



IRI Tunisia Index

Indicators

This is the sixth 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 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 April 1-11, 2012, and 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, and [December 24, 2011-January 6, 2012](#). The survey implemented a door-to-door, household interview methodology representative of Tunisia's 24 provinces.

This is IRI's second poll to be conducted after the October 23, 2011 National Constituent Assembly elections. Since the elections, Tunisia has seated a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) 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 political parties, Ennahda, Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol. It is expected that within 12 to 18 months a new constitution will be drafted. Elections are tentatively scheduled for the spring of 2013; Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki and others have suggested March 20, 2013, Tunisia's national independence day, as a possible date. The precise form of the elections is still unknown, and will 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 priorities for the interim government, 51 percent chose employment first, and 80 percent mentioned it as either their first, second or third choice.

Throughout 2011, security was mentioned as an equal priority with economic performance. However, since the NCA elections it has become a lower priority to most Tunisians. Security was only named as the first priority in the current poll by 11 percent of respondents. Overall, security was mentioned as a first, second or third priority by 26 percent of respondents, compared to 80 percent who mentioned employment, 55 percent who mentioned development and reform of the economy and 43 percent who mentioned living standards.

(more)

Tunisia Index – Page Two

Similarly, the survey asked respondents to cite the three top problems facing Tunisia as a whole. Responses were somewhat more varied, but the economy was still clearly the largest concern. Collectively, unemployment was mentioned by 74 percent of respondents, and the economic crisis by 59 percent. Security concerns were mentioned somewhat less frequently, including strikes and sit-ins mentioned by 36 percent of respondents, an 11 point decrease from IRI's January survey, and violence and delinquency mentioned by 30 percent of respondents.

While these issues were clearly secondary to economic performance and Tunisia's high unemployment rate, they are an increase over IRI's previous survey from January 2012.

Key findings of the poll are as follows:

- The survey indicates a near reversal in confidence for the current transition period over IRI's previous survey in January 2012. Sixty-one percent of respondents said they believe Tunisia is heading in the wrong direction, a 31 percent increase over IRI's previous survey and the lowest rating IRI has recorded since 2011. Furthermore, this is the first time since September 2011 that the majority of respondents have answered the country is heading in the wrong direction. This shift in public confidence is not unusual in countries undergoing political transitions, especially those accompanied by high popular expectations and high turnover of political leadership, as in Tunisia. In IRI's experience of transitional polling worldwide, it is common for periods of optimism to be followed by disappointment. It is especially important in such circumstances for governments to show progress and deliver results on key public demands.
- Respondents indicating that Tunisia is moving in the right direction fell by 30 percent since January 2012, to only 32 percent of respondents.
- Tunisians are still as concerned about the state of their economy as they were during 2011, with 77 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, 69 percent responded that it has in their community and 66 percent responded that security has improved nationwide. However, the results reflect a nine-point and eight-point decrease, respectively, since January.
- Tunisians are indicating lowered expectations for 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, 58 percent of respondents said it was very likely or somewhat likely to do so, down from 83 percent in January. Such a drop in expectations is not unexpected in a transitional country where large ambitions often meet limited means. This downward adjustment of expectations is part of a larger trend both in Tunisia and in post-transitional societies around the world.

(more)

