

IRI Tunisia Index

Indicators

This is the first 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 that was selected by IRI for its capability to conduct surveys throughout the country.

Independent public opinion surveys were not permitted under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and the lack of current survey data has deprived Tunisian civil society and government officials of an important tool to understand and respond to citizen priorities. This poll was conducted from March 5-18, 2011, and will serve as the baseline for future polls. This is the first published survey in Tunisia that implemented a door-to-door, household interview methodology representative of all 24 provinces.

In the few short months since Ben-Ali's 23-year reign ended, the interim Tunisian government has fallen once and experienced multiple ministerial resignations under popular pressure driven by street protests. The current government recently stated that its primary mandate is to serve in a caretaker role until the July 24 constituent assembly elections occur. The poll asked what the interim government's top priority should be, asking respondents to cite their first, second and third choice of priority. Although respondents most often chose providing jobs for the unemployed (35 percent first mention), organizing free and fair elections was the second priority most often mentioned (30 percent first mention).

Similarly, the survey asked what the single biggest problem facing Tunisia as a whole was, asking respondents to cite their top three problems. Tunisia's internal security was most often cited in respondents first mention (37 percent) followed by unemployment (32 percent). Collectively, unemployment was mentioned either first, second or third as the top problem 75 percent of the time. Internal security was mentioned either first, second or third 70 percent of the time.

Key findings of the poll are as follows:

- The survey indicates the vast majority of Tunisians (79 percent) believe that the country is headed in the right direction even though 66 percent describe the current economic situation in Tunisia as either somewhat bad or very bad.
- Tunisians are largely split over whether the country's politics should be based on religion or secularism. Forty-eight percent preferred politics based on religion while 44 percent preferred secularism. Among those choosing secularism 27 percent felt strongly about their response compared with 21 percent who felt strongly politics should be based on religion.

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- Bearing in mind internal security is a concern among a majority of Tunisians the survey indicates the National Army is the most trusted institution with 80 percent indicating they trust the army a great deal. This compares with 72 percent who said they trust citizen security groups that have emerged since Ben Ali's departure and compares with only 30 percent who said they trust the national police a great deal. The national police registered the strongest negative feelings with 32 percent of respondents saying they do not trust the police at all.

Top Issues

- *Economy*
 - Tunisians feel the country is moving in the right direction in large numbers (79 percent) even though a majority of 66 percent said their current economic situation was bad. This suggests the country continues to experience a positive atmosphere in the aftermath of the revolution. It also corresponds with respondents' view that development of independent media (65 percent) and political reform (59 percent) are the biggest improvements in the past year.
 - Tunisians are about evenly split on their household's financial situation during the past year with 35 percent saying it had gotten better, 36 percent saying it had gotten worse and 31 percent saying it had not changed.
 - Additionally, 32 percent said they have trouble 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 22 percent who said they are able to afford things like new clothes and eating at restaurants.
 - Thinking ahead to the next year. Tunisians have high expectations for the economy. Eight-four percent believe their household's financial situation will be better in the next year and 35 percent of those respondents believe it will be much better.
- *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 of 78 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 Ayed Ben Achour. Fifty-six 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 44 percent who are confident in the corruption commission.

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- The survey was conducted at the time of former Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi's resignation. Among respondents 44 percent said they strongly approve of this resignation and a combined 58 percent indicated they either strongly approve or approve. This compares with 22 percent who strongly disapprove of his resignation.
- Returning to the issue of politics based on religion or secularism, the survey indicates that a slightly larger number of Tunisians living in rural areas (55 percent) have a preference for politics based on religion when compared to 43 percent of Tunisians in urban areas who feel this way.
- In a list of issues polled including political reform, security, unemployment, and corruption among others, an overwhelming majority of respondents said the current government was either very likely (43 percent) or somewhat likely (39 percent) to deal with the issues mentioned. This suggests the Tunisian public has extremely high expectations about what the current interim government will accomplish.
- *Elections*
 - When IRI fielded this survey on March 5, constituent assembly elections had only been announced two days prior and the poll questionnaire had already been finalized; Tunisian media and political pundits previously believed that the first election to take place would be a presidential election. Thus, the poll asked respondents when they believed the presidential election would be held. Fifty-three percent of respondents surveyed believed a presidential election would occur in July 2011.
 - Moreover, 58 percent indicated they believe July would be the right amount of time needed to organize a presidential election, while an additional 17 percent said July was not soon enough to hold the election. This compares with only 14 percent who felt July is too soon. These responses indicated Tunisians are focused on elections and want an election to occur in July 2011.
 - Tunisians are also excited about the opportunity to take part in a democratic election. When asked if they would vote in an upcoming election, 95 percent said they were either very likely or likely to vote. Ninety-eight percent of Tunisians indicated they have a national identification card in the event this identification is used as a basis to establish eligible voters.
 - Interestingly, the survey asked about whether the country's next president would be someone Tunisians had heard of, or someone they have not heard of. While 54 percent said the next president would be someone they had heard of, a significant number (37 percent) indicated the next president would be someone Tunisians had not heard of.
- *International Relations*
 - Tunisia has long been an important trading partner with the European Union and Northern Africa, and 67 percent of respondents support further integration with the Union for the Mediterranean compared to only six percent against.

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- *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 the most frequent first response at 69 percent, radio was the next at 33 percent and newspapers were third at 25 percent.
 - The traditional media sources of information contrast with the Internet which was the fourth most frequent place Tunisians turn to for local news and information. Not surprisingly, young people are more likely to get their news from the Internet with 37 percent of Tunisians ages 18-24 indicating they get news online. This compares with only six percent of the 44-54 year olds who gets information online.

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