

Tunisia's Bumpy Road



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between August 15 and September 5, 2021, Zogby Research Services conducted a survey of 1,551 Tunisian adults to examine their attitudes about satisfaction with their lives and optimism for the future, their most important priorities for their country and approval of the government's handling of those concerns, the current crisis of governance, and the way forward. A summary analysis is followed by the complete results below.

I. The Present

1. Tunisians are dissatisfied with their current situation (more say they are worse off now than they were five years ago) and pessimistic that their lives will get better in the next five years.
2. The most telling expression of this deep dissatisfaction is the fact that 71% of Tunisians say that life was better before the 2010 revolution.
3. The government of Prime Minister Hisham Mechichi receives extremely low scores for its handling of what respondents say are the three top issues facing the country: controlling the pandemic (a performance rating of 22% positive), the economy (only 13% positive rating), and ending corruption (22% positive rating).
3. Opinion is divided down the middle on whether respondents approve or disapprove of President Kais Saied's actions and whether there is concern for Tunisian democracy.
4. A strong plurality of Tunisians place blame for the current crisis on the Speaker of the Parliament, Rached Ghannouchi. They also give only lukewarm support to any of Tunisia's political parties.
5. When asked to recommend the way forward, an overwhelming majority of Tunisians say that they want the constitution and the election law amended and early elections. They do not want to restore the system as it was. And they lean toward a presidential system instead of a parliamentary system.

II. Looking Back to the Last Decade

We've been polling in Tunisia since 2011 and a look back at our findings shows how opinion has changed during the past decade.

1. Back in 2011, shortly after the revolution 54% of Tunisians said they were confident that the country was on the right track; the remaining 46% said they weren't sure because it was too early to tell.
2. By 2013, when we asked Tunisians to look back and tell us how hopeful they had been in 2011, 83% said they had been hopeful. But in that same 2013 poll, only 39% said they were still hopeful, with 55% saying they were disappointed. Opinion had soured with only 27% saying the country was on the right track (with 64% saying it was on the wrong track).

3. This decline in satisfaction was due to the fact that the Ennahda party that was leading the government was seen as having been ineffective in addressing all of the major issues facing the country, with around two-thirds of respondents giving the government poor scores in dealing with the economy, protecting personal and civil rights, fighting extremism, and stopping corruption. As a result, only 28% said they had confidence in Ennahda.
4. After several governments rose and fell over the next five years, by 2018 only 20% of Tunisians said the country was on the right track and only 21% said they were better off than they had been five years earlier. And only 25% had any confidence in the Parliament as an institution.
5. In 2019, in the midst of presidential and parliamentary elections, we witnessed an upward movement in Tunisians' optimism. For the first time since 2011, more than 50% of Tunisians said they were optimistic about the future.
6. As we have seen, that optimism collapsed by 2021 owing largely to the government's failure to address the pandemic, the economy, and corruption.

III. Concluding Note

What comes through quite clearly from the results of this poll and our past decade of polling in Tunisia is that precisely because there is a vibrant democratic culture in the country, public opinion can be quite volatile.

Majorities were hopeful in 2011, then disappointed a few years later as the government failed to deliver on pressing needs. In 2019, in the lead-up to national elections, once again a majority was optimistic that the situation in the country would improve in the near future. Over the next few years, hopes again faded leading to today's crisis.

Tunisians are deeply dissatisfied with the failure of the Mechichi government, and its inability to address what overwhelming majorities say are the most pressing issues facing the country: the pandemic, government corruption, and the economy. Most telling is the fact that seven in 10 Tunisians now say life was better before the revolution occurred.

It is important to note that Tunisians have little confidence in all of the political parties and the Parliament. The largest party, Ennahda, and its leader remain, as they were in 2013, polarizing factors in public opinion. Unlike the situation in Egypt, where the objection to the Muslim Brotherhood-led government of Mohamed Morsi was based on concern with its ideologically-driven agenda, Tunisian frustration with Ennahda in 2013 and now appears to be driven by its failure to govern competently and deliver on the promises of the revolution.

Finally, while it appears that Tunisians are not of one mind as to how to move forward toward securing their future, there appears to be strong consensus in the public's desire to have both the election law and the Constitution amended and then to hold early elections.

While the public appears to have more confidence in the President than they do in the Speaker or the Prime Minister, President Saied should recognize that he doesn't have much time to deliver both on structural change and meeting the basic unmet needs of a deeply divided and restless polity.

RESULTS

Deep Dissatisfaction

Table 1. Are you better off or worse off than you were five years ago?

Better off	24
Worse off	37
About the same	39

Tunisians express low satisfaction in their current situation. Only 24% of Tunisians say they are better off now than they were five years ago, with 37% saying they are worse off and 39% saying their situation is about the same. Respondents who support all six of the major Tunisian political parties are more likely to say they are worse off than better off today than they were five years ago.

Table 1a. By party: Are you better off or worse off than you were five years ago?

