

Dynamic Interaction between Football Supporterism and Political Engagement in Post-Revolution Tunisia



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Abstract:

Background: This study delves into the impact of supporterism on voluntary political engagement in post-revolution Tunisia, particularly focusing on its potential for educating youth in participatory democracy. The study centres on the dynamics within the ultras supporters of the Tunisian football team "Club Africain" (CA), exploring their role in shaping political attitudes and actions. Also, this research highlights the significant role of supporterism in shaping political attitudes and actions among Tunisian youth. It emphasizes the need for further exploration of the influence of supporterism on political engagement in diverse political contexts with varied supporter profiles.

Methods: Ultimately, supporterism emerges as a persuasive tool for fostering understanding and engagement in participatory democracy, particularly among the youth. Therefore, 20 Club Africain ultras were interviewed semi-structured about their political engagement experiences. Interviews sought to understand the collective and individual opinions of Tunisians on democratic autonomy. The documentary analysis also showed the political engagement of young Tunisians and their determination to defend the country against fraudulent democratic processes.

Results: The investigation shows that supporterism and politics interact dynamically, demonstrating their resilience against political opportunism. However, some interviewees (7/20) contemplated immigration and terrorism as potential solutions despite their undeniable support for a secular state, rejecting extremist Islamic ideologies. These thoughts are rooted in experiences of discrimination and marginalization, shaping their perceptions and aspirations for the future. The results highlight supporterism as a dynamic space fostering autonomy in the political participation of young Tunisians.

Conclusion: Supporters demonstrate a self-motivated commitment to democratic values and equitable socio-economic development, advocating for transparent governance. Their engagement in politics through supporterism underscores the potential for positive and evolving interactions between sports and political activism.

Keywords: Football supporterism, Political events, Voluntary participation, Democracy education, Tunisia post-revolution, Political engagement.

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Cite as: Fitouri C, Saleh Z. Dynamic Interaction between Football Supporterism and Political Engagement in Post-Revolution Tunisia. Open Sports Sci J, 2024; 17: e1875399X309819. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/011875399X309819240610055916>



Received: March 07, 2024

Revised: May 16, 2024

Accepted: May 30, 2024

Published: June 13, 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a perceptible increase in acknowledgment of the various modes through which supporterism articulates, confronts, and interacts with politics [1-4]. It is possible that the beneficial contribution of this phenomenon to the restoration of ties with politics could be an interesting line of thinking in the context of the uprisings that occurred during the Arab Spring. On the other hand, the demands for stadiums in Arab countries did not start to materialize until the year 2000 [5] as a reaction to the dictatorship and the socio-economic issues [6, 7]. It was not until the beginning of the Tunisian revolution in December 2010 that this potential for mobilization became vast in public areas, which is a significant departure from where they often are located [8].

Ultras were the first to face the police, and they encouraged young people to join them in such a confrontation. There were some ultras who seized the initiative and created a physical barrier against the police [9, 10]. This was made possible by their familiarity with the methods that the police employed. The overthrow of dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya was brought about by the collective determination of young people who had no prior experience in political institutions [11]. In a manner that was both brutal and successful, these young people broke their silence in order to voice their ideas and participate in the conversation over issues that would have an impact on their future [12].

In light of this, the purpose of our research is to investigate the phenomenon of football fanaticism in Tunisia and the potential consequences that it may have for the development of participatory democracy. One of the most important questions that this study seeks to answer is whether or not the participation of young people in stadium settings can act as a catalyst for the development of effective autonomous education in social responsibility. Providing an answer to this question would make it possible for us to identify the advantages that result from the dynamic interaction between political involvement and supporter activism, as well as to investigate the factors that contribute to the success of these interventions.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the current conversation about the relationship between political support for football and football fanaticism. We hope that by undertaking this endeavor, we will be able to improve the legitimacy that supporters have in their roles as participants in the process of democratic co-construction. On the other hand, this is significant in light of the difficulties that Arab countries have met along their respective developmental paths.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the course of Tunisia's history, the mutually beneficial link that exists between football and politics has been firmly ingrained and has developed over the course of time [13]. The promotion of nationalist feelings and the assertion of an Arab-Muslim identity were vitally

