



IRI Tunisia Index

Indicators

This is the fifth 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 December 24, 2011–January 6, 2012 and serves as a complement to earlier IRI surveys conducted from [March 5-18, 2011](#), [May 14-27, 2011](#), [September 2-14, 2011](#) and October 9-13, 2011. This survey implemented a door-to-door, household interview methodology representative of Tunisia's 24 provinces.

This is IRI's first poll to be conducted after the October 23, 2011 national constituent assembly elections. Since the elections, Tunisia has seated a national constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, and an interim cabinet has been appointed to manage the country's day-to-day affairs. The assembly and cabinet are led by a coalition of three of the highest-winning parties from the October elections, Ennahda, Congress for the Republic, and Ettakatol. It is expected that within 12 to 18 months a new constitution will be drafted and elections will be called; the precise form of the elections is to be determined in the new constitution. The interim cabinet has authority to govern for the duration of the drafting process.

Consistent with IRI's previous surveys, economic concerns remain the most pressing issues for Tunisians. When asked to cite their first, second and third issues of top priority for the interim government, 55 percent chose employment as their first choice, and 85 percent mentioned it as either their first, second or third choice. One notable difference is the relative decline in concern for security. Mentioned as an equal priority with economic performance during previous surveys, security was named as a first priority in this poll by only seven percent of respondents, and was only mentioned by 16 percent overall. On the other hand, economic issues including employment, development and reform of the economy, and living standards were mentioned far more frequently than any other response. Interestingly, social reforms were mentioned as a priority by 25 percent of respondents, though only as a first priority by five percent.

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Similarly, the survey asked what was the single biggest problem facing Tunisia as a whole, asking respondents to cite their top three problems. Responses were somewhat more varied, but the economy was still clearly the largest concern. Collectively unemployment was mentioned by 80 percent of respondents, and the economic crisis by 75 percent. Security concerns were mentioned frequently as well, including strikes and sit-ins, mentioned by 47 percent of respondents, and violence and delinquency, mentioned by 19 percent of respondents. However, these issues were clearly secondary to economic performance and Tunisia's high unemployment rate, with only six percent of respondents indicating violence as a first choice, and two percent mentioning both security and terrorism. Related to both the economy and security, strikes and sit-ins were mentioned by 47 percent of respondents, nearly triple the frequency of mentions from IRI's September 2011 survey.

Key findings of the poll are as follows:

- The survey indicates a sizeable increase in confidence for the current transition period. Sixty-two percent of respondents said they believe Tunisia is heading in the right direction, an increase of 17 percent over the low point of confidence in October 2011. This level is the highest measured by IRI's surveys since March 2011.
- Tunisians are still as concerned about the state of their economy as they were during 2011, with 71 percent indicating that the economic situation is somewhat bad or very bad. In the aftermath of elections the economy has become the single largest priority among Tunisians, with employment, economic growth, and living standards named as the top three priorities for the current government.
- Though security remains a concern, most Tunisians believe it is improving. When asked if security has improved, 78 percent responded that it has in their communities and 74 percent responded that security has improved nationwide.
- Tunisians expect their government to deliver positive results in the near future. When asked if they expected the government to address a range of issues including living standards, constitutional and legal reforms, corruption, unemployment and security, 83 percent of respondents said it was very likely or somewhat likely to do so.
- Though Tunisians are confident in their government and expect it to address their concerns, confusion remains over its form and functions. When asked what the primary role of the national constituent assembly is, only 42 percent responded that it is to draft the new constitution, and 28 percent either responded that they did not know or refused to answer.
- There is a high level of support to ratify the new constitution through a popular referendum, with 66 percent of respondents indicating they would prefer a referendum to a vote within the assembly.
- While Tunisians remain divided on whether or not their government should be secular, they show a preference for moderately Islamist political parties. Sixty-eight percent of respondents said they would prefer to see more moderate Islamist parties in the national constituent assembly, an increase of 13 percent since September 2011.

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- ***Economy***
 - Tunisians are about evenly split on their household's financial situation during the past year with 33 percent saying it had gotten better, 36 percent saying it had gotten worse and 30 percent saying it had not changed.
 - A troubling 31 percent of Tunisians said they have difficulty feeding themselves, their families and buying the most essential things for survival. This compares with 49 percent who said they have means for survival but not enough money for extra things, and 15 percent who said they are able to afford things like new clothes and eating at restaurants.
 - Tunisians' expectations for the economy over the next year have steadily declined since March 2011, but still remain optimistic. In January 2012, 62 percent indicated they expected their situation to be better, including 15 percent who expected it to be much better.
 - When asked to rate their current quality of life on a scale of one to seven, where one is highest and seven is lowest, 72 percent of respondents rated themselves in the middle, between a three and a five.

- ***Political Transition***
 - Most Tunisians are casually aware of the national constituent assembly, with 82 percent of respondents indicating they follow the assembly's work. However, only 21 percent of respondents indicated they follow the assembly regularly.
 - While a plurality of Tunisians favors a mixed government in which power is shared evenly between the executive and the legislature (42 percent), there is significant support for both a government with a strong executive (25 percent), and for a government with a strong legislature (19 percent).
 - Tunisians are divided on whether the national constituent assembly should take more than one year to finish its mandate. Forty-four percent of respondents said they believe the assembly should take one year or less, while 42 percent said the assembly should take more than one year, including 30 percent who said it should take between one and two years.
 - Attitudes toward political pluralism are generally positive. When asked their opinion on the role of opposition parties, 52 percent of respondents said it was positive, compared to 30 percent who responded it was negative.
 - When asked why political opposition is positive, most responses indicated a desire to have a check on power and to offer different solutions to critical problems. Respondents indicating they believe opposition plays a negative role tended to assert that opposition would obstruct the smooth operation of government and delay decisions.

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- Attitudes toward secularism and religion among Tunisians are growing more ambivalent. Only 35 percent of respondents claimed to know what the difference is between a secular and non-secular government. Upon hearing the definition, 32 percent approved of a secular government while 41 percent disapproved, and 28 percent did not know or refused to answer. Approval and disapproval rates have both declined since IRI's September 2011 survey, and the number of respondents who do not know or refuse has more than doubled.
- While opinions of secular government grow more complicated, Tunisians continue to express a preference for Islamist political parties, with 79 percent of respondents saying they prefer to see Islamist parties in the national constituent assembly, compared to only 20 percent who prefer secular parties.
- 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 media (72 percent noted improvement), political reform (61 percent noted improvement), and civil society (51 percent noted improvement). Unemployment and living standards were important exceptions, with 75 percent and 64 percent of respondents noting a worsening, respectively.
- ***Elections***
 - Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that they voted in the national constituent assembly elections, while national turnout rate was approximately 54 percent of eligible voters.
 - An overwhelming majority of 89 percent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their vote, while only five percent said they believed they had made the wrong choice.
 - While there is no definite date set for elections yet, 66 percent of respondents said they expect elections to occur before the end of 2013. Fifty-one percent of respondents said these elections would be presidential, while 26 percent expect legislative elections.
- ***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 64 percent, the Internet was next at 14 percent and radio was third at seven percent.

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