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**U.S. ADMINISTRATION'S PRESS COMMUNICATIONS  
ON TUNISIA AFTER THE JULY 25, 2021 'STATE OF EXCEPTION':  
THE SHAPING OF URGENCY DISCOURSE**

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### Abstract

July 25, 2021 was an exceptional day in Tunisia, ushering in a new chapter in its contemporary political history and triggering a wave of global responses to the declared 'state of exception'. This research examines the U.S. administration's press communications on Tunisia following this event. Specifically, it explores (i) the dominant crisis frames permeating these communications and their underlying political agenda and (ii) the extent to which the discourse they imparted signals a change in U.S. foreign policy towards Tunisia in crisis situations. To meet these research objectives, a corpus-based investigation was undertaken using an integrative framework combining qualitative (frames) and quantitative (keyness and collocations) approaches. Results revealed changing discourses around the theme of crisis, moving from a sense of togetherness to urgency. This may echo the cautious attitude of the American government and its heightened concern about Kais Saied's transitional measures. In broad terms, the exploration offered a glimpse of how the dynamics of global politics unfold discursively. Importantly, the Biden administration's construction of Tunisia's political-democratic crisis in terms of urgency can have real-life consequences for international perceptions of the country's future. Theoretically, the study's implications touch primarily upon Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS, henceforth), particularly the evolving corpus linguistics concepts of keyness and collocation networks.

**Keywords:** U.S. press communications, Tunisia, July 25, crisis, urgency, CADS, framing, keyness, collocation network.

### 1. Introduction

The growing scholarly interest in political discourse analysis (e.g., Wodak, 1989; van Dijk, 2004; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2011; Ullmann, 2021) stems mainly from the contention that political actors and institutions have the potential to mold public opinion and that language constitutes one of the prime strategies they deploy to meet this end (Chilton, 2004; de Bruijn, 2019). The discourse of politicians is thus driven by the constant "struggle for political power" (Kirvalidze & Samnidze, 2016, p. 165) and is overwhelmingly ideological (van Dijk, 2001). Political institutions, in fact, have the power to influence people's perceptions of the external world (Mayr, 2008). The present study sheds light on the U.S. administration's press communications (press statements, press briefings, and the like) as a form of political discourse that has so far spurred a vast array of studies in the fields of critical discourse analysis (e.g., Sun, 2010), CADS (e.g., Partington, 2003; De Candia et al., 2013), political communication (e.g., Hong, 2016; Zhabotynska & Brynko, 2022),



amongst others. In particular, this article investigates the American government's press communications on Tunisia following the July 25, 2021 'state of exception'.

This small North African country grabbed the attention of the whole world more than a decade ago—2011—when Tunisians revolted against a long-time dictator, the then President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and the Tunisian Revolution ushered in a wave of pro-democracy protests in the Middle East and North Africa, known as the Arab Spring. Since then, Tunisia has been witnessing a democratic transition marked by important milestones like the 2014 free and transparent parliamentary and presidential elections. A recent political event, however, has aroused global concern about the danger of democratic backsliding in Tunisia. On July 25, 2021, incumbent President Kais Saied wrote a new chapter in Tunisia's contemporary political history (Marzouki, 2022) by declaring a 'state of exception' and announcing the suspension of Parliament and dismissal of the prime minister. This landmark day came amid a prolonged political, economic, and health crisis that had been engulfing the country and widespread public anger and protests. Though Saied's exceptional measures initially garnered popular support,<sup>1</sup> the subsequent developments—including a new constitution with few checks on the president's powers (e.g., Grewal et al., 2022)—and his lack of a clear roadmap (e.g., Fetouri, 2022) fueled increasing criticism nationally and internationally.

The present research examines the intriguing issue of how the United States, with its purportedly liberal, pro-democracy tradition, communicated the unfolding events in Tunisia, an important ally against terrorism in the MENA region, to the press and, by extension, the whole world. Importantly, the American administration's representation of the crisis enveloping Tunisia would have implications for not only U.S. foreign policy agenda but also global assessments of the political, economic, and security situation in Tunisia, hence potentially the future of this nascent democracy. This assumption is premised on a recurrent argument in critical discourse analysis-based crisis research (e.g., Powers & Xiao, 2008; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2011) stipulating that crisis events are construed partly discursively, given that they "influence, and are influenced by, what is said or written" (Mohd Don & De Rycker, 2013, p. 3). In this respect, political actors' discursive representations of crises are argued to impact public understandings of and responses to these events. Against this backdrop, this article addresses the two following research questions:

**RQ1:** Which crisis frames dominated the U.S. administration's press communications on Tunisia after July 25, 2021 and what kind of political agenda did they convey?

**RQ2:** To what extent did the communicated discourse mark a change in U.S. foreign policy towards Tunisia in crisis situations?

Methodologically, the study adopts an integrative analytical framework that combines framing theory (qualitative approach) and the corpus linguistics notions of keyness and collocation (quantitative approach). Equally important, critical discourse analysis represents the underlying theoretical background against which the results derived from the framing, keyness, and collocation analyses will be interpreted, thereby unveiling their ideological underpinnings. This research is thus best positioned within CADS, merging a discourse focus with corpus linguistics techniques (Ancarno, 2020).

## **2. Insights from political communication research**

Drawing on political communication research, this work aims to identify the crisis frames that were prominently used by senior U.S. government officials in their post-July 25 press communications on Tunisia. This is intended to gather empirical evidence in response to the first research question (RQ1).

### **2.1. Framing theory**

Framing is one of the most evolving theoretical concepts in the field of political communication research (Cacciatore et al., 2016). The major premise undergirding framing studies (e.g., Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993; Oxley, 2020, to name but a few) is that the ways in which elites such as politicians and journalists shape political issues influence public perceptions of these matters, hence the ultimate process of public opinion formation (Chong & Druckman, 2012; Shevchenko, 2022).

This is encapsulated in Entman's (1993, p. 52) oft-cited definition of framing as the process of "select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."

Framing scholars scrutinize media frames and/or political actors' frames (e.g., Entman, 2004; Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010; Bos et al., 2016, amongst others) with the aim of unveiling the role they may play in the construction of public discourse. Research on news framing has, in fact, uncovered substantial evidence on how the mass audience, in their understanding and interpretation of public controversies, tend to make recourse to those attributes that are most prevalent in mass media coverage of these very events (e.g., Iyengar, 1991). Likewise, it is argued that political communicators deploy framing as a strategy to manipulate people's minds (Oxley, 2020). In this regard, media agents partly draw on politicians' frames to generate their own set of frames; frame building, in the words of Rodelo and Muñoz (2019, p. 103), is conceived of as "the flow of frames from political actors to journalists and, thus, to news articles." Interestingly, with the proliferation of social media platforms, the general public itself has emerged as an active agent in the construction of the dominant frames through which current events are commonly perceived (Xie et al., 2022). In light of this, audience frames constitute the outcome of an interplay between different stakeholders—traditional and new—in the political communication environment.

## 2.2. Crisis frames

Narrowing the focus to crisis communication, it is enlightening to note that key agents in times of crisis adopt different framing strategies. Regarding media crisis framing, this is the process whereby "an organization selectively enhances the salience of some aspects of a crisis through news coverage and media communication, thereby influencing public perceptions" (Xie et al., 2022, p. 3). Crisis news coverage is reported to be dominated by five major frames (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; An & Gower, 2009), notably *human interest* (a humanistic dimension), *conflict* (contradictory accounts), *morality* (moral/religious judgment), *attribution of responsibility* (who's to blame?), and *economic consequences* (economic impact). The prevalence of one or some of these frames over the rest is contingent upon the type of crisis. Accordingly, while the *attribution of responsibility* and *conflict* frames abound in human-made crises, *human interest* and *economic consequences* framing is characteristic of natural disasters (Xi et al., 2021). Other media frames that are associated with particular crisis types have also been identified in the literature. For instance, in their coverage of health crises, news media organizations tend to supplement the aforementioned frames with other themes such as *reassurance/pacification*, *new evidence/research*, and *actions to take/prevention* (Gerken & van der Meer, 2019; Xi et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2022).

For their part, government agents and organizations—such as airlines in the case of plane crashes—develop their set of framing strategies in times of crisis. Specifically, they deploy a number of crisis response frames such as *apology*, *denial*, *diminishing*, and *ingratiation* (Coombs, 2007, 2018; Tian & Yang, 2022), with a view to managing public response to the ongoing events. The public itself has recently become an active actor in setting the agenda during crisis times by mediating its own construction and interpretation of the crisis in question via social media networks (Ben Ghazlen, 2023; Cheng et al., 2016). The public's frames largely draw on the crisis frames employed by the mass media, on the one hand, and political actors and/or organizations, on the other hand, hence the interconnectedness or "alignment" (van der Meer, 2014, p. 751) between the frames generated by different stakeholders in times of crisis. On this account, Xie et al. (2022) propose a comprehensive model of crisis frames that builds on the recurrent themes in crisis communication and can serve as a useful framework to investigate public crisis framing.

