

Tunisia Elections Dispatch No. 2

Voter Registration

Introduction

This is the second in a series of reports the [International Republican Institute](#) (IRI) is issuing over the course of the next few months as Tunisia prepares to hold parliamentary and presidential elections, currently scheduled for October 26, 2014. The presidential election is scheduled for November 23 with a potential run-off occurring before the end of 2014.

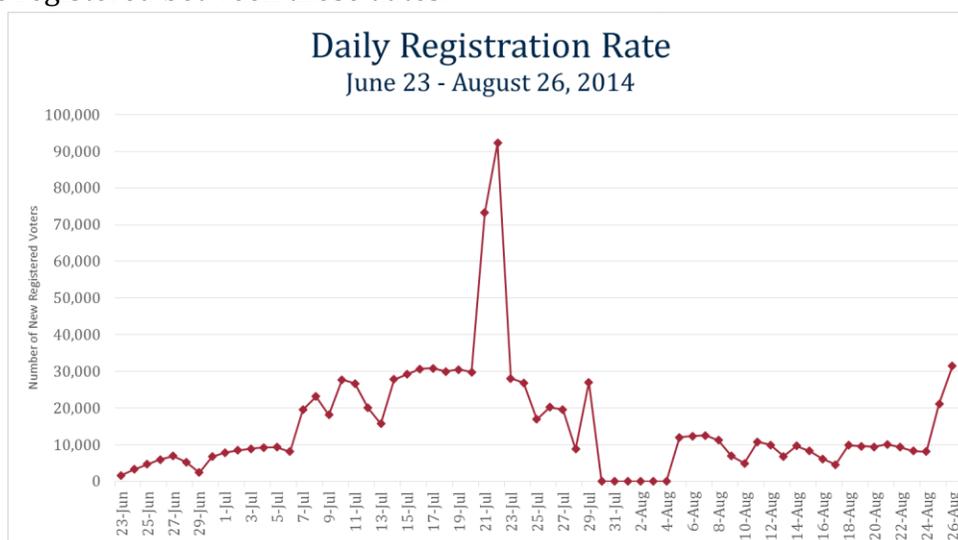
This report, a follow-up to IRI's [Tunisia Elections Dispatch No. 1](#), was compiled from the observations of IRI's long-term observer for the voter registration period. Subsequent reports will draw on the analyses of IRI's long-term observers stationed in-country in the months before and after the legislative elections.

To support these elections, IRI will conduct international election observation missions for both the parliamentary and presidential elections, deploying long-term and short-term observers throughout the country to monitor the pre- and post-elections processes, assess the transparency and credibility of the process, and, afterward, offer analysis and recommendations for future electoral cycles.

Per Tunisia's new constitution, the elections will be administered by the [Independent High Authority for Elections](#) (ISIE), which is a permanent independent public authority responsible for ensuring democratic, free, pluralistic, fair and transparent elections. Independent Regional Authorities for Elections (IRIE) were created in each electoral constituency to assist the ISIE in completing its tasks.

Fast Facts on the Registration Process

- The first voter registration period occurred between June 23 and July 29, 2014. [760,514](#) Tunisians registered to vote during this time.
- Due to lower than expected registration rates, on July 31, the ISIE announced that Tunisians could continue to register from August 5-26, 2014. As a result, [233,182](#) new voters registered between those dates.



- Registration is now closed. Between June 23 and August 26 a total of [993,696](#) people registered as voters. Registration data suggests [377,714](#) are under the age of 30. About [50.5 percent](#) of newly registered voters are women and [49.5 percent](#) are men.
- Those who registered during the extension period of August 5-26 will not be eligible to become an electoral candidate.
- Including those who registered in 2011, [5,236,244](#) Tunisians are registered to vote out of an estimated 7.4 million potential voters. Of the 5,236,244 total registered voters, [311,014](#) live outside the country.

OVERVIEW

Before registration ended on July 29, stakeholders expected that registration would be extended. However, the announcement extending registration to August 26 was not given until July 31, and the ISIE did not reopen registration until August 5. The delayed resumption resulted in a week of lost potential registration. However, it gave time for ISIE officials to evaluate their performance during the previous period and make some adjustments.

Compared to the first voter registration period (June 23 to July 29), the registration rate in the second period was slow. The daily average registration rate of the second period (August 5-26) was half that of the first (11,104 vs. 21,125). On the last two days of the second period, registration jumped to [21,164](#) and [31,401](#), respectively.

[Ben Arous, Tunis 1 and Sousse](#) electoral districts ended with the highest number of registered voters. In total, [57 percent registered via the SMS system,* 39 percent at ISIE offices and four percent on the ISIE website.](#)

Reports are mixed on the level of registration support provided by election administrators and other stakeholders during the second registration period. Limited coordination and communication with the ISIE frustrated these stakeholders' efforts to support registration. Voter registration campaigns conducted by political parties and civil society seems to have had only a minimal impact on registration rates. IRI has found that the ISIE could have done more to adequately promote registration, but is equally cognizant of enormous demands placed upon this new institution with limited time to prepare.

