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IRI Tunisia Index

Indicators

This is the second public opinion survey conducted in Tunisia by the International Republican Institute (IRI). The survey was undertaken in cooperation with Elka Consulting, a Tunisia-based market survey research firm which was selected by IRI for its capability to conduct face-to-face surveys throughout the country.

Independent public opinion surveys were not permitted under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and today there is a high demand for current survey data to provide Tunisian civil society and government officials an important tool to understand and respond to citizen priorities. This poll was conducted from May 14-27, 2011, and serves as a complement to an earlier IRI survey conducted from [March 5-18, 2011](#). This survey implemented a door-to-door, household interview methodology representative of Tunisia's 24 provinces.

Since IRI's last poll was conducted, protests have decreased considerably and the political climate has become somewhat calmer. However, the transition process remains fragile and contentious. On the evening of May 22 the Independent Higher Election Authority suggested that elections – originally scheduled for July 24 – be postponed until October 16. The interim government and several political parties initially rejected any postponement. After a protracted public dispute, during which the Higher Election Authority threatened to resign en masse, the elections were postponed until October 23.

During the fieldwork for IRI's poll, elections were scheduled for July 24. A total of 954 interviews were conducted before the first announcement that the elections might be postponed; after that announcement and until the end of fieldwork on May 27, while the election date was in dispute, a total of 327 interviews were conducted. Since the official date of elections remained the same throughout fieldwork, and the possibility of a postponement was well-known in advance of the May 22 announcement, results were not compromised.

As in the March poll, security and economic concerns remain the most pressing issues for Tunisians. However, security appears to have become a much higher priority in recent months. When asked to cite their first, second and third choice of top priority for the interim government, 36 percent of respondents chose security as their first choice, and 71 percent mentioned it as either their first, second or third choice. While 72 percent of respondents mentioned employment, only 27 percent mentioned it first. This is in contrast to the March poll, when security was not mentioned as a top priority by any significant number of respondents.

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Similarly, the survey asked what the single biggest problem facing Tunisia as a whole was, asking respondents to cite their top three problems. Responses were far more varied than in March, and included the economic and financial crisis, terrorism, strikes and sit-ins, corruption, and delinquency and vandalism. However, the top two responses – internal security and unemployment – were the same. Internal security was most often cited in respondents' first mention (28 percent) followed by unemployment (16 percent). Collectively, internal security was mentioned either first, second or third as the top problem 63 percent of the time. Unemployment was mentioned either first, second or third 56 percent of the time.

Key findings of the poll are as follows:

- The survey indicates a steep decline in confidence for the transition period. While the vast majority of respondents in March (79 percent) believed the country was headed in the right direction, only 46 percent said so in May. This level is equal to the 46 percent who said the country is headed in the wrong direction, up from 14 percent in March.
- Tunisians are concerned about the state of their economy, with 73 percent indicating that the economic situation is somewhat bad or very bad.
- Enthusiasm for democracy remains high, with 93 percent of respondents indicating they are very likely or somewhat likely to vote in elections and just six percent saying they are not likely to do so. Yet voters are unsure who they will support, with 72 percent responding they do not know who they would vote for in constituent assembly elections.
- Of the respondents who disapproved of a secular government in Tunisia, the overwhelming majority (80 percent) said they would prefer a moderately Islamist constituent assembly, while only 14 percent indicated a preference for strongly Islamist parties.
- Bearing in mind that internal security is a concern among a majority of Tunisians, the survey shows the National Army remains the most trusted institution with 83 percent of respondents stating they trust the army a great deal. This compares with 69 percent who said they trust citizen security groups that have emerged since Ben Ali's departure. Trust in the national police has risen considerably since March, with 47 percent indicating they trust the national police a great deal, an increase of 17 percent from only two months prior. The national police still registered the strongest negative feelings with 18 percent of respondents claiming they do not trust the police at all, but that is still a decrease of 14 percent compared to responses to the same question in March.
- ***Economy***
 - Tunisians increasingly feel the country is moving in the wrong direction, but a majority is still confident the economy will improve over the next year. This suggests the country continues to experience a positive atmosphere in the aftermath of the revolution.
 - Tunisians are about evenly split on their household's financial situation during the past year with 33 percent saying it had gotten better, 30 percent saying it had gotten worse and 37 percent saying it had not changed.