Xie et al.'s (2022) model consists of four major frames, notably *Nature*, *Cause*, *Process*, and *Result*. The former denotes "the set of inherent attributes and core characteristics of crisis" (p. 4). This frame groups a number of sub-frames commonly reported in crisis framing studies such as *morality*

and *seriousness*. Regarding the second frame, it identifies “the sources or related factors that lead to the crisis, including natural and man-made events” (p. 4) and encompasses such sub-frames as *attribution of responsibility*, *apology*, *denial*, and *human interest*. The *Process* frame, however, pins down the “evolution of a crisis event (crisis life-cycle), as well as the response and management strategies adopted by organizations and the public” (p. 4), covering—amongst others—the *conflict*, *new evidence*, and *reassurance* sub-frames. The last frame depicts “the consequences, including the injuries and deaths, economic losses, and other catastrophic effects, tangible and intangible” (p. 4). The *economic consequences* and *catastrophic effects* sub-frames fall under this category. The eclectic nature of Xie et al.’s (2022) framework boosts its applicability to different crisis types (natural/human-made) and frames’ generating sources (mass media, politicians, the public, etc.). It will therefore be employed in the present investigation, as section 4.1 elucidates.

### 3. Insights from corpus linguistics

Keyness and collocation (networks) analyses, widely used techniques in corpus linguistics (Gabrielatos & Marchi, 2011; Lehecka, 2015), can give insights into the aboutness (Phillips, 1989; Gabrielatos, 2018) and ideological undercurrents (Bondi & Scott, 2010; Bogetić, 2013) of a given corpus by comparison with another. This being so, these corpus linguistics notions are herein utilized to provide empirical evidence in answer to the second research question (RQ2).

#### 3.1. Keyness analysis

Keyness analysis has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the last two decades (McEnery, 2009; Bondi & Scott, 2010; Goh, 2011; Durán-Muñoz, 2019, to name but a few). Introduced in the mid-1990s, this corpus linguistics concept targeting keywords is considered to be relatively recent (Gabrielatos, 2018). As Scott (1997, p. 236) succinctly put it, a keyword is “a word which occurs with unusual frequency in a given text ... by comparison with a reference corpus.” It is noteworthy that keyness studies do not limit their focus to single words but can address other units of analysis such as n-grams (word chunks/clusters/bundles), discourse/pragmatics functions, lemmas, and POS tags (Gabrielatos, 2018). The notion of keyness “tells us the *aboutness* of text” (Taylor & del Fante, 2020, p. 35, emphasis in original), that is to say, the distinctive features of a text or corpus, encompassing the prevailing themes and attitudes it embodies. Undeniably, keywords have long been used to study the workings of ideology in language (e.g., Williams, 1976; Wierzbicka, 1997). The contribution of corpus linguistics (Scott, 1997) rather lies in basing keyness analysis on the comparison of two corpora through recourse to statistics and the use of corpus tools. Specifically, by conducting such a procedure, a researcher seeks to “identify large differences between the frequency of word-forms in two corpora (usually referred to as the *study* and *reference* corpus)” (Gabrielatos, 2018, pp. 227–228, emphasis in original).

While it is commonly agreed that a study or target corpus constitutes the primary focus of the researcher, different conceptions have been advanced for the notion of a reference corpus, resulting in major inconsistencies among corpus linguists as to what qualifies as a good selection (Goh, 2011). In this respect, Gabrielatos (2018) delineated two major misconceptions about the choice of a ‘good’ reference corpus, notably the argument that it should (i) be larger than the target corpus and (ii) display a general (vs. specialized) focus. Goh (2011), in a similar vein, ascertained that corpus size and genre are not important factors in the selection of a reference corpus, reiterating Scott’s (2009) assertion that a plainly ‘absurd’ reference corpus can still be a good one inasmuch as it is indicative of aboutness. In short, as Gabrielatos (2018, p. 253) posited, “there is nothing intrinsic in a corpus that renders it a good selection for a ‘study’ or ‘reference’ role ... . Any two corpora can be compared, as long as their characteristics ... help address the particular research questions.” Further research is thereby needed to clearly pin down the characteristics of an appropriate reference corpus, given that even the contention that it should represent the norm against which the study corpus is compared and contrasted (Scott, 2008) is not plausible since defining what the ‘norm’ is tends, by itself, to be elusive and problematic.

### 3.2. Collocation (networks) analysis

The concept of collocation was introduced to linguistic theory by Firth (1957, p. 11) in his famous dictum “you shall know a word by the company it keeps.” Corpus linguists, chiefly John Sinclair, then helped the term gain more prominence (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). It is important to note that there is no single and consensual definition ascribed to this concept and that “the meaning attached to the term collocation depends heavily on the particular application is being used for” (Anagnostou & Weir, 2007, p. 11). The present study adopts Sinclair’s (1991, p. 170) conceptualization of collocation as “the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text.” Such a definition encapsulates a statistical view (Frath & Gledhill, 2005) of the phenomenon of collocation. Based on the premise that words are not combined randomly (Firth, 1957) in that “any given word tends to co-occur with certain words more often than it does with others” (Lehecka, 2015, p. 2), this research also gives due attention to the discourse-pragmatic grounding of collocations. In so doing, it draws on previous CADS studies (e.g., Hardt-Mautner, 1995; Gabrielatos, 2008; Baker et al., 2013) that deployed the concept of collocation to unravel the discursive strategies of representation in different contexts. In this sense, the analysis of collocations “offers a productive means for understanding ideology, as lexical co-occurrence may shed new light on complex webs of identities, discourses and social representations in a community” (Bogetić, 2013, p. 334).

An important feature of collocations is the connectivity between individual collocates, considering that “[c]ollocates of words do not occur in isolation, but are part of a complex network of semantic relationships” (Brezina et al., 2015, p. 141). This assumption triggered growing interest in the concept of collocation networks among corpus linguists (e.g., McEnery, 2006; Baker & McEnery, 2015). Accordingly, the study of collocation networks allows the identification of the underlying fabric of meaning associations and connections in discourse. It is worthy of mention that the notion of collocation networks originally borrows from Phillips’s (1989) postulation that lexical networks are salient indicators of the aboutness of a text. On a practical plane, *GraphColl* (Brezina et al., 2015), developed at Lancaster University in 2014–2015, is a powerful corpus tool for constructing networks of collocations. Based on a range of association measures, this corpus utility creates graphical representations of collocation networks whereby a collocate of the original node can itself act as a second node for which a new network of collocates (second-order collocates) is generated. This process can be replicated, yielding an elaborate nexus of collocation networks (Brezina et al., 2015). On this account, the main merit of a collocation networks analysis is that it can capture complex webs of semantic associations permeating an entire corpus in one single graph (e.g., Figures 6 and 7 in this paper).

## 4. Method

The combination of qualitative (manual framing analysis) and quantitative (automatic keyness and collocation (networks) analyses) research methods in this study is anchored in the belief that they are complementary in nature and their synergy would provide deeper insights into the present investigation. In this light, corpus linguistics techniques and tools can corroborate the qualitative analysis of frames and, potentially, uncover new patterns that could otherwise have remained unnoticed to the human coder. Numerical and graphical evidence is, in fact, thought to offer a better understanding of the dynamics of the U.S. administration’s construction of the multifaceted crisis enveloping Tunisia during Saied’s presidency as expressed through its press communications.

### 4.1. Framing analysis

The framing analysis (RQ1) was conducted on a corpus (Saied corpus, henceforth) amounting to 5,004 words and consisting of the U.S. administration’s press communications on Tunisia from July 25, 2021 (Saied’s declaration of a ‘state of exception’) to September 14, 2022 (date of data collection). These communications include (transcripts of) press statements, briefings, releases, and

conferences—in whole or in part—issued by the White House or the Department of State. They were compiled from the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia<sup>2</sup> and the American Presidency Project<sup>3</sup> websites using “Tunisia” as a search word. The Saied corpus was content analyzed manually along (i) three crisis types (political-democratic, economic, and health crises) and (ii) five crisis frames (Nature, Cause, Process, Result, and Actions to take). It is worth noting that the first four frames, representing Xie et al.’s (2022) framework, were selected deductively based on the existing literature reviewed in section 2.2, while the last one emerged inductively in the course of data analysis. The Actions to take frame, in fact, does not belong to Xie et al.’s (2022) original taxonomy of frames adopted in this work, though it was reported in some crisis studies (e.g., Xi et al., 2021).

