

Expectations Rise Ahead of Tunisia Vote

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With many Tunisians still undecided, campaigning reaches fever pitch in run-up to Arab Spring's first election.

Only a few days before the October 23 elections are due to begin, Tunisians seem enthusiastic and perplexed in equal measure.

With a sea of political parties of all orientations to choose from – some 100 parties have been established, as well as scores of independent candidates – many voters remain undecided, certain only that they want a new government to boost the economy and ensure the success of the revolution.

“No matter who I go to vote for or who is going to win the election, I don't really care as long as they fix the unemployment problem, this is my main worry,” said Muhammad Al Manai, a fish breeder who has been out of work since 2007. “But that promise is on every party's platform.”

“I can't decide who I'm going to vote for and God only know who is the right choice to save this country from economic collapse and change the old rotten system,” said Isleh, who owns a small restaurant in the capital's suburbs. “Products are becoming more and more expensive.”

International observers are arriving to monitor the elections, and campaigning is reaching fever pitch ahead of Sunday's vote.

Football supporters have changed the lyrics of their team's chants, replacing the names of their favourite teams with the parties they are planning to vote for, and Tunis is filled with activists wearing T-shirts with the logos of the various contenders, or handing out numerous political flyers.

One distributor, a tall, toothless man who belonged to the Islamist AnNadha party said with a smile, “I'm not really worried about the elections because I'm 100 per cent sure that we are the most powerful group and the victory is basically in our pockets.”

However, the election's system of proportional representation – which will lead to the formation of an assembly tasked with writing a new constitution – means that no single party will be able to win an outright majority, with many hoping that a secular, democratic system will emerge.

“My name is Sofien Snoussi,” said a young, blond man. “I'm 23 and I have dual nationality, Swedish and Tunisian. I choose to live here with my father here even though my Swedish mother lives in Stockholm, because I love Tunisia – and I have the faith that we are going to win this battle of freedom and get away from religious intolerance and built a secular society.”

Tensions between those who favour a secular system and conservative Muslims have been rising ever since the revolution. Most recently, demonstrations last week saw thousands of people take to the streets, outraged that a Tunisian television channel had broadcast the animated film *Persepolis*, which features a representation of God, prohibited in Islam.

A counter-demonstration in Tunis was swiftly organised by a secular group known as Atakni (Leave Me Alone) to protest against extremism.

“People are fighting and protesting over a stupid movie in their first real test of respecting freedom of expression – so what about a really big deal like deciding their future?” said taxi driver Fathi Ben Kahla angrily. “Maybe I am the most pessimistic man in Tunisia but I don't have a good feeling about the election, and there is a chance that I will not vote at all.”

Mariem, a journalist, said that the atmosphere of uncertainty was widespread.

“From my work in the field, I have noticed that a high number of Tunisians have not yet decided who they are going to vote for,” she continued. “Everything happened so fast for them; revolution, protests, problems, campaigns and the creation of over one hundred parties.

“You see, we are not a large population in Tunisia, but we are made up of a mosaic of cultural and political opinions – and it's going to be difficult to unite.”

Ramy Jarbou is a Tunisian writer and film-maker.

Location: [Tunisia](#)

Topic: [Elections](#)

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