail, in a blatant violation of the principle of professional secrecy and the preservation of the confidentiality of the investigation and litigants' secrets. However, the most common form of invasion is when abusers retaliate against their girlfriends, fiancées, or even ex-wives for simply ending a relationship by publishing real or fabricated content (photos, messages, personal conversations...) to hurt them or undermine their subsequent relationship, whether real or imagined, in response to a narcissistic complex that does not recognize the partner's right to rebuild her private emotional and sexual life after the breakup.

### **Transferring direct violence to the digital space:**

This form is generally used by abusers who are not satisfied with abusing their victims in real life and are determined to continue their revenge on them by reposting previous forms of violence on social media, such as one of the monitored videos depicting the abuse of a victim by her former "boyfriend" or posting contents of previous verbal, physical or even judicial conflicts, usually accompanied by comments and "documents" referring to defamation, revenge and retaliation.

## The effects of digital violence on victims:

Contrary to the perceived underestimation of digital violence, its effects are usually severe on the psychological and relational levels of its victims, especially women, who already suffer from gender-based violence that follows them in private spaces as well as in public life at a pace that has been increasing for more than a decade of accelerated political and societal transformations, and invading various areas of social life, perhaps the least recognized by public policies is digital violence, in an increasing consistency with the growing presence of youth on the Internet.

Some rare reports and studies on the subject in Tunisia indicate that violence against women is no longer limited to traditional private and public spaces, but also includes digital spaces. Many groups of women, such as women political and civil activists, journalists, and admins of active pages on social media platforms, are typical examples of cyber violence that they are exposed to daily through various forms of attacks on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

According to a survey study on violence against women on social networks, especially Facebook, conducted by the Center for Research, Studies, Documentation, and Information on Women (CREDIF)<sup>25</sup>, women represent 89% of all targets of digital violence in Tunisia, and 49% of the perpetrators of these crimes are young people due to their growing use of social networks compared to older age groups. Another 19% were subjected to insults and bullying.

However, the most impactful consequences of this type of violence on victims are direct, by excluding them from participating in public and political life because of the psychological and familial consequences of digital violence through its rapid spread among users, without the victim's ability to limit or contain it. It has been recorded that some victim-activists refrain from appearing in the physical and virtual public space for a period of time that varies from one victim to another, due to fear of the recorded threats and a sense of insecurity, especially when official agencies are involved in this violence, which are supposed to be the protectors of all citizens without discrimination, regardless of their gender, color, affiliation, or political positions.

---

25 Fathia Saidi, Digital and virtual violence against women activists in the public sphere. A study on "digital violence against women activists in the public sphere" calls for a law on gender-based cyber violence (babnet.net) <https://www.babnet.net/cadredetail-267565.asp>  
Digital violence against women: When digital technology becomes a means of psychological intimidation - Alqatiba <https://alqatiba.com/2023/10/05/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d9%86%d9%81-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b1%d9%82%d9%85%d9%8a-%d8%aa%d8%ac%d8%a7%d9%87-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%b9%d9%86%d8%af%d9%85%d8%a7-%d8%aa%d8%aa%d8%ad%d9%88%d9%91%d9%84>

The indirect impact does not stop at the victims themselves, but extends to other women and girls, whether they are active or considering participating and entering the public sphere, as they are intimidated and frightened of participating for fear of meeting the same fate, thus making them withdraw from interest in public affairs, which represents an additional obstacle added to the list of obstacles that shackle women and weaken their participation in the management of public affairs.

## Conclusion:

The violations documented in the report include a significant number of women activists, journalists, and human rights defenders. The report monitors several violations by the Tunisian state and its various agencies against women human rights defenders and activists in the civil and political sphere, in addition to women who were subjected to harassment and security pursuits based on their work, especially women lawyers and journalists.

This type of violation comes as part of a series of assaults against women in Tunisia in various fields. The report points to the digital hacking that women activists and human rights defenders face, from publishing their photos during their presence at peaceful gatherings and protests to being bombarded with a barrage of epithets and social stigmatization that diminish the role of women in political life. In addition, the Tunisian state tends to prosecute and muzzle women journalists, either by using Decree No. 54 or by filing loose charges that have no purpose but to deter and stop criticizing and blaming the authorities on a number of issues.

This leads us to find ourselves in the same circle that makes women the object of ridicule and scorn simply for expressing their opinions and criticizing the President, or opposing the policies of his rule, to the point of prison sentences, which is what Tunisia has been experiencing in recent years, with the authority supporting such practices either indirectly through official speeches to the people or indirectly by waiving the principle of parity in the electoral law and increasing the frequency of security prosecutions among women politicians such as human rights defender Bochra Belhaj Hamida, political women like Abir Moussi, Chaima Aissa lawyer Dalila M'ssadak, and her colleague in the defense commission of political detainees Islam Hamza.



## Recommendations:

- Respect of the right to political and party activity, including the right to compete for power or participate in it by exercising the right to run in party and coalition lists and independent candidacy, and the right of citizens to freely choose all their representatives.

- Enact Law No. 58 of 2017 to address violence against women and children and provide a special budget to ensure that the right to protection and access to justice is achieved in an equal manner for women and men.

- Establishment of a body of units specialized in crimes of violence against women and children to investigate cases of cyber violence and prosecute perpetrators before the courts to address the phenomenon of impunity for cyber crimes against women.

- Guarantee the right of individual and collective protest by peaceful assembly, demonstration, and strike without infringing on these freedoms and without security or judicial prosecution.

- Guaranteeing the right to a fair trial for women, starting with respecting legal procedures at, all stages of the hearing, investigation, and trial, adopting the presumption of innocence of the accused until proven guilty, and abandoning the arrest of suspects and the search for charges.

- Enabling women's access to justice by automatically providing legal aid to women victims of cyber-violence and undertaking the victims of this type of violence, which is no less serious than other types of violence.

- Guarantee the right of civil activity for national and professional associations and organizations, and stop threatening them with unjust laws that aim to limit their activities or monitor them in advance and only apply Decree No. 88 of 2011 on the organization of associations.

- Respect freedom of thought, expression, and publication, including freedom of the press and the right of citizens to access all information and opinions through free, independent, and pluralistic media, including freedom of expression on social media without infringing on the rights of others.

- Repeal Decree No. 54 on combating crimes related to information and communication systems and only apply Decree No. 115 of 2011 on

freedom of the press, printing, and publishing without discrimination on political grounds.

- Respect the right of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities to exercise their individual and collective rights without security restrictions or judicial prosecutions as long as they do not infringe on the rights of others.

- Return to the application of the principle of horizontal and vertical parity in candidacy for elected bodies with a commitment to parity in appointments to administrative and political positions, and taking into account the principle of women's competence in civil and political participation.

- Abolish all forms of labor discrimination against women in terms of assignments, wages, and professional promotion, and end forms of vulnerable employment in agriculture, domestic work, and other sectors.

- Ratify the Istanbul Convention on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of 2011, provide a special budget for the implementation of Law No. 58 of 2017 on combating violence against women and children, and provide mechanisms to access justice and fight impunity.

This report was printed with support from:  
[Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network](#)









**INTERSECTION**  
ASSOCIATION

Intersection Association  
publications

**SCAN ME**



subscribe  
in our newsletter

**SCAN ME**

