

THOUSANDS OF TUNISIANS PROTEST AGAINST SAIED

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More than 2,000 Tunisians rallied on Sunday, the country's independence day, against President Kais Saied and a project he launched to gauge public opinion on proposed constitutional reforms.

Protesters in the capital shouted "the people want to overthrow the president" and "no to consultations".

The demonstration was organised by the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party and a movement named "Citizens Against the Coup" — in reference to a power grab by Mr. Saied last year.

Many of the demonstrators were people who had voted for Mr. Saied, among them blogger and rights activist Mounira Bouazizi.

"I thought that he believed in democracy and the gains of the revolution, but he did the complete opposite," she told AFP.

Mohammed, a retiree, echoed her, saying: "We cannot call this a democratic process. Today, the people are divided between pro- and anti-Kais Saied. This harms freedoms and democracy."

Sunday's rally was the latest in a series of demonstrations in the country since Mr. Saied seized a host of powers after dismissing the government and freezing Parliament on July 25.

Critics have dubbed the move a "coup" and rights groups have warned that the country — seen as the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring protests — is sliding towards autocracy.

Demonstrators marched towards Parliament in the Bardo neighbourhood of Tunis, many waving national flags, but a large police deployment blocked their path. "We will not accept the results of the consultation, this farce against the people," Samira Chaouachi, the vice-president in the frozen Parliament, told the crowd.

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