The manual content analysis of the Saied corpus was performed by two human coders: the researcher and a Tunisian student pursuing his M.A. studies in English (Linguistics). Based on *ReCal2* (Freelon, 2010), an online intercoder reliability measure, the strength of agreement between the two coders was deemed ‘Almost Perfect’. As regards the coding process, it relied on the following definitions of the coding categories:

**a) Type of crisis:** segments that refer, directly or indirectly, to a political-democratic, economic, or health (COVID-19) crisis are coded for the respective crisis type. The ones that evoke more than one crisis are double-coded.

**b) Type of crisis frame:** once the type of crisis is identified, the segment should also be coded for the type of crisis frame it realizes:

- **Nature frame:** how was this crisis described/labelled/perceived? How did it manifest itself? (e.g., Spokesperson Ned Price: “they [Tunisians] face the dual challenges of ... and the COVID-19 pandemic” [Health crisis])
- **Cause frame:** who is responsible for the crisis? (e.g., Office of the Spokesperson: “the economic challenges that Tunisia is facing as a result of Russian aggression against its neighbor” [Economic crisis])
- **Process frame:** how did the crisis evolve and which response strategies did it trigger? (e.g., Secretary Antony Blinken: “Tunisia’s July 25 constitutional referendum was marked by low voter participation” [Political-democratic crisis])
- **Result frame:** which negative consequences did the crisis have? (e.g., Spokesperson Ned Price: “... that have undermined Tunisia’s independent democratic institutions” [Political-democratic crisis])
- **Actions to take frame:** which actions were recommended to preclude the aggravation of the crisis/to find a resolution to the crisis? (e.g., Assistant Secretary Barbara Leaf: “I also stressed the importance of Tunisia moving forward with urgency in its negotiations with the IMF ... to arrest the ongoing economic crisis” [Economic crisis])

The abovementioned guidelines represented the codebook based on which the researcher and the second coder conducted the manual framing analysis of the Saied corpus. The few cases of coding disagreements were settled with further discussions and scrutiny. In contrast with automated research methods, qualitative approaches are undeniably notorious for their subjectivity.

#### 4.2. Keyness and collocation (networks) analyses

Targeting RQ2, the keyness and collocation (networks) analyses investigated the extent to which the American government’s representation of the crisis unfolding in Tunisia following Saied’s declaration of a ‘state of exception’ marked a change in its foreign policy vis-à-vis this country in crisis contexts. Given the comparative nature of this research question, a second corpus (Essebsi corpus, henceforth) from the same genre and source as the first one was collected using the same search word “Tunisia.” Late President Beji Caid Essebsi is Saied’s predecessor—by national vote—; his presidency shares some similarities with Saied’s, considering that it took place in a post-revolution period characterized by a fragile democratic transition and the occurrence of a number of

crises, most critical among which are the two terrorist attacks on the Bardo museum and Sousse. The Essebsi corpus, comprising 7,930 words, thus constituted the reference corpus that was compiled between March 18, 2015 (Bardo museum attack) and July 25, 2019 (the passing of President Essebsi).

The selection of this reference corpus was informed by Gabrielatos's (2018) assertion that a 'good' reference corpus should neither be a general one nor much larger than the target corpus; rather, it has to meet the research objectives addressed. Potential differences between the target (Saied corpus) and reference (Essebsi corpus) corpora are expected to provide solid empirical evidence as to whether the American government's crisis-related discourse, with respect to Tunisia, varied across these two presidencies (RQ2).

Another noteworthy observation is that, despite the relatively small size of these two corpora (12,934 words), the collected data is believed to be a rich resource that can yield insightful research results in that its institutional nature makes every single word count. This type of discourse indeed consists of scripted and calculated statements (Konstantinova et al., 2019). The corpora under study, in this sense, represent 'loaded' language that is likely to be fertile ground for the exploration of ideology and stance taking. Equally important, the integrated methodological approach espoused by this work would not have been feasible, had the size of the Saied corpus been larger as the manual coding of frames is an arduous and time-consuming process. The present research utilized the corpus linguistics notions of keyness and collocation (networks) to carry out the aforementioned comparative analysis. The latest version of *#LancsBox* (6.0) (Brezina et al., 2021), developed at Lancaster University, is the corpus analysis tool that conducted keyness calculations (via the *Words & Ngrams* interfaces) and generated collocation profiles and networks (via the *GraphColl* interface) for the Saied and Essebsi corpora. This powerful software package is user-friendly and can be downloaded, free of charge, from the internet. Log-likelihood (LL) is the statistical significance test that was selected in this research to generate keyness values. According to Gabrielatos (2018), this statistical metric is widely used in keyness studies and can be said to be a reliable measure of keyness when the size of the collected corpora is small, which is the case for the present work. An effect size metric is, however, an indispensable keyness measure for larger corpora. The default threshold value in *#LancsBox 6.0* is 6.63. With respect to the collocation analysis, it was carried out using two association measures, namely Mutual Information (MI for effect size) and Log-likelihood (LL for statistical significance). *#LancsBox 6.0*, by default, sets the cut-off value of 3 for the former metric.

## 5. Results and discussion

This section describes a prevalent political-democratic crisis framed in terms of urgency and U.S. crisis-related discourse from Essebsi to Saied.

### 5.1. A prevalent political-democratic crisis framed in terms of urgency

Results of the framing analysis (RQ1) are outlined in Table 1. The first observation worth reporting is that, in its press communications, the U.S. government communicated the idea that the crisis engulfing Tunisia since July 25, 2021 is chiefly political-democratic (103 out of 169 occurrences). This salience may echo the scope of attention that was allocated by the Biden administration to Saied's declaration of a 'state of exception', considering it to be outweighing any other crisis that Tunisia was facing. This can be interpreted against the purported American tradition of promoting democracy worldwide.

Table 1

**Frequencies of crisis types and frames in the Saied corpus**

	Potitical- democratic Crisis	Economic Crisis	Health Crisis	Total 1
Nature Frame	30	27	6	63
Cause Frame	2	6	0	8
Process Frame	24	4	1	29
Result Frame	5	0	0	5
Actions to take Frame	42	18	4	64
Total 2	103	55	11	169

The framing analysis also revealed the preponderance of the Actions to take and Nature frames over the rest of crisis frames, with 64 and 63 (out of 169) instances respectively. The recurrent use of the former in the Saied corpus reflects the “prescriptive (what actors should do)” legacy (Loke, 2016, p. 854) underpinning international relations and politics. The remarkably low frequency of the Result frame (5 occurrences), by contrast, can be attributable to the fact that all the investigated crises are still ongoing and their consequences are yet unfolding. Overall, the evidence presented in Table 1 may suggest that U.S. crisis-related discourse on Tunisia following July 25, 2021 was more focused on the nature of the crisis and the required measures than its causes (8 occurrences) and development (29 occurrences).

For reasons of space, the analysis and illustrations will be confined to the political-democratic crisis and the frames of Actions to take and Nature by virtue of their prominence. A close examination of their realizations in the corpus unveiled a significant pattern, notably a remarkable sense of urgency in the ways in which U.S. government representatives described the crisis in Tunisia and outlined the actions to be taken in response. Specifically, the discourse of urgency emerged in part from the prevalence of the sub-frame of seriousness in the Nature frame, thereby construing Tunisia’s political-democratic crisis as being serious and concerning. The underlined parts in the following examples illustrate this sense of criticality:

- (1) Secretary Antony Blinken: “*Tunisia has experienced an alarming erosion of democratic norms over the past year and reversed many of the Tunisian people’s hard-won gains since 2011.*”
- (2) Spokesperson Ned Price: “*We are concerned and disappointed by recent reports from Tunisia on infringements on freedom of the press and expression and the use of military courts to investigate civilian cases.*”
- (3) Spokesperson Ned Price: “*The United States is deeply concerned by the Tunisian President’s decision to unilaterally restructure Tunisia’s Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE).*”
- (4) Spokesperson Ned Price: “*We are particularly troubled by reports that media offices have been closed.*”
- (5) Secretary Antony Blinken: “*... have raised deep questions about Tunisia’s democratic path, both in Tunisia and internationally.*”

Secretary of State Blinken’s statement in Example 1 was considered one of the strongest messages delivered by the United States in opposition to President Saied’s transitional measures (Farooq, 2022). Nonetheless, deploying softer diplomatic rhetoric, the American government refrained from labelling what happened in Tunisia on July 25, 2021 as a ‘coup.’ This avoidance strategy was tacitly communicated in the State Department Spokesperson Ned Price’s assertion that “[w]hen it comes to the actions that led to this point, more important than debating what to label these events is the critical

work of supporting Tunisia on its democratic path.” In this respect, harsh criticism was directed at the U.S. government’s reportedly soft and reactive approach to the political-democratic crisis in Tunisia (Hamid, 2021; Yerkes, 2021).

