

TUNISIA

Date of Elections: 4 November 1979

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament on the normal expiry of their term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The unicameral Parliament of Tunisia, the National Assembly, is composed of 121 members elected for 5 years.

Electoral System

All citizens aged 20 years or more who have held Tunisian nationality for at least five years and who are in full possession of their civil and political rights are entitled to vote. Disqualified are persons convicted of crime; those convicted of offences which entail either an unsuspended sentence of imprisonment in excess of three months or a suspended sentence of imprisonment in excess of six months; those under guardianship; undischarged bankrupts; the insane; and members of the armed forces and National Guard.

The electoral registers are permanent. They are revised at the commune and sector level on January 1. Citizens living abroad may also be registered. All disputes concerning the lists are resolved by a revision committee. Voting is not compulsory.

Candidates to Parliament must be qualified electors who are at least 28 years of age and born of a Tunisian father. Governors, magistrates, certain local public officials and members of the police force cannot be elected. The exercise of public functions which are non-elective and remunerated out of funds from the State, public establishments or public collectivities are generally incompatible with the office of Deputy; this is also true for the office of president or director of a national enterprise and public establishment, as well as director or administrator of certain public enterprises. Also incompatible are offices which involve working for a foreign State or an international organization when remuneration is provided by these employers.

Candidatures must be submitted during the third or fourth week preceding the elections. Candidates may not run in an individual capacity; they must belong to a party list which is made up of candidates who have agreed to appear on the same list; within each constituency, several lists may not bear the same title nor belong to the same party or organization. Each list enumerates twice as many candidates as there are seats to be filled in the constituency. Candidates need make no monetary deposit.

Tunisia is divided into 22 electoral constituencies. In each, four to seven candidates, who appear on the party lists, are elected by simple majority. The elector casts as many

votes as there are seats to be filled and, in so doing, may split his vote among candidates of different lists. Seats are allocated to the candidates who have obtained the largest number of valid votes.

Should only one list be presented, the candidates on it who have obtained the greatest number of votes are declared elected. In the case of vote splitting, the seats to be filled are allotted to the candidates of the different lists in the order of votes obtained.

An Assembly seat which falls vacant between general elections is filled through a by-election held within three months of the occurrence of the vacancy. No by-elections are however held within the last 12 months of the expiry of the legislature's term.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The November 1979 elections were conducted within the framework of Law 79.40 of 15 August 1979, which made various changes to the Electoral Code*. The most significant innovation is the widening of the candidates' lists, which now must contain twice as many names as seats to be filled in the constituency. Electors thus have a choice with respect to a particular party list. According to its authors, this provision met the wish for an "opening", dialogue and strengthening of the democratic process of public polls. To the same end, prosecutions against various opposition figures were terminated and pardons were granted, particularly on 3 August 1979, President Habib Bourguiba's birthday.

Despite these developments, opposition groups, after some hesitation, decided not to participate in the elections and only the ruling Destour Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste destourien-1?SD*) put forth candidates. On polling day, voter turnout was slightly lower than at the preceding elections, especially in Tunis; the overall figures were 81.4% in 1979 as compared to 96.8% in 1974. The atmosphere on voting day was calm.

On 7 November, President Bourguiba announced that he would once again name Mr. Hedi Nouria as Prime Minister; the latter had held this post since 1970. On 24 April 1980, President Bourguiba reshuffled his Cabinet and Mr. Mohammed Mzali became the new Prime Minister; three Ministers who had resigned at the end of 1977 returned.

* See section *Parliamentary Developments*, p. 33.

Statistics

*1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the National Assembly*

Number of registered electors	1,800,144
Voters	1,465,260 (81.4%)
Void or blank ballot papers	55,654
Valid votes	1,409,606
<i>Votes in favour of the candidates of the Destour Socialist Party. I</i>	1,409,606

Political Group	Number of Seats
Destour Socialist Party (PSD)	121"

* Nine seats added since previous elections.

*2. Distribution of Deputies according to
Professional Category*

Teachers	46
Civil servants	24
Liberal professions	21
Farmers	15
Businessmen and merchants	8
Others	8
	121

3. Distribution of Deputies according to Sex

Men	119
Women	2
	121

4. Distribution of Deputies according to Age Group

28-40 years	22
41-60	93
61 and over	6
	121

Average Age: 48.1 years