	Ennahda	Qalb Tounes	Democratic Current	Itilaf al Karama	Ach-Chaab	Free Destourian
Better off	23	28	24	11	18	30
Worse off	27	32	30	51	40	27
About the same	50	40	47	38	42	44

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table 2. As you look five years into the future, do you feel you will be better off or worse off than you are today?

Better off	30
Worse off	33
About the same	37

Optimism about the future is also low among Tunisian respondents. Only 30% say they expect their lives will be better five years into the future, while 33% say they expect to be worse off, and 37% say they expect things will remain about the same.

Table 2a. As you look five years into the future, do you feel you will be better off or worse off than you are today?

	Ennahda	Qalb Tounes	Democratic Current	Itilaf al Karama	Ach-Chaab	Free Destourian
Better off	36	28	23	14	25	45
Worse off	34	43	39	30	28	19
About the same	30	29	38	57	47	36

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table 3. Was life in Tunisia better or worse before the 2010 revolution?

Life was much better before the 2010 revolution.	27
Life was somewhat better before the 2010 revolution.	44
Better	71
Life was somewhat worse before the 2010 revolution.	20
Life was much worse before the 2010 revolution.	9
Worse	29

The most telling expression of Tunisians' deep dissatisfaction is the fact that 71% of all respondents say that life was better before the 2010 revolution. And this sentiment is shared by substantial majorities of respondents who support each of the six major parties; between 57% and 79% of these party supporters say life was better before the 2010 revolution.

Table 3a. Was life in Tunisia better or worse before the 2010 revolution?

	Ennahda	Qalb Tounes	Democratic Current	Itilaf al Karama	Ach-Chaab	Free Destourian
Life was much better before the 2010 revolution.	31	17	16	17	23	35
Life was somewhat better before the 2010 revolution.	40	49	44	45	34	44
Better	71	66	60	62	57	79
Life was somewhat worse before the 2010 revolution.	23	27	29	28	27	10
Life was much worse before the 2010 revolution.	6	7	11	10	16	11
Worse	29	34	40	38	43	21

Mechichi Government Failed to Address Priorities

How important are each of the following issues to you?		
Issues	Very/Somewhat Important	Excellent/Good Performance
Controlling the pandemic	98	22
Ending corruption in government	97	22
Handling the economy	97	13
Combating religious extremism and terrorism	81	26
Protecting the rights of women	73	10

When asked to rank priority concerns facing the country, Tunisians rank controlling the pandemic, handling the economy (e.g., creating employment and controlling the high cost of living), and ending government corruption as far and away the top three.

However, when asked to evaluate the performance of the government of Prime Minister Mechichi in each of these areas, the government receives low scores. With respect to the top three issues of importance, fewer than one-quarter of respondents rate the government's performance as excellent or good (controlling pandemic: 22%, handling the economy: 13%, and ending corruption: 22%).

Mixed Reviews of President Saied's July 25th Actions

Table 4. Do you approve or disapprove of the actions taken by President Kais Saied on July 25th?

Approve	49
Disapprove	51

Approve is the aggregation of the responses "strongly approve" and "somewhat approve." Disapprove is the aggregation of the responses "somewhat disapprove" and "strongly disapprove."

Opinion is divided on President Saied's actions on July 25th, with 49% approving (35% strongly approving) and 51% disapproving (only 18% strongly disapproving). Majorities of respondents who support the Free Destourian, Democratic Current, Ach-Chaab, and Qalb Tounes parties support the president's actions, while only about one-third of those who have confidence in Ennahda and Itilaf al Karama party support his actions.

Table 4a. Do you approve or disapprove of the actions taken by President Kais Saied on July 25th?

	Ennahda	Qalb Tounes	Democratic Current	Itilaf al Karama	Ach-Chaab	Free Destourian
Approve	33	52	55	36	53	66
Disapprove	67	48	45	64	47	34

Approve is the aggregation of the responses "strongly approve" and "somewhat approve." Disapprove is the aggregation of the responses "somewhat disapprove" and "strongly disapprove."

Table 5. Are you concerned about democracy after President Saied's July 25 decisions?

Very concerned	50
A little concerned	31
Not at all concerned	19

There is a similar split with respect to Tunisians' concern about the future of democracy in their country, with 50% saying they are very concerned and 50% saying they are either only a little concerned or not at all concerned. Among those respondents who have confidence in Ennahda, two-thirds (68%) are very concerned about the future of democracy in Tunisia, and about one-half of those with confidence in the Qalb Tounes (52%) and Itilaf al Karama (47%) parties agree. Only about one-third of those who support the other major political parties (Democratic Current: 34%, Ach-Chaab: 32%, Free Destourian: 29%) are very concerned about Tunisian democracy after the president's decisions on July 25.

Table 5a. Are you concerned about democracy after President Saied's July 25 decisions?

	Ennahda	Qalb Tounes	Democratic Current	Itilaf al Karama	Ach-Chaab	Free Destourian
Very concerned	68	52	34	47	32	29
A little concerned	21	30	47	37	52	58
Not at all concerned	11	19	19	16	16	13

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table 6. Which person you think was mostly responsible for Tunisia's crises?