important roles that football teams played prior to the country's independence [14]. Post-independence, sports clubs became a tool for state-building and later, over time, a vehicle for political opportunism, primarily the two most popular clubs in the Tunisian capital: Espérance Sportive de Tunis¹ (EST) and Club Africain² (CA). The control of the EST by the first president of Tunisia, H. Bourguiba, and by S. Chiboub, the son-in-law of the former autocrat Ben Ali, ousted by the revolution, is certainly synonymous with political power identification [15]. From 2012 to 2017, it was the territorial rival, the CA, that became a political actor with the rise of the young businessman S. Riahi³ at the helm of the club. Coming from a political family opposed to the old regime, Riahi led a transcontinental existence, alternating between Libya and France, which added a distinctive dimension to his leadership. The financial promises of this ambitious president seemed to resolve the economic problems of the club. Building on an illustrious family history, the rise of Riahi positioned him at the forefront of the political landscape, garnering support and empathy from CA supporters, who represented a large portion of Tunisian society. His era of leadership proved transformative, leaving an indelible mark on both the club's financial trajectory and its socio-political resonance within the nation. Six months after taking office as club president, he formed his own political party, the Free Patriotic Union (UPL). In its inaugural participation in the 2014 legislative elections, the UPL ranked 5th, surpassing long-standing political opponents. This success fueled his ambition to run in the 2019 presidential election. However, in the months leading up to the election, he abruptly resigned from his position as CA president and fled Tunisian territory amid allegations of corruption and money laundering⁴. As a result, CA faced a severe financial crisis, requiring urgent measures to avoid FIFA sanctions. This disastrous situation prompted CA supporters to mobilize massively to voluntarily safeguard their club. Leveraging social media platforms, particularly Facebook, supporters spontaneously orchestrated high-impact fundraising interventions. Notably, on November 5, 2019, supporters organized a historic fundraising event, raising over \$500,000 in a single day despite prevailing socio-economic challenges.

This spontaneous engagement of CA supporters suggests the potential of supporterism as a tool for

¹Espérance sportive de Tunis (football) - Wikipédia (wikipedia.org), 2 May 2024.

²Club africain (football) - Wikipédia (wikipedia.org), 15 May 2024.

³Slim Riahi - Slim Riahi — Wikipédia (wikipedia.org), 5 June 2022.

⁴Bozonnet, CH. "Slim Riahi, the Tunisian Berlusconi.". https://www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2014/11/22/slim-riahi-le-berlusconitunisien_4527785_1466522.html, 22 November 2014).

instilling civic values and encouraging citizen participation. In this context, football teams often wield the ability to influence perceptions of locations. The larger the audience attracted by the club, the greater the significance of spatiality becomes [16]. Thus, studying the case of CA may illuminate the process of constructing a collective actor for political purposes. However, offering a singular explanation seems improbable given the complexity of this interaction, which arises from a combination of factors and long-term personal and collective experiences. Therefore, it is also necessary to find recurring motifs between engagement in football supporterism and the political events of the country since the revolution. This remarkable, peaceful, and popular movement marked the beginning of the Arab Spring, which spread to Egypt, Libya, and Syria [17]. While the slogans of this event conveyed economic and democratic concerns, the movement also symbolized a collective aspiration to restore individual and collective self-esteem [18]. The main catalyst of this revolution was Mohamed Bouazizi, who galvanized Tunisian youth to revolt against perceived humiliation, marginalization, and oppression by public authorities [19]. A generation previously detached from politics emerged as the vanguard of a peaceful social movement advocating for dignity, justice, and freedom of expression [20]. Subsequently, Tunisia embarked on a stimulating democratic journey marked by unprecedented freedom of expression compared to other post-revolutionary Arab countries [21]. Despite persistent socio-economic crises, these young people continue to shape the political landscape notably with their resolute support for the candidacy of the current president, Kais Saied, since 2019.

Further, their approval of subsequent measures aimed at rectifying the outcomes of the revolution underscores their ongoing engagement in national affairs [22]. Although controversially labeled a coup d'état [23, 24], the supporters of President Saïd view him as an upright figure and an anti-system leader capable of addressing unfulfilled promises of representative democracy and persistent socio-economic disparities [25-27]. This initiative, characterized by its spontaneity despite the absence of prior political education [28], highlights the central role of stadiums in authoritarian countries as places for educating individuals about freedom of expression and collective dissent against the system [29]. From this perspective, it is important to consider this study on the effectiveness of football supporterism as a means of educating both individuals and collectives in political participation.