Urgency discourse was also shaped through the construction of the suggested actions (Actions to take frame) as pressing and urgent measures. The underlined parts in Examples 6–10 impart a clear sense of emergency expressed in U.S. political discourse on the ongoing political events in Tunisia.

- (6) Spokesperson Ned Price: “*It is essential that the Government of Tunisia uphold its commitments to respect the independence of the judiciary as stipulated in the constitution.*”
- (7) Spokesperson Ned Price: “*President Saied should appoint a prime minister to form a government able to address those urgent needs.*”
- (8) Secretary Antony Blinken: “*we urge the swift adoption of an inclusive electoral law that facilitates the broadest possible participation in legislative elections planned for December, including among those who opposed or boycotted the constitutional referendum.*”
- (9) Spokesperson Ned Price: “*We have consistently communicated to Tunisian officials that any political reform process should be transparent and inclusive, and undertaken in coordination with a range of political parties, labor unions, and civil society.*”
- (10) NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne: “*the critical need for Tunisian leaders to outline a swift return to Tunisia’s democratic path.*”

Strikingly, the tone of the above ‘recommendations’ becomes quite harsh and severe in some instances. The sense of obligation, conveyed by the use of “essential that,” “should,” and “critical need,” admittedly lays bare the exercise of power at work. The United States, as a superpower, gives itself the right to dictate what Tunisia—a developing country benefiting from U.S. assistance and currently relying on its support to secure a critical IMF loan—needs to do amid its escalating crisis. Such strong statements from top politicians in the Biden administration did not, however, go unnoticed; they “roiled the U.S.-Tunisian relationship” (Ryan, 2022, para. 5) and were considered by the Tunisian government to be a form of interference in the country’s internal affairs.

Broadly speaking, the dynamics of power relations have always been of special interest to discourse analysts across different contexts, including crisis research. In particular, “the role of power and ideology in how crises function socially and discursively” (Mohd Don & De Rycker, 2013, p. 21) is revealing in multifarious respects. In the current context, for instance, the extent to which what happened in Tunisia warrants the aforementioned sense of emergency can be a subject of debate. According to a Sigma Conseil poll<sup>4</sup> conducted in May 2022, 65.2% of Tunisians continued to support President Saied despite mounting criticism nationally and globally. They reject the crisis narrative altogether and believe that the exceptional measures are constitutional and represent the only way to get the country back on track.

## 5.2. U.S. crisis-related discourse from Essebsi to Saied: a shift in focus

**5.2.1. Key words and bigrams.** In partial answer to RQ2, key words/bigrams were identified in the target (Saied) and reference (Essebsi) corpora with the aid of #LancsBox 6.0. On the grounds of feasibility, the analysis was limited to the top 20 Log-likelihood ordered key words/bigrams. Function words were discarded, given that they are unlikely to convey discourse-pragmatic meanings. Results, outlined in Table 2, showed that keywords characteristic of the Saied corpus (positive keywords) evinced the same dominant theme emerging from the framing analysis—a political-democratic crisis enveloping Tunisia and requiring urgent measures.

Table 2

**Keywords in the Saied and Essebsi corpora**

Positive keywords	Freq. in Saied Corp.	Freq. in Essebsi Corp.	Key-ness value (LL)	Negative keywords	Freq. in Essebsi Corp.	Freq. in Saied Corp.	Key-ness value (LL)
secretary	32	2	48.93	caid	20	0	18.99
transparent	19	0	36.96	essebsi	20	0	18.99
assistant	15	0	29.18	attack	18	0	17.09
civil	24	5	24.77	tunisia's	16	0	15.19
process	18	2	23.91	terrorist	15	0	14.24
saied	12	0	23.34	assistance	13	0	12.34
return	12	0	23.34	investment	12	0	11.39
democratic	35	15	21.24	cooperation	12	0	11.39
constitutional	9	0	17.50	obama	12	0	11.39
diverse	9	0	17.50	together	11	0	10.44
voices	9	0	17.50	Young	10	0	9.49
kais	9	0	17.50	violence	10	0	9.49
society	21	7	16.01	counterterroris	9	0	8.54
journalists	8	0	15.56	citizens	9	0	8.54
path	11	1	15.46	security	36	8	8.03
economic	32	18	14.00	risk	8	0	7.59
inclusive	18	6	13.72	difficult	8	0	7.59
independent	7	0	13.61	bardo	8	0	7.59
swift	7	0	13.61	museum	8	0	7.59
trip	7	0	13.61	hard	7	0	6.64

This aboutness was particularly mediated through such keywords as *transparent*, *civil*, *process*, *return*, *democratic*, *constitutional*, *diverse*, *voices*, *society*, *journalists*, *path*, *inclusive*, *independent*, and *swift*. It is enlightening to note that the semantic categorization of key words/bigrams in the present study was based on a rigorous examination of their co-text, as exemplified in the sample concordance lines included in this section. By way of illustration, Figure 1 displays the KWIC concordances for the keywords *transparent* and *swift* in the target corpus.

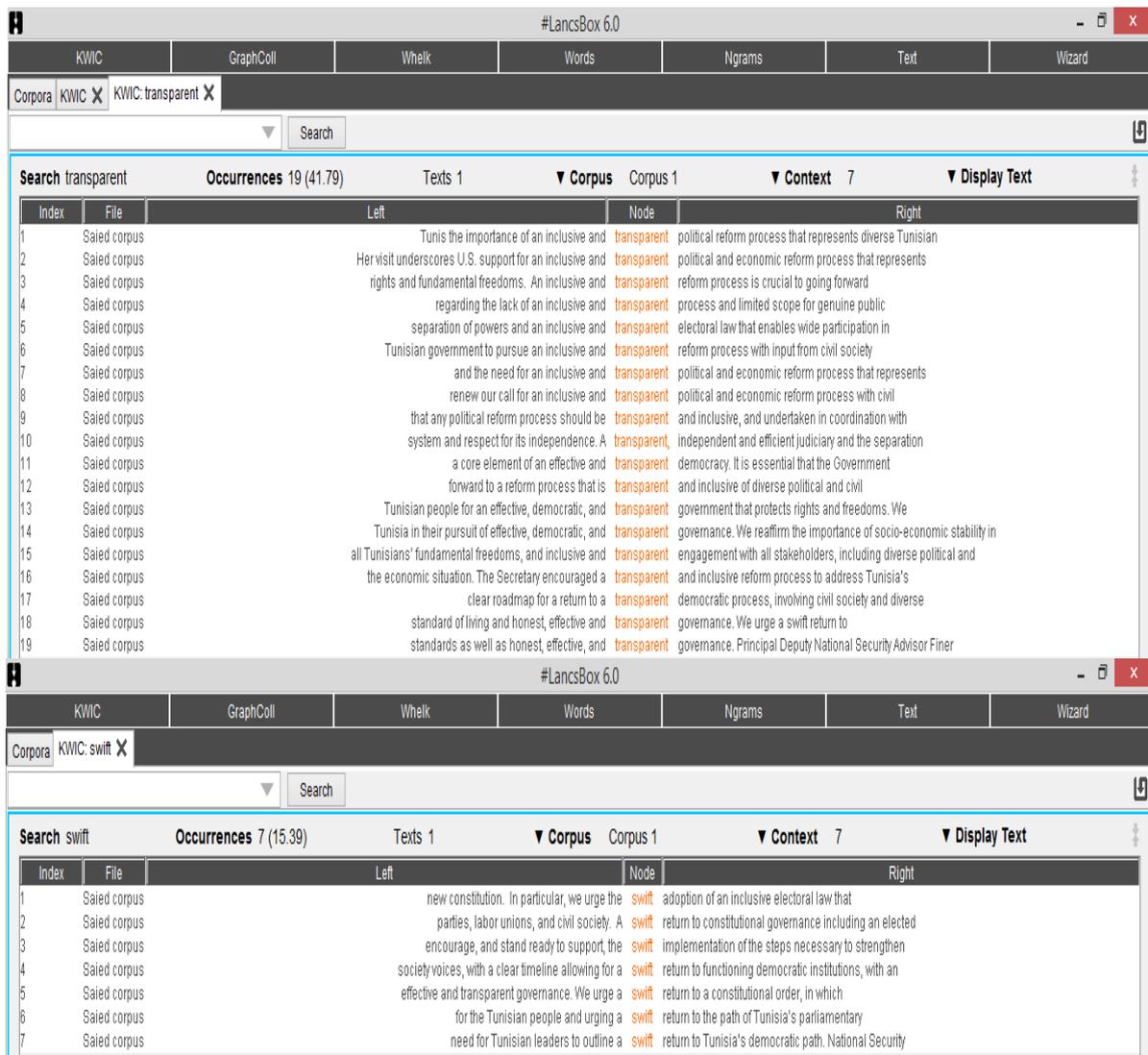


Figure 1. KWIC concordances for the keywords *transparent* and *swift* in the Saied corpus

Keywords typical of the Essebsi corpus (negative keywords), however, unveiled the prevalence of two distinct topics, notably terrorism (*attack, terrorist, violence, counterterrorism, security, risk, bardo, and museum*) and assistance and cooperation (*assistance, investment, cooperation, together, and obama*). The wider context of two sample keywords pertaining to these two themes in the reference corpus is provided in Figure 2.

