



IRI Tunisia Index

Indicators

This is the International Republican Institute's (IRI) first public opinion survey conducted in Tunisia in 2013, and the eighth survey since the beginning of the current transition period in January 2011. The survey was conducted from December 19, 2012 – January 7, 2013, in cooperation with [Elka Consulting](#), a Tunisia-based market survey research firm, implementing a door-to-door household interview methodology representative of Tunisia's 24 provinces. This poll serves as a complement to earlier IRI surveys conducted [March 5-18, 2011](#), [May 14-27, 2011](#), [September 2-14, 2011](#), October 9-13, 2011, [December 24, 2011-January 6, 2012](#), [April 1-11, 2012](#), and [July 26 – August 8, 2012](#).

IRI's surveys document trends in Tunisian public opinion since the end of Ben Ali's term in early 2011. This survey measures current perceptions of the overall condition of the Tunisian state, including the political transition, economic performance and security. Tracking questions show how opinions have developed over the course of the past two years. Additional questions provide more detailed information on the forces that are influencing public opinion.

This survey features a number of questions on the nature of unemployment in Tunisia, which is consistently named as Tunisia's primary challenge. In the present poll, IRI examines unemployment more closely, asking respondents to describe their expectations for government intervention to resolve joblessness. The survey also measures how respondents perceive the performance of the current government, and that of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). Other issues examined by the survey include support for political parties, local governance, civil society development and approval of selected political figures.

The survey finds increasingly negative trends in public opinion and eroding confidence in the current transition. Seventy-seven percent of respondents said they believe the country is moving in the wrong direction, an increase of 10 points over IRI's previous survey and the highest level of dissatisfaction that IRI has measured since it began polling in Tunisia. Economic progress is the major concern behind this trend. When asked to cite their first, second and third priorities for the current government, 43 percent chose employment first, and 77 percent mentioned it as either their first, second or third choice. Related issues, including development and reform of the economy and living standards, were the second and fourth highest priorities, respectively.

In addition to economic issues, security is another area where citizens look for solutions from the government. Though perceptions of security gradually improved throughout 2012, in the current survey it has reemerged as a concern, with 45 percent of respondents saying it should be a top priority for the government, second only to economic issues. Similarly, 50 percent of respondents said that security is one of the three most important problems facing Tunisia as a whole, though only nine percent said it was the most important outright. Security-related issues such as strikes, violence and terrorism were mentioned by a total of 21 percent, 14 percent and seven percent of respondents respectively.

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Key findings of the poll are as follows:

- The survey indicates an ongoing decline in confidence for the current transition period over IRI's previous surveys beginning in January 2012. The drop comes along with general dissatisfaction over the government's performance, with 64 percent of Tunisians saying they are not very satisfied or not satisfied at all with the government.
- Tunisians are more disappointed with the country's economic performance, with 82 percent indicating the economic situation is somewhat bad or very bad. This is the highest level of dissatisfaction with the economy measured by IRI in Tunisia to date.
- The main cause of discontent with the economy appears to be unemployment. Seventy-three percent of respondents named unemployment as one of the most important problems facing Tunisia, with 47 percent saying it is the most important.
- Negative impressions of the overall economy notwithstanding, 39 percent of respondents say their personal financial situation has gotten better over the past year, a slight increase over IRI's previous survey.
- When asked how long the NCA should take to complete its mandate, 65 percent said it should take one year or less, a 20 point increase over IRI's previous survey.
- There is a high level of support to ratify the new constitution through a popular referendum, with 80 percent of respondents indicating they would prefer a national referendum to a vote within the assembly. This preference conflicts with the current arrangement, in which the constitution will be ratified by an NCA vote unless it cannot receive a two-thirds majority.
- The governing coalition led by the Islamist Ennahdha Movement has recently lost support to secular opposition parties, mostly to Nida Tunis, which was founded by former interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi in June 2012. When asked who they would vote for in the next election, respondents narrowly favored Ennahdha (18 percent) over Nida Tunis (17 percent). This showed a marked increase in support for Nida Tunis and a decrease in support for Ennahdha, a nine point swing for both parties since IRI's last survey.
- The political landscape in Tunisia is still fluid, as 40 percent of respondents indicated they do not know for whom they would vote. Whether these citizens vote, and how they cast their ballots, will decide the composition of Tunisia's next government.