President Kais Saied	29
Rached Ghannouchi	45
Hichem Mechichi	24
Nabil Karoui	3

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

When asked who they believe is most responsible for Tunisia's current crises, 45% of respondents say it was Speaker of the Parliament Rached Ghannouchi. Twenty-nine percent (29%) blame President Kais Saied and 24% point to Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi as the person most responsible for Tunisia's crises. Among Tunisians who have confidence in the major parties, only those who support Ennahda hold the president largely responsible for the crises (62%). A plurality of respondents (44%) who support Qalb Tounes hold Mechichi responsible, while at least a plurality of respondents with confidence in the each of other four major parties hold Ghannouchi responsible (Free Destourian: 53%, Ach-Chaab: 46%, Democratic Current: 45%, Itilaf al Karama: 44%).

Table 6a. Which person you think was mostly responsible for Tunisia's crises?

	Ennahda	Qalb Tounes	Democratic Current	Itilaf al Karama	Ach-Chaab	Free Destourian
President Kais Saied	62	19	19	28	27	21
Rached Ghannouchi	21	37	45	44	46	53
Hichem Mechichi	14	44	32	26	25	25
Nabil Karoui	3	1	4	3	2	2

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Governance and the Way Forward

Table 7. President Saied has options moving forward. Please evaluate the following possible courses of action.

	Approve	Disapprove
Restore parliamentary activity as it used to be	48	52
Amend election law and the Constitution and call for early elections	84	16
Extend emergency provisions and stay in power as long as it takes to put the country on the right track	42	58

Approve is the aggregation of the responses “strongly approve” and “somewhat approve.” Disapprove is the aggregation of the responses “somewhat disapprove” and “strongly disapprove.”

What should President Saied do next? An overwhelming majority of Tunisians (84%) say that their preferred course of action for the president is to “amend election law and the Constitution and call for early elections.” Opinion is divided on two other options, with less than half of the respondents favoring either “restoring parliamentary activity as it used to be” (48%) or “extending emergency provisions and staying in power as long as it takes to put the country on the right track” (42%).

Table 8. What kind of government do you prefer for Tunisia?

Presidential	41
Parliamentary	29
A mix of the two, the way it is now	30

When asked what kind of government they prefer for Tunisia, a plurality of respondents (41%) say they prefer a presidential government, while about three in 10 prefer a parliamentary system (29%) or “a mix of the two the way it is now” (30%).

A presidential government is the preference for a majority of those with confidence in Qalb Tounes (58%) and the Free Destourian Party (54%). A parliamentary government is the preference only for supporters of Ennahda (44%), while at least pluralities of those with confidence in the Ach-Chaab (51%), Democratic Current (46%), and Itilaf al Karama (42%) parties prefer a government that is a mix of presidential and parliamentary systems as it is now.

Table 8a. What kind of government do you prefer for Tunisia?						
	Ennahda	Qalb Tounes	Democratic Current	Itilaf al Karama	Ach-Chaab	Free Destourian
Presidential	27	58	27	24	28	54
Parliamentary	44	16	28	34	21	22
A mix of the two, the way it is now	30	26	46	42	51	25

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table 9. How much confidence do you have in each of the following parties to address Tunisia's problems?

	Confidence	No confidence
Ennahda	34	66
Qalb Tounes	22	78
Democratic Current	19	81
Itilaf al Karama party	28	72
Ach-Chaab party	14	86
Free Destourian party	12	88

Confidence is the aggregation of the responses "great confidence" and "some confidence." No confidence is the aggregation of the responses "very little confidence" and "no confidence at all."

One reason for the lukewarm enthusiasm for a parliamentary system may be Tunisians' lack of support for the various political parties that currently exist. None of the political parties are held in high regard by a majority of Tunisians. About one-third (34%) of respondents say they have either "great confidence" or "some confidence" in Ennahda, followed by 28% who express confidence in Itilaf al Karama and 22% who have confidence for Qalb Tounes. Fewer than one in five respondents have confidence in the other parties in the poll. Almost 20% of all Tunisians registered little or no confidence in all of the parties.

Methodology

The survey was conducted between August 15 and September 5, 2021, using a face-to-face personal interview approach. A multi-stage sampling methodology (random, door to door sampling) was employed for selection of respondents. Urban as well as rural centers were covered to ensure a widespread geography (including Tunis, Bizerte, Sousse, Sfax, Kairouan, Gaafsa, Douz, Tataouine, Jendouba, Tozeur, Qabis). The sample obtained was nationally representative and was comprised of adult males and females who were 15+ years of age. A total of 1,551 respondents were interviewed. The margin of error is ± 2.5 .

Demographics

Male	50
Female	50
Under 30	28
30+	72
In city	70
Out of city	30
Sunni	99
Shia	1

ZOGBY
RESEARCH SERVICES

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