3. METHODOLOGY

First, the methodology employed in this study was qualitative, centered on semi-structured interviews. The primary objective was to delve into the unique perspectives of selected supporters of CA, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the intricate dynamics of supporterism and its entanglement with political events within the nation. A cohort of twenty young male CA supporters willingly participated in the interviews, with an

average age of 29.66 years. The participants exhibited diverse professional backgrounds: 9 were unemployed, 6 were students, and 5 were employed. Regarding their political affiliations, participants opted to maintain confidentiality, although all expressed opposition to an Islamic state. Conducted in public spaces chosen by the participants themselves, the interviews were characterized by an absence of coercion or bias. Ethical protocols, such as mutual trust, anonymity, and data confidentiality, were strictly adhered to. All participants gave informed verbal consent.

The interview guide was structured around three principal domains. Firstly, it explored the motives behind their robust engagement in club affairs, delving into the political dynamics within the club and their positioning vis-à-vis its elected officials. Secondly, it scrutinized the support framework and its intersection with the political landscape of the country. This segment sought to identify issues pertaining to citizenship and the meaningful involvement of youth in political discourse and organization. Participants were encouraged to articulate their views on political matters and contemplate their future within the country.

Utilizing a thematic reading framework, the interview content was systematically analyzed to extract core themes based on their representativeness and relevance. This qualitative approach endeavors to decipher the essence of supporting the CA and discern the hurdles hindering the comprehensive engagement of young individuals in the democratic process, notwithstanding the perpetual political and socio-economic turmoil in post-revolution Tunisia.

Secondly, as an additional methodological technique, data documentary analysis was incorporated into the methodological investigation. To be more specific, we referred to the words of a song that was recorded by the CA supporters' group "African Winners" in 2020, titled "Ya Hyetna"⁵ (Our Life). This pragmatic choice was aimed at providing further insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of the CA supporters regarding their engagement with the club and its political implications. The lyrics of the song were analyzed to extract thematic content relevant to the research objectives, particularly focusing on expressions of political sentiments, perceptions of societal issues, and aspirations for change within the Tunisian context. This dual-method approach, combining semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between supporterism and political engagement among CA supporters.

4. QUALITATIVE RESULTS ANALYSIS

Based on the findings of the qualitative research, there are three primary axes that shed light on the complex relationship that exists between supporterism and political

⁵Ya Hyetna, chanson du Club Africain, [Ya Hyetna] [Vidéo]. Youtube, 16 May 2020. Ya Hyetna, chanson du Club Africain (paroles en français) (youtube.com)

activity. In the first place, the article “Supporterism: Cultivating Autonomy in Responsible Citizenship” highlights the fact that being a CA supporter helps to cultivate a feeling of accountability and autonomy in communities. Furthermore, the article titled “Supporter Dynamics and Political Engagement: An Intricate Interplay” investigates the ways in which the dynamics that exist within the supporter community have an effect on political engagement. Finally, the article titled “Contradictory Perceptions of the Future: Navigating between Indignation and Awareness” highlights the different viewpoints of the participants as they navigate between feelings of indignation and rising awareness of prospects for change in the socio-political landscape of Tunisia.

4.1. Supporterism: Cultivating Autonomy in Responsible Citizenship

In the wake of the club's financial crisis and the departure of its president, a profound sense of responsibility permeated all levels of club supporters, transcending socio-economic boundaries in a concerted effort to raise funds. Termed “El Latkha”⁶ 1,2, and 3,” three primary initiatives were organized with the aim of covering expenses for foreign players, encompassing salaries and FIFA sanctions. To facilitate donations, a dedicated bank account (TFF Litigation CA) was established to receive cash, checks, and transfers from both national and international sources. Remarkably, contributions surpassed \$2 million, notwithstanding the significant economic downturn affecting all societal strata.

