



IRI Tunisia Index

Indicators

This is the seventh 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.

Surveys of political opinion are relatively new in Tunisia, having been prohibited under former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. IRI's surveys document trends in Tunisian public opinion since the end of Ben Ali's term in early 2011. This poll was conducted from July 26 – August 8, 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, [December 24, 2011-January 6, 2012](#), and [April 1-11, 2012](#). The survey implemented a door-to-door, household interview methodology representative of Tunisia's 24 provinces.

This is IRI's third poll to be conducted after the October 23, 2011 National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections. The NCA is tasked with drafting a new constitution, and an interim cabinet has been appointed to manage the country's day-to-day affairs. After a period of relative optimism following the NCA elections, the majority of Tunisians now feel their country is moving in the wrong direction. Sixty-seven percent of respondents said they believe the country is moving in the wrong direction, an increase of six points over IRI's previous survey. This is the highest level of dissatisfaction that IRI has measured since it began polling in Tunisia. The rise in public frustration corresponds with the growing perception that the government has not been able to address key priorities over the past year, and that it is unlikely to do so in the future.

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, 52 percent chose employment first, and 81 percent mentioned it as either their first, second or third choice. Related issues, included development and reform of the economy and living standards, were the second and third highest priorities, respectively.

When asked what is the most important problem facing Tunisia as a whole, only three percent of respondents mentioned security. However, security-related issues were still mentioned somewhat frequently. Strikes and sit-ins were mentioned third most, by 30 percent of respondents, and violence, delinquency and vandalism was mentioned fourth most by 28 percent perception of respondents. Terrorism was mentioned by a total of six percent.

In addition to economics, transparent communication was mentioned frequently as a top priority for the current government. A total of 37 percent of respondents indicated government communication as a top priority, including 12 percent who listed it as their first choice. This is a sharp increase over previous surveys; only three percent of respondents to IRI's April 2012 survey mentioned government communication at all.

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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 survey in January 2012. This drop comes in spite of modest economic growth and political stability during the first half of 2012.
- In spite of a generally negative outlook, respondents offered a slightly more positive appraisal of the economy than in recent surveys. Twenty-eight percent of respondents described the economy as somewhat or very good, the highest number since March 2011.
- However, Tunisians are still concerned about the state of their economy, with 70 percent indicating that the economic situation is somewhat bad or very bad. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported that their household's financial situation has not improved or gotten worse over the past year.
- Attitudes toward secularism have recently grown more positive. Fifty percent of respondents indicated their approval of a secular system of government, an 18 percent increase since January 2012 and the highest approval rating IRI has measured.
- While more Tunisians prefer a secular system, the majority also still favor Islamist political parties, with 64 percent saying they prefer Islamist parties in the NCA.
- Since the NCA elections, expectations for the government have steadily declined. When asked if they expected the current government to address a range of issues including living standards, constitutional and legal reforms, corruption, unemployment and security, 53 percent of respondents said it was very likely or somewhat likely to do so, down from 83 percent in January and 58 percent in April.
- Awareness of the National Constituent Assembly has improved. When asked what the primary role of the NCA is, 51 percent responded that it is to draft the new constitution, an increase of nine percent since IRI's last survey. The number of respondents who said they did not know the primary role of the NCA, while still high at 17 percent, was nine points lower than IRI's previous survey.
- There is a high level of support to ratify the new constitution through a popular referendum, with 73 percent of respondents indicating they would prefer a national referendum to a vote within the assembly.
- The broad preference for a constitutional referendum conflicts with the current path to ratification, in which a two-thirds majority of the NCA can ratify the constitution. A referendum at present would only occur if a vote in the NCA fails twice to achieve a two-thirds majority. With Tunisian citizens preferring a popular referendum to a vote in the NCA by a margin of 55 percent, the current ratification process could call public satisfaction with the new constitution into question.

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Economy

- In spite of ongoing concerns about the national economy and unemployment, Tunisians rated their personal economic situation slightly higher than in recent polls. Thirty-four 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 twice as high as in January 2012. Twenty-two percent said they have trouble affording essentials for survival, the lowest response IRI has recorded since 2011.
- When asked to rate their current quality of life on a scale of one to seven, where one is highest and seven is lowest, 32 percent of respondents rated themselves a three or higher. This is the highest number IRI has measured since 2011, and an increase of nine points since January 2012.
- Respondents reporting a low quality of life – five or higher – decreased by three points since January 2012, from 41 percent to 38 percent.
- 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, 67 percent said they expect assistance from the government in finding work. When asked what type of assistance the government should provide to the unemployed, 44 percent suggested increased public sector hiring, while 22 percent suggested loan programs.
- Increasing foreign direct investment and improving education and vocational training are considered the best ways to increase jobs in Tunisia, indicated by 37 percent and 26 percent of respondents, respectively. The next highest response, to expand the public sector, was indicated by 12 percent of respondents.

Political Transition

- Opinions of the best system of government power sharing have changed significantly. Asked to choose between a presidential, parliamentary or mixed system, a majority of Tunisians now favor a presidential system (52 percent). This is almost a reversal of previous polls in which a mixed government was consistently preferred. Only 21 percent of respondents indicated a preference for a mixed government, down from a high of 53 percent in April. A parliamentary system remains the least popular option, chosen by 19 percent of respondents.
- The vast majority of Tunisians believe the NCA should take no more than two years to finish its mandate. Seventy-one percent of respondents said they believe the NCA should take two years or less, while 18 percent said the assembly should take three years or more.
- While opinions of secular government are more positive, Tunisians continue to express a preference for Islamist political parties, with 64 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 drop in preference for Islamist parties since it reached a high point of 79 percent in January.

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- 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 (59 percent noted improvement), security (48 percent), political reform (47 percent) and development of an independent civil society (43 percent).

Elections

- A majority of 59 percent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their vote, a decrease of nine points since IRI's last survey. Twenty-four percent said they believed they had made the wrong choice, an increase of four points since April.
- Of those who indicated they were not satisfied with their vote, 72 percent said they were not pleased with the party for which they had voted.
- Looking ahead to the next elections, 39 percent of respondents said they intended to vote for the same party as they had in the NCA elections, while 19 percent said they intended to vote for a different party and 27 percent were undecided.
- When asked to choose from a list of political parties, 27 percent of respondents said they would support Ennahda Movement in the next elections. The next highest parties were Nida Tunis, Ettakatol and Congress for the Republic, at approximately six percent each. However, 41 percent of respondents indicated they did not know who they would vote for, while seven percent refused to answer.
- The high number of undecided voters indicates that many Tunisians may not have enough information about their political options at present. Political parties are still in the process of building national networks and many have not yet developed coherent issue-based platforms. Many parties are not well-known to voters and lack the local infrastructure to conduct direct outreach in most regions of the country. As Tunisia moves closer to a completed constitution and elections in the coming months, parties will need to increase their direct contact with voters and offer credible solutions to the priority challenges of employment and economic development.

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