Tunisia Index – Page Three

- While expectations are lower for the government, they are still generally high for the economy. When asked whether they expect their household's financial situation to get better or worse over the next year, 57 percent of Tunisians responded that they expect it to be much better or somewhat better.
- 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 26 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 69 percent of respondents indicating they would prefer a referendum to a vote within the assembly.
- Tunisians' views of a secular government are slightly more favorable than in previous surveys. When asked if they approve or disapprove of a secular government in Tunisia, 47 percent responded that they approve, over 44 percent who disapproved. While this close division between approval and disapproval is consistent with IRI's previous surveys, this is the first time that approval for a secular government has been higher than disapproval. Approval of a secular government has increased 15 percent since January 2012, to the highest level measured by IRI.
- ***Economy***
 - Tunisians are about evenly split on their household's financial situation during the past year with 37 percent saying it had gotten better, 42 percent saying it had gotten worse and 21 percent saying it had not changed.
 - Twenty-eight percent of Tunisians said they have difficulty feeding themselves, their families and buying the most essential things for survival. This compares with 48 percent who said they have means for survival but not enough money for extra things, and 20 percent who said they are able to afford things like new clothes and eating at restaurants.
 - When asked to rate their current quality of life on a scale of one to seven, where one is highest and seven is lowest, 70 percent of respondents rated themselves in the middle, between a three and a five.
 - Tunisians expect the government to take an active role in developing the economy and reducing unemployment. Of the respondents who indicated they were seeking jobs, 74 percent said they expect assistance from the government in finding work.
 - Forty-six percent of respondents indicated that the best way to increase jobs in Tunisia is through increased direct foreign investment. The next highest response, to expand the public sector, was only indicated by 14 percent of respondents. Respondents also mentioned improving education and vocational training and improving security. Increasing tourism, which is frequently cited as a key sector of the economy, was only mentioned by three percent of respondents.

(more)

Tunisia Index – Page Four

- ***Political Transition***

- Most Tunisians are casually aware of the National Constituent Assembly, with 74 percent of respondents indicating they follow the assembly's work. However, only 37 percent of respondents indicated they follow the Assembly regularly.
- A majority of Tunisians favors a mixed government in which power is shared evenly between the executive and the legislature (53 percent). However, there is some support for both a government with a strong executive (24 percent), and for a government with a strong legislature (16 percent).
- Tunisians are divided on whether the NCA should take more than one year to finish its mandate. Forty-three percent of respondents said they believe the Assembly should take one year or less, while 44 percent said the assembly should take more than one year, including 29 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, 54 percent of respondents said it was positive, compared to 24 percent who responded it was negative.
- Attitudes toward secularism and religion among Tunisians may be subtly shifting. Only 36 percent of respondents claimed to know what the difference is between a secular and non-secular government. Upon hearing the definition, 47 percent approved of a secular government while 44 percent disapproved. This near-even split is consistent with IRI's previous surveys, but it is the first time that a plurality of respondents indicates a preference for secular government in Tunisia.
- While opinions of secular government grow more complicated, Tunisians continue to express a preference for Islamist political parties, with 66 percent of respondents saying they prefer to see Islamist parties in the NCA, compared to 30 percent who prefer secular parties. Nevertheless, this result does indicate a sharp drop in preference for Islamist parties since January.
- Respondents were asked whether security, unemployment, political reform, corruption and other issues had improved or worsened over the past year. The largest perceived improvement was in the development of an independent media (61 percent noted improvement). However, perceptions are decidedly more negative since IRI's previous survey, with improvement in political reform dropping by 18 points, civil society by 12 points, constitutional reform by 12 points and government corruption by 11 points. Regarding unemployment and living standards, 72 percent and 74 percent of respondents noted worsening conditions, respectively.

- ***Elections***

- Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they voted in the National Constituent Assembly elections, while national turnout rate was approximately 54 percent of eligible voters.

(more)

Tunisia Index – Page Five

- A majority of 68 percent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their vote, while 20 percent said they believed they had made the wrong choice. This is a 15 point increase over IRI's January survey in respondents who are dissatisfied with their vote.
 - Of those who indicated they were not satisfied with their vote, 67 percent said they were not pleased with the party for which they had voted.
 - Fifty percent of respondents said they expect elections to occur on or before March 20, 2013. Fifty-six percent of respondents said these elections would be presidential, while 23 percent expect legislative elections.
- ***Information and Media***
 - The survey asked where Tunisians turn for local news and information. Television was by far the most frequent first choice for news at 63 percent, the Internet was next at 16 percent and radio was third at nine percent.

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