Independent of elected leaders, these initiatives were undertaken by CA supporters, inspiring some former players and renowned leaders to join the cause. Social networks and the Tunisian media played the main role in spreading and supporting the project. This post-revolution freedom of expression in media was achieved thanks to the decree-law⁷ N° 2011-115, enacted on November 2, 2011. This legislation, which linked press freedom in Tunisia, played a pivotal role in facilitating the dissemination and amplification of these actions. This widespread media coverage attracted the attention of Qatar Airways⁸, which subsequently became the official sponsor of the club for four seasons (2020-2024) with a sponsorship package totaling \$8 million. This strategic partnership not only alleviated the crisis but also laid a solid foundation for future endeavors. Notably, Qatar Airways leveraged this opportunity to establish a foothold in Tunisia, especially amidst the backdrop of the ongoing crisis of the Tunisian company, Tunisair, where its name featured prominently, despite the categorical opposition of the Tunisian General Labor Union⁹ (UGTT) to the privatization of public enterprises.

Supporterism emerged as a catalyst for enriching and constructive citizen engagement, providing a platform for open dialogue and shared aspirations. Rooted in solidarity, integrity, and a commitment to transparency, supporters advocated for the club's welfare, prioritizing communal interests over personal concerns.

The sentiments echoed by interviewees underscore an unwavering allegiance to the club and a steadfast dedication to its well-being, irrespective of external circumstances. This unwavering support reflects a deep-seated belief in the values of solidarity, honesty, and equitable access to information, which lie at the heart of supporterism. These narratives affirm the potential of supporterism as a way of fostering responsible citizenship and nurturing a collective spirit grounded in shared values and common goals. The comments made by the participants of this study are as follows:

“The club belongs to us; it is our family, and we defend it to the death!”.

“The CA is our top priority. We will always be ready to support it as much as possible, regardless of our life situation.”

“The CA fundraiser also involved children and people in poverty. Some of them borrowed money and sold their belongings, such as cars, furniture, or livestock, to participate in this special fundraiser.”

“The participation of all CA supporters was spontaneous and sincere, but also transparent and honest, which contributed to the legitimacy of the actions.”

This collective initiative carried out by these supporters of the CA constitutes a factor of autonomous citizen responsibility. In this sense, the value of supporterism lies in the fact that it invites us to collectively establish a new space for the construction of thoughts, initiatives, and the sharing of persuasive discourses, independently of the framework assigned to this football phenomenon. Integrity, fairness, and solidarity are presented as the main conditions for the strength of voluntary commitment.

4.2. Supporter Dynamics and Political Engagement: An Intricate Interplay

In a unanimous voice, the interviewees advocated for the segregation of sports from political affairs. They perceived the recent presidential crisis within CA as emblematic of the failure inherent in their intertwining.

⁶Ben Malek, F., “Club Africain: The fans invent a new “Latkha”. Club Africain: Les supporters lancent une nouvelle “Latkha” - Sport By Tunisie Numérique (tunisienumerique.com) (accessed December 30, 2019).

⁷Decree-Law No. 2011-115 of November 2, 2011, on the freedom of the press, printing and publishing. 2021. Décret-Loi N°2011-115 du 2 novembre 2011 - HAICA

⁸Qatar Airways Announces Partnership with Club Africain of Tunisia. Qatar Airways Announces Partnership with Club Africain of Tunisia | Qatar Airways (accessed August 16, 2020).

⁹“The UGTT declares war on privatization”. L'UGTT déclare la guerre à la privatisation (leconomiste maghrebin.com), (accessed Feb. 12, 2018).

This sentiment underscores the perception of sports as a mere tool for political manipulation and opportunism. Moreover, all interviewees vehemently rejected affiliating with any political faction, irrespective of its ideological stance. Post-revolution power struggles were also the main cause of this sense of disillusionment. For these participants, the power has been hijacked for the benefit of the political figures, leaving no prospect of a better life for the country's youth. However, the aspiration for a more promising future was the main objective of the Tunisian revolution. The comments given by the participants of this study are as follows:

"Politics, in its current manifestation, is perceived as detrimental and unpopular. We opt to maintain a distance from partisan entanglements and engage only when necessitated by the imperative to champion political reform and instigate change."

"The pursuit of political ambitions is antithetical to the aspirations of football enthusiasts. Our allegiance lies with a noble and communal cause, in stark contrast to the perceived corruption endemic to political spheres."

"Our resistance is grounded in our staunch opposition to the injustices, despotism, and repression perpetuated by elected officials, whether within the realm of sports or governance. Driven by conviction and patriotism, we persist in challenging political overreach."