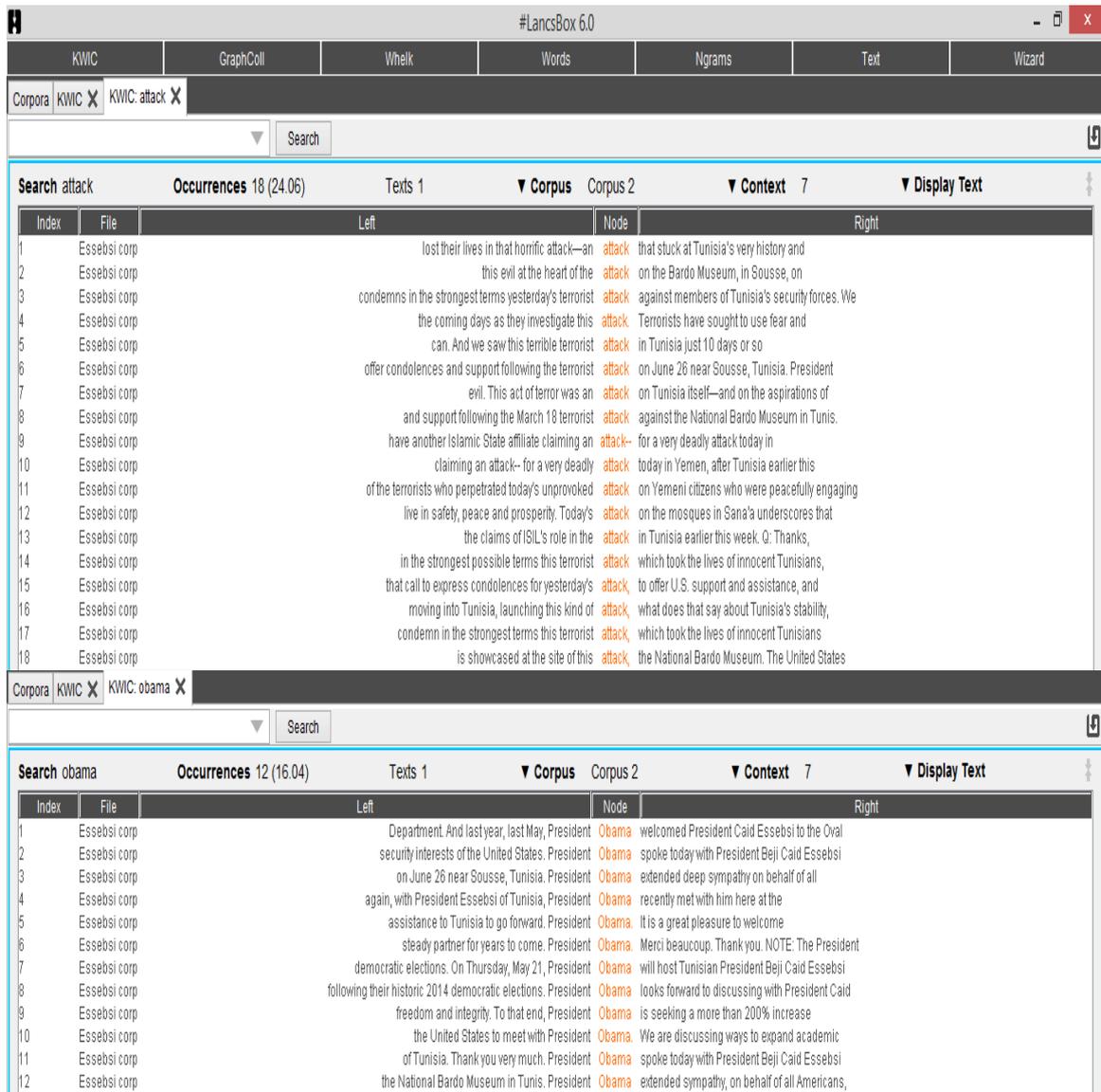


Figure 2. KWIC concordances for the keywords *attack* and *obama* in the Essebsi corpus

The differences detected between the two corpora as to their aboutness can be indicative of a change in U.S. diplomacy with respect to the crises that Tunisia faced from Essebsi's to Saied's presidencies. U.S. press communications during Essebsi's term in office placed a dual emphasis on the terrorist attacks striking the country and the American administration's strong commitment to U.S.-Tunisia partnership and cooperation. When the measures to be taken in response to the crisis were discussed, it was equally revealing that they were constructed within a discourse of togetherness, as the KWIC concordance for the keyword *cooperation* shows (Figure 3).

Index	File	Left	Node	Right
1	Essebsi corp	Tunisians. The two leaders highlighted the strong	cooperation	between their countries, whose relationship dates to
2	Essebsi corp	is facing and the importance of counterterrorism	cooperation	. The leaders reaffirmed the historic United States-Tunisia
3	Essebsi corp	States-Tunisia relationship and agreed to maintain close	cooperation	, including on security matters, and seek additional
4	Essebsi corp	matters, and seek additional ways to expand	cooperation	between the two countries. We applaud Tunisia
5	Essebsi corp	economic partnerships, we are deepening the security	cooperation	in a way that protects our citizens
6	Essebsi corp	the Global Counter-ISIL or Counter-Daesh Coalition... Our	cooperation	with Tunisia has never been more important
7	Essebsi corp	investigation and pledged to continue strengthening our	cooperation	on counterterrorism and broader security issues with
8	Essebsi corp	continued consolidation of Tunisia's democracy, U.S.-Tunisian security	cooperation	, and Tunisia's efforts to advance important economic
9	Essebsi corp	beyond. The President affirmed our continued robust	cooperation	on counterterrorism and broader security issues with
10	Essebsi corp	States is justifiably proud of the robust	cooperation	that we have with Tunisia on counterterrorism
11	Essebsi corp	now. And that is why the security	cooperation	that I referred to earlier that exists
12	Essebsi corp	United States is proud of our robust	cooperation	with Tunisia on counterterrorism and broader security

Figure 3. KWIC concordance for the keyword *cooperation* in the Essebsi corpus

By contrast, as Table 2 demonstrates, the theme of partnership and cooperation partially faded into the background during the presidency of Saied, giving rise to an alternative narrative: an endangered democracy and the urgency of reforms. The shift may signal a cautious attitude on the part of the Biden administration. This was tangibly reflected in the U.S. decision to reduce its military and economic aid to Tunisia in the wake of the July 25 event. Interestingly, even when the topic of U.S. cooperation and assistance was evoked in the Saied corpus, it was tacitly conditioned by the implementation of the suggested measures, reiterating the discursive strategies of dominance and control elucidated earlier in this article. Another noteworthy observation is the implication that U.S. cooperation and assistance efforts are directed at the Tunisian people, particularly the victims of Tunisia's political-democratic crisis, rather than Saied's government. Examples illustrating these intriguing patterns are as follows:

- (11) Assistant Secretary Barbara Leaf: *"I reiterated U.S. support for the Tunisian people and our commitment to a long-term partnership. That partnership is strongest when anchored in a shared commitment to democratic principles and human rights."*
- (12) Spokesperson Ned Price: *"The United States supports the aspirations of the Tunisian people for an effective, democratic, and transparent government that protects rights and freedoms."*
- (13) Secretary Antony Blinken: *"the United States has and will continue to use all tools at our disposal to support the Tunisian people in forging a democratic and accountable government ... U.S.-Tunisia partnership is strongest when there is a shared commitment to democracy and human rights."*
- (14) NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne: *"... delivered a message from President Biden reaffirming his personal support ... the Tunisian people and urging a swift return to the path of Tunisia's parliamentary democracy."*

Regarding the analysis of key bigrams, it did not detect significant disparity patterns between the two corpora, considering that only 6 key bigrams in the reference corpus (negative bigrams) attained statistical significance, as outlined in Table 3. The top 20 Log-likelihood ordered bigrams<sup>5</sup> in the target corpus (positive bigrams), nonetheless, echoed the same crisis (political-democratic) and urgency narrative emerging from the framing and keywords analyses reported earlier. This recurrent theme was particularly conveyed through the following 2-word clusters:

