

Mourakiboun

First Election Campaign Monitoring Report

Mourakiboun has been following the Tunisian election campaigns with a team of trained monitors who have been following and evaluating the campaigns using a rigorous methodology. The methodology, used by approximately 600 specialized monitors across Tunisia, uses reporting tools specifically developed for these elections that include a variety of qualitative and quantitative indicators. While *Mourakiboun* will publish a detailed report about the monitoring three weeks after Election Day, this report outlines preliminary results of the monitoring until the date of writing.

1. General election campaign activities in Tunisia

For the most part, election campaigns across the country were launched on Monday, October 6th and Tuesday, October 7th, which was a later start than had been planned. This late start was due to the fact that many municipalities delayed in preparing public advertisement boards for campaign advertising, and candidates were not allowed to launch their campaigns until these boards were ready. In an extraordinary case, the two cities of Sfax and Djerba did not see the launch of campaigns until the second week of the campaign period. Campaign launches in the first two weeks took a variety of forms, including distribution of leaflets in public spaces, public rallies, musical performances, and candidates' appearances.

The discrepancies between the candidate lists' and parties' resources were clearly evident in the campaign launch activities. For example, some of the lists were able to hire fleets of cars for their activities, while others were not able to afford them. In other cases, it was clear that some large candidate lists and parties had large pools of funds, significant influence over public officials and other local administrative figures, and had disproportionate ability to dispense patronage to local citizens, while many other candidate lists lacked these capabilities. Overall, the observers agreed that disparities in party resources were one of the major defining features of the campaign period. Some of the parties and lists noted for having significant capabilities to conduct campaign activities included *Nahdha*, *Nidaa' Tunis*, *Al-Jabha Al-Sha'biyya (Popular Front)*, *Afek Tunis*, *The Socialist Party*, *Ettakatol* and the *Republican Party*.

2. Common outreach methods used to reach voters

Candidate lists and parties communicated with voters in various ways including direct engagement in markets and public places, public rallies, door-to-door canvassing, and the use of large numbers of hired cars. Parties also conducted daytime and evening rallies with loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods, squares, public spaces such as the public theater, exhibition halls, and private event halls.

In some of the districts, such as Sfax, campaign teams strategically placed themselves in prominent areas such as the *diwan*, the *touta gardens* (in doing so taking advantage of a strategic public space frequented by civil society), the markets, and the working class neighborhoods. Some parties and candidate lists, such as the *Afek Tunis* list in Sfax, distributed campaign goodies with their party numbers on them. Others attempted to garner support by using recognizable party symbols, such as in Sfax, where the *Sout Sfax* list represented itself using a blue motorcycle and *Tiyyar al-Democrati* list used an orange motorcycle.

3. Significant electoral promises made by candidate lists and parties

The monitoring team noted widespread similarities between the electoral platforms of the different candidate lists and parties. They also noticed that the citizens did not appear to relate to the campaign platforms, which they saw as the result of the campaign platforms lacking actionable, substantive policy suggestions. For the most part, campaign platforms made emotional appeals to popular goals such as providing job opportunities or improving the security situation without including practical plans for addressing the issues. These vague party platforms had a negative effect on the voters, often leaving them confused between the aims of the different candidate lists.

Some of the most significant promises included creating work opportunities; improving the security situation; reducing corruption; focusing attention on marginalized groups and poor areas; building hospitals; protecting the environment; improving public administration; reforming the judiciary; creating public spaces; fixing traffic congestion; facilitating loans for small and medium enterprises; public job creation for low income earners; university scholarships; opportunities to study abroad for students; and combatting the problem of industrial waste found in areas like Djerba and Sfax.

At the same time, parties and candidate lists made a number of special promises to specific localities to bring funding for development projects. These included developing a maritime trading port in Zarzis; promises of a medical college in Ben Gardane; a promise to address the problem of the 80 slum communities in Sfax; promises to build a sports complex in Sfax and have the city host the 2021 Mediterranean Games; promises to win recognition of Sfax's archaeological sites as World Heritage Sites; promises to develop the Taparura urban project; and promises to renovate the SIAPE phosphate processing plant. In the capital Tunis, some of the lists mentioned taxes refunds in their platforms.

4. The most significant challenges faced by campaigns

The *Mourakiboun* network noted that campaigns faced various challenges, the most significant of which was the lack of public involvement with the campaigns in most regions during the first two weeks. The level of popular involvement increased during the third week,

although it appears that it remains below what had been expected. The monitors noted that citizens generally did not trust the lists' campaign promises.

In some areas with a number of competing candidate lists and parties, groups conducting campaigns in the same areas engaged in violent exchanges with each other in the streets. Certain groups reportedly took control of some areas and refused other campaign teams the ability to enter the areas or communicate with the voters inside. In some cases, campaign teams were kept from accessing their sub-district (*ma'tamidiyya*) centers. In the governorate of Nabeul, for example, there was a lack of gathering spaces, and supporters of some campaigns attempted to obstruct the activities of other campaigns.

5. Monetary Corruption

The *Mourakiboun* team tried to investigate the issue of monetary corruption, specifically the buying of votes, by gathering evidence of the practice in the field. Despite much talk of direct and indirect monetary corruption, however, none of the monitors were able to document any specific cases. At the same time, most of the monitors pointed to cases where the candidate lists engaged in excessive spending, which can be considered use of "political money". In Skhira, for example, the monitors observed some of the parties giving out 20 dinars per day to people for handing out pamphlets, canvassing the streets, and attending rallies, which can be considered a way of buying influence with money. In another example, the monitors observed one of the parties in Sfax distributing holiday gifts and food. In areas like Nabeul, political money was moved and spent under the blanket of charities that normally take donations and subsidies for needy families. Most of the monitors agreed in the conclusion that political money is an entrenched facet of the Tunisian political scene.

6. The Security Situation During the Elections

The monitors didn't record security incidents until the end of the second week of the campaigns. Since then, there have been some events that affected the security situation. For example in Sfax, some of the areas came to be controlled by Ex-convict and there was an intense security presence and fears that a security problem could develop. In Medenine, there were fears of a security breakdown when supporters of the *Tahrir Party* organized marches protesting the elections and intimidating voters from participating in the elections on Friday, October 18, 2014. In some areas, the monitors also observed some people shutting down roads and tearing campaign posters without intervention by police.