Outside the club, these CA supporters interviewed exhibited a resolute determination to assert themselves as a formidable political force, surpassing even the government. They expressed a preference for informal activism over seeking formal political power. Deliberately, these young supporters supported the value of their political and social dynamism, envisioning it as a catalyst for steering the country towards participatory democracy. Consequently, they continued to assert their influence, advocating for a peaceful and democratic vision of politics and exerting pressure on both the government and the broader societal landscape. Their remarks are as follows:

"The youth will be the architects of Tunisia's return to democracy, holding the future of the nation in their hands."

"We have demonstrated our capabilities since the revolution, and politicians are aware that we possess the capacity to intervene whenever the system falters."

"We act on our convictions, serving as a steadfast bulwark against corruption, whether in sports or politics."

"Our engagement in politics will always remain independent of partisan affiliations. Our shared values prioritize the welfare of all Tunisian citizens over the interests of corrupt elected officials."

Navigating between protest and acceptance, these supporters highlight the constructive interactions between supporterism and politics. Each interviewee was steadfast in affirming their allegiance to both the football community and political activism. This symbiotic relationship manifests in civic practices aligned with the principles of conscientious and enlightened citizen participation.

4.3. Contradictory Perceptions of the Future: Navigating between Indignation and Awareness

While the apparent interface between supporters and politics showcased positive actions, a somber undercurrent permeates the sentiments of seven of the interviewed supporters (7/20), painting a bleak picture of their future in Tunisia. The most alarming revelations center around terrorism and illegal immigration, the two phenomena that have defined post-revolution Tunisia. The arguments put forth predominantly revolve around the country's economic depression. Yet, all interviewees (20/20) advocated for a secular state and applauded the failure of the moderate Islamist strategy. They affirmed the unequivocal relationship between religion and politics, asserting their inherent incompatibility. They said that freedom of expression contrasts with the doctrines of religion rooted in unwavering subservience.

Beyond religious dogma, they said that terrorism and immigration in Tunisia find sustenance and funding from both national and international entities, among which the "Ennahdha" party preys on vulnerable youth. For these supporters, the proliferation has accelerated significantly with the ascent of Islamists to power. In fact, for three interviewees (3/20), the financial advantages enjoyed by the relatives of this political party are the ultimate proof of their involvement in human trafficking. They revealed that the disenfranchised youth, ensnared by jihadist ideologies, receive material inducements for their families. They made the following revelations:

"We have relinquished hope for a dignified existence in a nation where every youth is torn between emigration and succumbing to terrorism. We are prepared to lay down our lives to secure a modicum of betterment for our loved ones."

"We cherish Tunisia, yearning to dwell within its borders, yet these pretentious politicians have left us devoid of recourse. They compel us to embark on treacherous voyages or to engage in conflict to solve our pecuniary problems."

"We were the catalysts of a non-violent uprising against autocracy and years of oppression for a brighter future. Alas, disillusionment now pervades us, driving a desire to flee the nation by any means necessary. In our heads, we are already resigned to our fate."

"Despite my profound affection for the homeland, I would contemplate resorting to terrorism to escape misery."

"These political elites revel in their authority under the guise of religious piety."

"We are devout Muslims, with our beliefs deeply intertwined with our personal connection to the Divine. We adamantly refuse to permit this political party to circumvent societal norms in the name of religion."

Furthermore, among the thirteen interviewed supporters (13/20), a prevailing optimism towards their future and the political landscape of the country emerged. Their stance has been characterized by a constructive

perception conditioned by the integrity and righteousness of elected officials, like the current president, Kais Saïed, who considers it in harmony with the objectives of the revolution. However, these interviewees called on the current government to pay special attention to the concerns of young people by embarking on real and effective solutions. One of the supporters interviewed referred to the democratic ethos within his group, considering these principles essential to advancing the political and socio-economic fabric of Tunisia. The comments were as follows:

“Political leaders must heed young people's concerns and eschew exclusionary practices.”

“The era of oppression and tyranny towards us must yield pragmatic solutions that genuinely address our needs.”

“Our collective operates on the bedrock of equity and integrity for the betterment of our club. This ethos is indispensable for co-creating the Tunisia of tomorrow.”