*and transparent, reform process, civil society, return to, democratic path, an inclusive, respect for, inclusive and, human rights, a swift, a clear, and diverse political.*

Table 3

**Key bigrams in the Saied and Essebsi corpora**

Positive bigrams	Freq. in Saied Corp.	Freq. in Essebsi Corp.	Key-ness value (LL)	Negative bigrams	Freq. in Essebsi Corp.	Freq. in Saied Corp.	Key-ness value (LL)
assistant secretary	15	0	29.18	caid essebsi	18	0	17.09
and transparent	13	0	25.29	president caid	14	0	13.29
reform process	11	0	21.40	president obama	12	0	11.39
civil society	20	5	18.63	and security	7	0	6.64
president kais	9	0	17.50	bardo museum	7	0	6.64
return to	9	0	17.50	to meet	7	0	6.64
democratic path	8	0	15.56				
an inclusive	12	2	13.76				
respect for	7	0	13.61				
inclusive and	9	1	11.95				
senior administration	6	0	11.67				
kais saied	6	0	11.67				
administration official	6	0	11.67				
of state	6	0	11.67				
president saied	6	0	11.67				
human rights	15	6	9.75				
a swift	5	0	9.72				
acting assistant	5	0	9.72				
a clear	5	0	9.72				
diverse political	5	0	9.72				

The KWIC concordances for the key bigrams *human rights* and *return to* succinctly illustrate the sense of emergency in U.S. political discourse on the political-democratic crisis Tunisia was grappling with, following Saied's exceptional measures. In particular, the lexical selections of "grapple," "erode," "critical time," "urge," "have been clear in," "a swift," "a rapid," "concerned and disappointed," "call for a clear," and "urging," occurring within the 7-word span of the bigrams, encapsulate this urgency discourse.

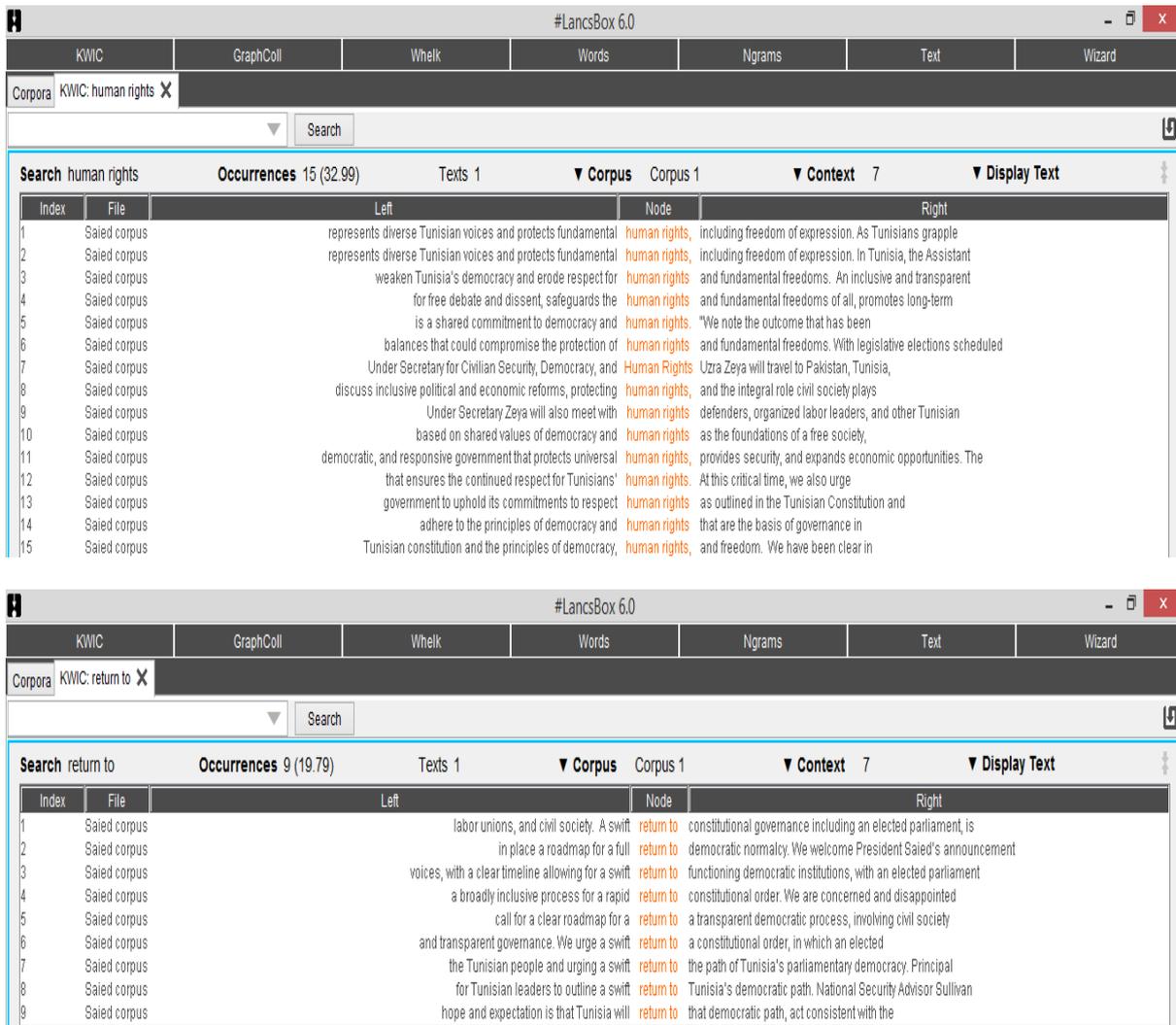


Figure 4. KWIC concordances for the key bigrams *human rights* and *return to* in the Saied corpus

A final observation to make before reporting the results of the collocation (networks) analysis is that this sense of urgency would have been more detectable by the keyness analysis, had the corpus tool (#LancsBox 6.0) used the frequency of lemmas rather than word-forms in the calculation of keyness. In fact, Figure 5 demonstrates that the lemma URG occurred 14 times in the Saied corpus, compared to a total absence of occurrences in the reference corpus. None of its word-forms, however, reached a keyness value that is high enough to be on the top 20 keywords list. This consideration would hopefully further illuminate future research on the corpus linguistics concept of keyness.

The screenshot shows the #LancsBox 6.0 interface. At the top, there are tabs for KWC, GraphColl, Wheelk, Words, Ngrams, Text, and Wizard. Below the tabs, there is a search bar with the text 'KWC: /urg.\*fi, ... X'. The main area displays search results for the lemma 'urg' in the Saied corpus. The search criteria are 'Search /urg.\*fi', 'Occurrences 14 (30.79)', 'Texts 1', 'Corpus Corpus 1', 'Context 7', and 'Display Text'. The results are shown in a table with columns: Index, File, Left, Node, and Right. The table contains 14 rows of results, each showing a snippet of text from the Saied corpus with the lemma 'urg' highlighted in orange. Below the main table, there is a summary for 'Search /urg.\*fi' with 'Occurrences 0 (0.00)', 'Texts 0/1', 'Corpus Corpus 2', 'Context 7', and 'Display Text'.

Index	File	Left	Node	Right
1	Saied corpus	the importance of Tunisia moving forward with	urgency	in its negotiations with the IMF and
2	Saied corpus	opposed the new constitution. In particular, we	urge	the swift adoption of an inclusive electoral
3	Saied corpus	in a democratic system. We continue to	urge	the Tunisian government to pursue an inclusive
4	Saied corpus	rights. At this critical time, we also	urge	the Government of Tunisia to prioritize implementing
5	Saied corpus	affirmed in Presidential Decree 117. We also	urge	Tunisia's President and new Prime Minister to
6	Saied corpus	form a government able to address those	urgent	needs. We echo calls from the Tunisian
7	Saied corpus	and honest, effective and transparent governance. We	urge	a swift return to a constitutional order,
8	Saied corpus	plays a significant role. We underline the	urgent	need to appoint a new head of
9	Saied corpus	Biden-Harris Administration, for the Tunisian people and	urging	a swift return to the path of
10	Saied corpus	Advisor Finer discussed with President Saied the	urgent	need to appoint a prime minister designate
11	Saied corpus	a long conversation with the president and	urged	him to make sure that Tunisia returns
12	Saied corpus	basis of governance in Tunisia. The Secretary	urged	President Saied to maintain open dialogue with
13	Saied corpus	and freedom. We have been clear in	urging	all parties to avoid taking any actions
14	Saied corpus	that media offices have been closed and	urge	scrupulous respect for freedom of expression and

Figure 5. The lemma URG in the Saied and Essebsi corpora

**5.2.2. Collocation profiles and networks.** Unlike keyness analysis, the study of collocations requires the selection of a starting point—a node. The examination of the co-occurrences of the node TUNISIA, at a span of five words to the right and left, in the Saied and Essebsi corpora was thought to offer further empirical evidence in response to RQ2. Specifically, this collocational analysis would reveal potential discrepancies in the type of semantic categories that TUNISIA is frequently associated with across the target and reference corpora.