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- A troubling 28 percent of Tunisians said they have difficulty feeding themselves, their families and buying the most essential things for survival. This compares with 43 percent who said they have means for survival but not enough money for extra things, and 21 percent who said they are able to afford things like new clothes and eating at restaurants.
- Thinking ahead to next year, Tunisians' expectations for the economy have been somewhat tempered since March. Seventy-one percent believe their household's financial situation will be better in the next year, including 28 percent of respondents who believe it will be much better, compared to 84 percent and 35 percent, respectively, in March.
- ***Political Transition***
 - The survey asked respondents about the commissions created by Tunisia's interim government to deal with issues of corruption, political reform and human rights violations. A wide majority (82 percent) said they had heard of these commissions.
 - When asked about the individual commissions' set-up to deal with these issues, respondents had the most confidence in the Political Reform Commission led by Iyadh Ben Achour. Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated they were confident in the Political Reform Commission as compared with 52 percent who said they were confident in the Human Rights Commission and 48 percent who were confident in the Corruption Commission. These levels of confidence are largely unchanged since March.
 - Over the course of the transition Tunisians may become more politically independent. Forty-five percent of respondents in the latest poll stated their head of household had at least some influence on their political opinions, compared to 69 percent who said so in March. A similar decline in influence was apparent for religious, union and political party leaders.
 - The survey indicates a complex divide between religion and secularism among Tunisians. Only 23 percent of respondents claimed to know what the difference is between a secular and non-secular government. Upon hearing the definition, 54 percent approved of a secular government while only 40 percent disapproved.
 - Although a narrow majority of Tunisians (54 percent) approve of a secular government, a similar number (51 percent) said they would prefer to see a moderately Islamist constituent assembly. Only eight percent said they would prefer a strongly Islamist assembly, while only three percent indicated they would prefer it to be strongly secular. Among those who disapproved of a secular government, the overwhelming majority (80 percent) said they would prefer a moderately Islamist constituent assembly, while only 14 percent indicated a preference for strongly Islamist parties.
 - When asked why they would approve a secular government, the plurality of respondents (47 percent) replied it would guarantee freedom, democracy and equality; 27 percent indicated that they preferred to keep religion separate from politics. Those who disapproved of a secular government cited a number of explanations, including that Islam has solutions for every sector (26 percent), and that they like a government based on religion (16 percent). Only two percent claimed they disapprove of secularism because it comes from the West.

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- Respondents were asked whether security, unemployment, political reform, corruption and other issues had improved or worsened over the past year. Responses were mixed but generally positive, with the largest perceived improvement in the development of an independent civil society (63 percent noted improvement) and media (76 percent noted improvement).
- A majority of respondents said the current government was either very likely (27 percent) or somewhat likely (32 percent) to deal with the issues mentioned above. This demonstrates a decline in Tunisians' expectations of their interim government since March, when an overwhelming majority (82 percent) responded that the government was very likely or somewhat likely to solve these problems.
- *Elections*
 - One of the proposed systems for the constituent assembly elections is a proportional, closed list. Twenty-six percent of Tunisians said they are familiar with such a system, while 46 percent said they are not. In response to a description of a proportional closed list system, 53 percent of respondents said they would support such a system, while 29 percent said they would oppose it.
 - A majority of respondents (53 percent) also indicated that the 50 percent quota for women delegates in the constituent assembly is too high, while 41 percent said it was the right amount. Of those who believed the quota was too high, a 24 percent quota was deemed more appropriate for the constituent assembly.
 - While 93 percent of respondents indicated they are very likely or somewhat likely to vote in elections, voters are unsure who they will support. In fact, 72 percent responded that they do not know who they would vote for in constituent assembly elections.
- *International Relations*
 - Tunisians have generally a positive view of international organizations. Majorities indicated they approve of the World Bank (71 percent), the European Union (72 percent), the United Nations (66 percent), the Arab League (60 percent) and the Union for the Mediterranean (51 percent), a multilateral organization comprising 43 countries from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans with the goal of supporting economic, political and socio-cultural cooperation. One exception to this pattern is NATO, of which 36 percent of respondents disapproved, while only 34 percent expressed approval.
- *Information and Media*
 - The survey asked where Tunisians turn for local news and information asking that they cite no more than three choices from a list. Television was by far the most frequent first response at 59 percent, radio was next at 13 percent and the Internet was third at 12 percent.

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