“True democracy hinges on communication and collaboration with citizens.”

It is evident that the lingering experience of discrimination before and after the revolution continues to shape the pessimistic outlook of many young Tunisians, reflecting a painful history that influences their future projections. This narrative underscores the fragility of the current situation and the pressing issues concerning security and the economy. The democratic transition, therefore, confronts a paradigm shift in the treatment of youth by those in power, which is imperative for achieving political and socio-economic stability.

In this context, supporterism emerges as an opportune arena for cultivating communal identity and civic responsibility, thereby enabling governments to recognize and harness the untapped potential of Tunisian youth in distress, fostering genuine investment in their welfare and empowerment.

4.4. Documentary Analysis

The analysis of the documentary content unveils a poignant portrayal of the country as a desolate “pit,” where its inhabitants struggle to survive while harboring aspirations of providing a brighter future for their offspring. For these CA supporters, elected officials are nothing but “incompetent opportunists”, destroying the future of the country. However, they clearly show their determination to confront the corrupt system and fight for socio-economic equity, with their remarks, “they want to resist us, but they do not know our stubbornness,” with the main goal of reclaiming “our country”. Conversely, they express their disappointment towards a country that, according to them, “has forgotten them” and “the state that has abandoned them”. Therefore, they express grievances towards a country they love and defend, feeling overwhelmed by anger and a sense of marginalization. These “invincible” youths find refuge in alcohol and drugs; desperately, they believe that justice will be served by “God”. Thus, they express their distress and “cry out”

their country, which has become, in their eyes, “a graveyard” for the oppressed and the poor, but also an object to be plundered and sold. The hatred towards the system and the lack of humanity of political leaders are clearly depicted in the lyrics of this song, highlighting the injustice felt by this oppressed youth: “a shitty country where nothing is expected”. They declare their fight against the system, firmly announcing that they will forever be “the voice of those who have no one”. For these youths, the revolution continues, and the struggle against the state will continue until “social justice is achieved”.

These lyrics testify to a strong sense of maturity and civic responsibility. Attachment to the club is therefore considered a symbol of successful integration, identity, and belonging. This identification with the club in the political sphere was made by free will and conviction. CA, thus, appears as a facilitator of social relations, consolidation, and formation of social identities. The sense of belonging to the social environment has surpassed geographical and identity references [30-33]. In this regard, this commitment is characterized by a dominant desire for change through informal “democratic legitimacy” [34].

5. DISCUSSION

The complex relationship between football and politics transcends mere social dynamics and extends into the realms of nationalism and political contention [35-37]. Testimonies from a cohort of Tunisian supporters of Club Africain (CA) underscore the strong interactions between supporterism and the political landscape of the country. Doherty *et al.*'s research [38] sheds light on these interactions through the testimonies of a group of Tunisian CA supporters, suggesting close ties between supporterism and the country's political events. This study also examined the link between Tunisian youth experiences during the revolution and their subsequent political engagement, hinting at the potential for increased political activism among young people. This hypothesis is supported by the multiple political transitions experienced by the country despite a democratic setback [39-41]. Ridge further observes emerging signs of a conscious democratic ethic among Tunisians post-revolution [42].

Moreover, youth activism in Tunisia has largely adopted non-violent means, sharply deviating from politically charged aggression stemming from negative sentiments [43]. In this light, supporterism may be seen as a dynamic sphere catalyzing the transformation of marginalization into constructive reflections and identity assertion [44]. Several researchers have highlighted the role of sports, particularly football, in shaping social identity [45, 46]. This observation is particularly pronounced during periods of political repression, as exemplified by Football Club Barcelona, which is considered representative of the city of Barcelona and its nation or territory [16]. Thus, the territorial anchoring of football teams has always been a structural element of local identity [47].

This observation is also true for CA and its rival, EST,

thereby reviving the historical opposition between the northern and southern suburbs of Medina, the former capital of Tunis [15]. Additionally, sport, especially football, serves as a powerful tool for national identity, effectively contributing to changing mindsets in various ways and at different times [16]. Consequently, it can serve politics, encouraging collective reflection and decision-making for the common good [34]. The example of Qatar illustrates this significant positioning of sport, aiming to promote its image internationally while addressing challenges related to human rights, labor, and a sustainable environment [48].