As noted in Table 4, the content words that reached the LL and MI cut-off values in the Saied corpus convey an association of TUNISIA with the notions of an endangered democracy (*democratic*) and the need to support the Tunisian people (*support* and *people*) against possible abuse from the president and his government (*president* and *government*). ‘Connecting the dots’ drew heavily on the findings elicited from the framing and keyness analyses that provided a solid empirical base in favor of such an interpretation, displaying the complementarity between the selected analytical methods. With respect to the Essebsi Corpus, the common collocates listed in Table 4 unveiled the connectedness of TUNISIA with the aforementioned themes of cooperation (*united*, *states* and *our*) and terrorism (*attack*). Needless to say, the categorization of the extracted collocates into semantic groups relied on close scrutiny of their expanded context in the Saied and Essebsi corpora.

Table 4

**Log-likelihood ordered collocates of TUNISIA  
in the Saied and Essebsi corpora**

Saied corpus					Essebsi corpus				
Collocate	Position	Freq.	LL	MI	Collocate	Position	Freq.	LL	MI
the	R	41	164.43	3.44	and	R	45	170.17	3.53
to	L	28	111.55	3.69	the	L	47	155.32	3.17
in	L	17	82.84	4.46	in	L	28	114.93	3.94
of	L	21	72.39	3.44	to	R	34	109.98	3.27
democratic	R	12	63.90	4.80	of	L	29	104.01	3.57
and	L	21	59.94	3.00	president	R	19	98.23	4.72
on	R	11	58.42	4.81	with	L	19	96.23	4.65
that	L	11	40.13	3.72	that	L	19	66.50	3.60
its	R	6	34.55	5.12	states	L	12	61.23	4.74
a	R	11	33.45	3.28	united	L	12	59.24	4.63
government	L	7	30.97	4.30	has	R	10	53.24	4.89
will	M	6	27.47	4.41	for	L	13	49.14	3.85
support	L	5	25.61	4.76	as	R	10	39.40	3.99
with	R	7	23.56	3.57	essebsi	L	7	37.83	4.96
people	L	5	21.29	4.21	a	R	12	35.44	3.26
is	M	6	20.43	3.61	is	R	10	27.44	3.12
president	L	5	19.50	3.97	this	R	8	27.11	3.61
we	R	6	18.01	3.32	so	R	6	26.64	4.36
economic	L	5	17.36	3.67	on	R	7	25.34	3.79
as	L	5	17.04	3.62	our	L	8	24.36	3.36
					attack	L	5	24.20	4.62
					caid	L	R	23.02	4.47

Though revealing in some respects, collocational profiles—being limited to one particular node—seem to have captured only part of the overall web of meanings around TUNISIA. Generating collocation networks from the node TUNISIA proved to paint a broader picture or, in the words of Baker (2016, p. 14), “give ‘added value’ to corpus analysis.” By way of illustration, the network of semantic relationships highlighted in Figure 6 constitutes a graphical representation of the aboutness of the Saied corpus. The collocation network joining the nodes TUNISIA, DEMOCRATIC, RETURN, and SUPPORT indeed invoked the same dominant discourse emerging from the framing and keyness analyses: the urgent need for a swift return to the democratic path in Tunisia. In this light, the present investigation can have methodological implications for future research on collocation, suggesting that collocation profiles and networks are best used in tandem.

The node SUPPORT seems to be an idiosyncrasy in that it contradicts the aforementioned finding (keywords analysis) that the theme of cooperation and assistance was not quite prominent in the Saied corpus. Such speculation can, however, be refuted on two main grounds. Firstly, as shown earlier in this section, even when the issue of U.S. support was evoked, it was implicitly conditioned by the implementation of the recommended actions and tended to be targeted at the Tunisian people rather than Saied's government. Secondly, the collocation network in Figure 6 demonstrates how the node SUPPORT displays a limited network of meaning connections, reminiscent of the recurrent theme of the United States being in support of the people of Tunisia for a swift return to the democratic path.

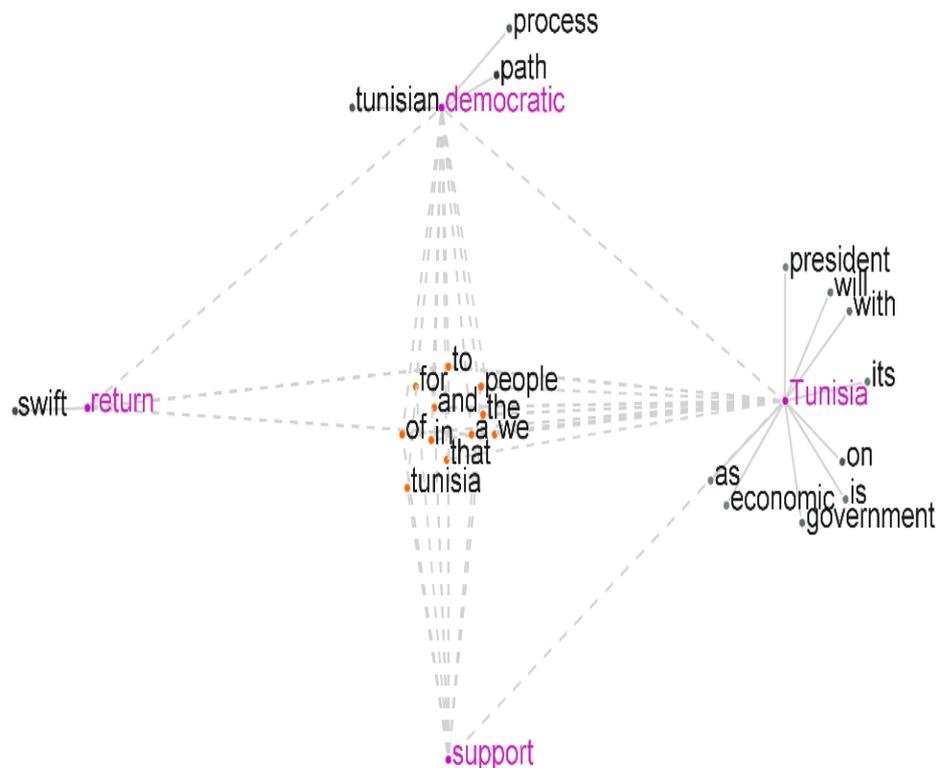


Figure 6. Collocation network from the node TUNISIA in the Saied Corpus

Figure 7, by contrast, shows that the theme of support and cooperation has much richer meaning associations in the Essebsi corpus, evoking a wider and more complex web of related collocates such as *partnership*, *commitment*, *strengthening*, *support*, and *partners*. The node OUR, though being a function word, unraveled a significant network of third-order collocates pertaining to this sense of togetherness. The collocation network linking the nodes TUNISIA, ATTACK, STATES, and OUR also revealed the connectedness between Tunisia and the United States in their joint efforts against terrorism, thereby confirming the results of the keyness analysis reported earlier. The visual representation of fourth-order collocates of the node TUNISIA across the Saied and Essebsi corpora thus unveiled important cross-associations characteristic of each corpus.