Economy

- Unemployment and the economy are seen as the most urgent issues in Tunisia. When asked to name the three most important problems facing Tunisia as a whole, 73 percent of respondents said unemployment and 63 percent said the economy and financial crisis.
- Despite their ongoing frustration with the current economy, Tunisians' appraisals of their personal situations have improved. Thirty percent of respondents indicated they have enough means for survival and can afford some additional expenses such as new clothes and eating at restaurants, which is 13 points higher than in January 2012.

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- Tunisians look to the government for solutions on unemployment. Among job-seekers who were surveyed, 69 percent indicated they expected government help in finding a job. When asked what sort of help they expected, respondents suggested loans, public sector recruitment, public investment, and vocational training programs.
- Tunisians also look to international trade for economic development. Increasing foreign direct investment was chosen by 35 percent of respondents as the best way to increase jobs in Tunisia, making it the top response. Expanding the public sector was a distant second with 16 percent.

Political Transition

- When asked if they would prefer a presidential, parliamentary or mixed system, a majority of Tunisians now favor a presidential system (53 percent). This continues a shift that began in IRI's last survey; while a mixed government was favored by a majority as recently as April 2012, only 24 percent of respondents indicated a preference for mixed government in this survey. The least popular option is still a parliamentary system, chosen by 18 percent of respondents.
- Attitudes toward secularism continue to vary. In IRI's previous two polls, a plurality of respondents indicated a preference for a secular government. In the current survey, 48 percent said they would disapprove of a secular government, compared to 47 percent who indicated they would approve of one.
- The public appears to be eager to conclude the current transitional period. The vast majority of Tunisians believe the NCA should take no more than two years to finish its mandate. Sixty-five percent of respondents said they believe the NCA should take one year or less, and 43 percent said it should take less than one year, an increase of 27 points over IRI's August 2012 survey.
- Tunisians believe in increasing numbers that the current government arrangement does not serve their interests. When asked if politicians in Tunis care enough about problems in the rest of the country, 68 percent said mainly no or not at all.
- Opinions of local government are more divided. Forty-four percent of respondents said they believe local councils can improve conditions in their towns, compared to 50 percent who said they did not.
- When asked what local councils could improve, respondents chose issues such as infrastructure (30 percent) and pollution (18 percent). Issues such as unemployment and security were chosen less often with only three percent and 1.5 percent of responses, respectively.
- Respondents were asked whether civil society development, media, women's rights, healthcare, sanitation and other issues had improved or worsened over the past year. The largest perceived improvement was in the development of an independent media (52 percent noted improvement), development of independent civil society (34 percent) and security (31 percent).

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Elections

- Among those who voted in the NCA elections, only 14 percent indicated they intend to vote for the same party in the next elections. Fourteen percent said they do not intend to vote at all, an increase of eight percent over IRI's previous survey.
- Ennahdha Movement and Nida Tunis have emerged as the leading political parties at present, though neither is close to a popular majority. Presented with a list of major parties, 18 percent of respondents said they would support Ennahdha Movement in the next elections, and 17 percent said they would support Nida Tunis. No other party garnered more than five percent. The most common response, however, was don't know (40 percent), showing most Tunisians still have not decided which party they will vote for in the next elections.
- When asked which party they trust most to handle issues including economic growth, security, unemployment, and living standards, respondents narrowly preferred Ennahdha to Nida Tunis, though neither party had a clear advantage in any category. A similar number of respondents said they trust no party over another, and the plurality responded that they did not know.

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