Media and television coverage of voter registration was limited during the initial phase of the registration period. IRI did observe that the ISIE and media outlets slowly increased coverage of registration over the month of August.

ISIE OPERATIONS

The ISIE provided a second voter registration period, which may have been in part due to pressure from political parties that felt the registration of more voters would increase their electoral chances. The ISIE's reluctance to extend voter registration is evident in the delay

* Citizens register to vote via SMS by sending their national identification number to an ISIE number via text message. They receive a response confirming their registration and informing them of their polling center's location.

of the announcement from July 29 to July 31. The ISIE now faces increased pressure to review the voter rolls and prepare polling centers for Election Day in less than two months.

Many IRIEs used the time between registration periods to adjust their strategies for registering voters. Some IRIEs dismissed registration teams based on their performance. Additionally, Sfax 1 chose to focus its efforts on densely populated urban areas outside of Sfax city, where the proportion of new voters registered is lower than the national average; Sfax 2 doubled its mobile registration units, closed the least efficient stationary offices and focused on voters without identity cards and registering from company offices and factories; Sidi Bouzid concentrated on registering rural populations, the youth and the unemployed. Governorates with large factories turned their efforts toward targeting factory employees, registering voters on site.

The above examples are demonstrations of the ISIE's ability to deploy creative solutions in an attempt to achieve its mandate. It is worth noting, however, that some IRIEs in the interior parts of the country cited insufficient support and vague directives from the ISIE.

ISIE Promotion Efforts

From conversations with ISIE officials, the ISIE did not promote registration during the second period due to limited resources. It was also intimated that those who will vote are already well informed of the registration process and timelines. However there is evidence that would suggest the contrary. Registration rates increased each time the ISIE amplified its media presence in July. The IRIE president in Sidi Bouzid also noticed an uptick in registration numbers whenever an ISIE representative spoke to local media.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF REGISTRATION

The media slowly intensified its attention to voter registration during the second period. After initial television and radio announcements about the re-opening of registration, national media paid little attention to voter registration in the first ten days of August. In mid-August, national media outlets began actively covering the electoral process once again.

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS' REGISTRATION EFFORTS

Political Parties

Political parties continued to campaign during voter registration, encouraging citizens to register to vote and participate in Tunisia's democratic future. However several political parties complained of poor communication with the ISIE. There were numerous allegations of parties attempting to register voters en masse in violation of ISIE registration procedures. A lack of communication between the ISIE and political party operatives is likely the reason for this phenomenon, instead of a premeditated effort to knowingly circumvent the electoral law. Parties actively registering voters should be commended for their outreach efforts. This is overall a positive sign in Tunisia's democratic transition. The ISIE should strive to better inform political parties of the particulars of the campaign law and the electoral law in the coming months.

Civil Society

IRI received conflicting reports of the level of civil society support provided to voter registration during the second period. IRI noted the presence of voter awareness campaigns in many governorates and the absence of voter awareness efforts in others. A lack of coordination between IRIEs and civil society in many governorates was equally evident. In many governorates in the interior, voter registration efforts by civil society were conducted. However, IRIE officials reported that they were unaware of any civil society efforts in their governorate. During the registration period members of civil society also expressed dissatisfaction with the IRIEs' cooperation. Overall, IRI commends civil society for its activism on voter registration and voter awareness but notes that a coordinated national effort was lacking. Overall, civil society was more present in urban centers and governorates with higher levels of prosperity.

SECURITY

Despite monthly attacks on the Tunisian military and police along the Algerian border, IRI received no indications that would suggest security concerns have had a direct impact on voter registration rates. But there is concern the threat of violence during the elections could affect voter participation or disrupt the elections process. The Tunisian government has reported that it is stepping up efforts to secure the country for elections. In early August President Moncef Marzouki requested increased military support from the U.S. during his visit to Washington, DC on August 4-6.

The threat of violence has directly impacted at least one governorate. The government of Tunisia is not yet sure whether citizens in the closed military area of Kasserine will be able to vote due to security threats present in this region. Additionally, presumably fearing the actions of Salafists opposed to elections, the IRIE coordinator in Sfax 1 requested that the National Guard protect IRIE offices in Sfax. As noted in IRI's last dispatch, Salafists threatened and intimidated ISIE mobile registration teams in Bizerte as well and have caused minor disruptions in multiple regions.

CONCLUSION

While still below the ISIE's original goal of 2.5 million registered voters, the total for both registration periods in 2014 of just under 1 million is commendable given the short time for preparation, budgeting challenges and the domestic and regional political climate. The addition of about 233,000 voters to the rolls during the extension is important, although it remains to be seen whether other areas of election administration will suffer due to the extension of the voter registration period. The ISIE could have promoted the second registration period more and seen higher registration numbers, but perhaps conserving resources for the upcoming three elections will prove to be a wiser decision. IRI commends the staff of the ISIE for their integrity, flexibility and steadfast dedication to Tunisia's democratic future.

Political parties' candidate lists for the parliamentary elections have been finalized and will be published on September 6. The official parliamentary elections campaign period for political parties will begin on October 4 and close on October 24, 2014.

IRI will issue a Tunisia Elections Dispatch on the pre-elections period in the coming weeks.

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