Thus, this spontaneous engagement resonates with Rousseau's democratic ideal, where power is directly entrusted to citizens without intermediaries [49]. The civic duty sense of these football supporters has spawned a form of political participation focused on collective empowerment, idea generation, and knowledge dissemination [50]. This hypothesis is supported by the peaceful demonstrations of the Tunisian revolution and citizen practices outside traditional political circles [51]. These principles underlie a dynamic political landscape reacting to societal changes, citizen input, and shared norms. This mass mobilization also advocates spatial justice, harmonizing space, politics, and social equity in line with principles of holistic national development and geographic parity [52].

However, despite this maturity, young Tunisians remain affected by the nation's socio-economic malaise [53]. They also remain excluded from political decision-making [54], explaining the alarming messages of some interviewees oscillating between terrorism and immigration. The first phenomenon, clandestine immigration, explosively developed post-revolution [55, 56], severely disrupting the region's migratory landscape and leading to a humanitarian catastrophe. Consequently, some have expressed extremist thoughts, oscillating between terrorism and immigration. The resurgence of clandestine immigration post-revolution has intensified regional migratory dynamics, leading to a humanitarian crisis due to underlying socio-economic factors [57]. This vulnerability stems from a deep disillusionment following unfulfilled revolutionary aspirations. For the Tunisian people, activism is more perceived as an expression of freedom than hope [58].

Thus, internal social and ethnic marginalization can fuel conflicts and instability [59]. The specter of post-revolutionary terrorism among Tunisians further complicates matters [60, 61], while underlying motivations remain ambiguous [62]. In this regard, the respondents in our study espoused secularism, viewing support for President Saïed as a counterbalance to the Islamist Ennahda party [63]. Other studies on jihadism have not yet clearly established the link between Islam and Sharia, focusing primarily on the socio-economic factors of these troubled countries [64, 65]. In this regard, some argue that terrorism is often associated with cultural stereotypes of Islam and representations of Muslims [66]. The dynamics of electoral politics post-revolution highlight the

interaction between socio-economic indicators and religiosity. This crisis of secularism has emerged since the revolution and has questioned the entire democratic process of the country [67-69]. Indeed, the relationship between sports events and terrorism is discussed by some researchers [70, 71]. In France, a law was passed considering hooliganism as a precursor to terrorism [72]. Whether in sports or political discourse, negative representations of Islam are constraining, especially in post-revolutionary Arab nations. In this context, the European Union's shift towards security cooperation and counterterrorism in the wake of the Arab Spring has redefined priorities in the region. Nonetheless, the findings of this research value supporterism as a tool for education in autonomous participatory democracy.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the connection between support for a cause and the continued involvement of young people in the democratic process of Tunisia after the revolution. By conducting qualitative interviews and studying documentaries, we have discovered how supporterism promotes civic ideals and a common identity rooted in democratic principles. Nevertheless, certain advocates have brought to light concerning patterns. Certain individuals have reported a feeling of disappointment, which has caused them to contemplate potentially dangerous options, such as engaging in illegal immigration or participating in acts of terrorism. These findings emphasize the immediate requirement for inclusive and fair solutions to meet the expectations of young people and tackle the socio-economic difficulties of the country. The research findings emphasize the potential of supporterism as a forum for significant civic engagement, especially in post-revolutionary situations. It is important for elected officials to consistently strive to engage young people by creating and implementing projects that adapt to their ideas and methods. In order to gain insight into these successful policy measures and enhance the ability of democracies to withstand challenges, it is imperative to illuminate this process through an analysis of different categories of supporters and a thorough examination of analogous transitions in other Arab nations.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

It is hereby acknowledged that all authors have accepted responsibility for the manuscript's content and consented to its submission. They have meticulously reviewed all results and unanimously approved the final version of the manuscript.

ABBREVIATION

CA = Club Africain

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

The research design was approved by the Medical Ethics Council of the Faculty of Medicine in Sousse, Tunisia (reference number 35220228).

HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of institutional and/or research committee and with the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki, as revised in 2013.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

STANDARDS OF REPORTING

COREQ guidelines were followed.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data and supportive information are available within the article.

FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all participants who contributed to the completion of this study. This manuscript could not have been completed without their support and patience.

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