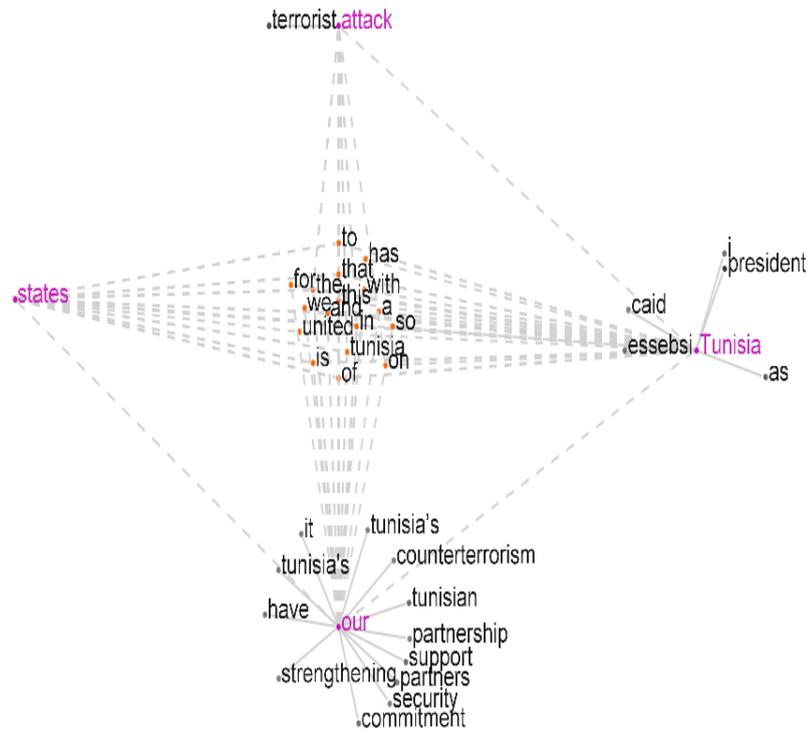


Figure 7. Collocation network from the node TUNISIA in the Essebsi Corpus

On the whole, the collocation (networks) analysis conducted in this research tended to uncover a change in the type of discourse surrounding Tunisia in a crisis context from Essebsi’s to Saied’s presidencies. The U.S. administration, as it seems, placed its prime emphasis on the political-democratic crisis unfolding in Tunisia and the urgency of reforms during Saied’s term in office, relegating the discussion of partnership and assistance to a second position. In its press communications on the terrorist attacks that struck the country during Essebsi’s presidency, however, the American government remarkably stressed its strong commitment to partnership and cooperation with Tunisia. The top 15 concordance lines around the node (United) STATES in Figure 8 illustrate this latter pattern.

Index	File	Left	Node	Right
1	Essebsi corp	Chahed, and Foreign Minister Jhinaoui. The United	States	and Tunisia have a strong partnership that
2	Essebsi corp	world to recognize the newly formed United	States	Similarly, in 1956, following Tunisia's independence, the
3	Essebsi corp	in 1956, following Tunisia's independence, the United	States	was the first major power to recognize
4	Essebsi corp	is a strong partner of the United	States	and we are proud to support your
5	Essebsi corp	grown this year—in 2017, the United	States	increased development and military assistance by more
6	Essebsi corp	in North Africa and threaten the United	States	and our partners, including Tunisia. The recent
7	Essebsi corp	Tunisian Prime Minister to reaffirm the United	States'	support for Tunisia as it works to
8	Essebsi corp	bow down to terrorists. Instead the United	States	and Tunisia will continue to work together
9	Essebsi corp	the Bey was given to the United	States	as a kind gesture in a trying
10	Essebsi corp	live our values. Here in the United	States	, we are reminded almost every day that
11	Essebsi corp	things that people look to the United	States	for is this entrepreneurial and innovative capacity,
12	Essebsi corp	universities and community colleges across the United	States	Through USAID, we are training the next
13	Essebsi corp	as well as to Libya. The United	States	has been working to double our security
14	Essebsi corp	over the world, especially in the United	States	and significantly right here in this room.
15	Essebsi corp	commitment that exists here in the United	States	and around the world for Tunisia. So

Figure 8. KWIC concordance for the node STATES in the Essebsi corpus

In recapitulation, the keyness and collocation (networks) analyses reiterated the abovementioned finding, to varying degrees (RQ2). Interestingly, this shift in focus in U.S. foreign policy towards Tunisia in crisis situations can be accounted for in terms of the nature of the crisis at issue as well as U.S. strategic interests. Such variables understandably influenced the kind of diplomacy to adopt. In particular, terrorist attacks on a country considered a long-time ally against terrorism in the MENA region would incontrovertibly prompt a discourse of cooperation and assistance on the American part. Conversely, a reportedly president-generated political and democratic crisis entails a different political calculus. Equally important, the detected sense of urgency in the U.S. government's press communications on the latter crisis is best interpreted against the backdrop of the professed American legacy of democracy promotion. In this respect, the evidence collected in the scope of this research is consistent with Marzo's (2020) study postulating that security and democracy had been the building blocks of U.S. foreign policy in Tunisia since the September 11 attacks. Undeniably, together with country-specific circumstances, the foreign policy of the United States—including tangible and intangible foreign aid—is shaped by other external factors such as global geopolitical, economic, and sanitary developments.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, this article shed light on the U.S. administration's press communications on Tunisia after President Saied declared a 'state of exception' on July 25, 2021. The empirical investigation rested on the integration of qualitative (frame detection) and quantitative (keyness and collocations) research methods. The framing analysis revealed the heightened attention that the American government allocated to the political-democratic crisis unfolding in Tunisia during Saied's presidency, shaping a discourse of urgency around it. This has implications for general perceptions of this country's degree of political stability since the mass media, an arguably key actor in public opinion formation, partly draw on political actors' frames in reporting on current events.

The comparative analysis of U.S. crisis-related discourse on Tunisia from Essebsi's to Saied's presidencies corroborated the qualitative study and, most importantly, unveiled how U.S. foreign policy in Tunisia presumably displayed a shift in focus. Specifically, the keyness and collocation (networks) analyses seemed to uncover a move from construing a discourse of togetherness around the crisis (terrorist attacks) during Essebsi's term in office to stressing a sense of urgency in discussing Tunisia's crisis (political-democratic) during Saied's presidency. Being confined to the context of crisis, the work's results might not yet be representative of American foreign policy towards Tunisia in its entirety. It is also noteworthy that this research makes no claims about a chronological policy shift, as this requires the investigation of a broader spectrum of crisis events.

Strikingly, the abovementioned urgency discourse reached a critical point when U.S. government representatives used a prescriptive tone in their delineation of the range of urgent measures to be taken by Saied's government, triggering escalating tension between the two countries. On this account, the analysis laid bare significant discursive strategies of dominance and control. The study's findings, therefore, need to be interpreted in light of the wider context of global politics and the underlying dynamics of power relations.

In view of this, the present article has intended to contribute to the unceasing discussion of language and power through the lenses of political communication research, corpus linguistics, and critical discourse analysis. Besides the merit of multidisciplinaryity, this research has direct implications for the theory and practice of the relatively recent corpus linguistics concepts of keyness and collocation networks and opens up prospects for their further research. In particular, this work showed how they are, firstly, inherently complementary and, secondly, best used in combination with qualitative research methods. This synergy, in fact, has offered deeper insights into the ideological underpinnings of U.S. crisis-related discourse on Tunisia following the landmark day of July 25, 2021.

## Notes

1. <https://lapresse.tn/104654/sondage-emrhod-87-des-tunisiens-soutiennent-kaies-saied-et-approuvent-ses-decisions/>
2. <https://tn.usembassy.gov/>
3. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>
4. <https://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2022/05/17/tunisie-intentions-de-vote-kais-saied-et-le-pdl-toujours-en-tete/>
5. Bigrams comprising only one function word were included in the analysis.

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**ПРЕС-КОМУНІКАЦІЇ АДМІНІСТРАЦІЇ США ЩОДО ТУНІСУ ПІСЛЯ  
«ВИНЯТКОВОГО СТАНУ» 25 ЛИПНЯ 2021 РОКУ:  
ФОРМУВАННЯ ДИСКУРСУ НАГАЛЬНОСТІ**

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**Анотація**

25 липня 2021 року стало винятковим днем для Тунісу, який відкрив нову главу в його сучасній політичній історії та викликав хвилю глобальної реакції на оголошений «винятковий стан». У цьому дослідженні розглядаються прес-комунікації адміністрації США щодо Тунісу після цієї події. Зокрема, у ньому досліджуються (i) домінуючі кризові фрейми, що пронизують ці повідомлення та їх основну політичну програму, і (ii) ступінь, у якому цей дискурс сигналізує про зміну зовнішньої політики США щодо Тунісу в кризових ситуаціях. Для досягнення вказаних цілей дослідження було проведено корпусне вивчення з використанням інтегративної методики, що поєднує підходи якісний (фрейми) і кількісний (ключовість і сполучуваність). Результати показали зміну дискурсів за тематикою кризи, їх перехід від почуття єдності до першочерговості. Це може відтворювати обережне ставлення американського уряду та його підвищену стурбованість перехідними заходами Каїса Сайєда. У широкому сенсі дослідження запропонувало уявлення про те, як динаміка глобальної політики розгортається у дискурсі. Важливо, що тлумачення політико-демократичної кризи в Тунісі адміністрацією Байдена в термінах нагальності може мати реальні наслідки для міжнародного сприйняття майбутнього країни. Теоретично, застосування результатів дослідження стосується в першу чергу Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (далі CADS), зокрема еволюції таких понять корпусної лінгвістики як ключовість і колокаційні мережі.

**Ключові слова:** прес-комунікації США, Туніс, 25 липня, криза, нагальність, CADS, фреймінг, ключовість, колокаційна мережа.