

Carter Center Preliminary Statement on Tunisia’s Presidential Election Second Round

Oct. 15, 2019

This statement is preliminary and covers only aspects of the electoral process through Oct. 14. It does not cover the final tabulation of election results, nor the period for filing challenges. As a result, this statement does not represent the Center’s assessment of the electoral process as a whole, but rather a partial preliminary assessment of those phases that are completed. The Carter Center will release one or more additional assessments in the post-election period and at its conclusion. This statement should also be read in conjunction with the preliminary statements released by The Carter Center on Sept. 17 after the first round of the presidential election and on Oct. 8 after the parliamentary election. In addition, a comprehensive final report with recommendations will be published in the months following the end of the electoral process.

Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions

The Tunisian people demonstrated their deep commitment to the democratic process by voting in three well-organized elections in less than one month: a presidential election on Sept. 15, parliamentary elections on Oct. 6, and a presidential runoff on Oct. 13. All three elections were orderly and peaceful, with only minor irregularities. While voter turnout in the Sept. 15 and Oct. 6 elections was lower than in recent elections, it increased markedly for the Oct. 13 runoff. Tunisia’s electoral authorities should be commended for their management of the 2019 elections within a compressed timeline.

The elections in many ways reflected the disillusionment of the Tunisian people with the existing political institutions and establishment, and popular impatience with a failure of the state to produce tangible economic improvements, protect the fundamental rights of citizens, and tackle corruption on all levels. Both candidates who competed in the runoff are seen as outsiders: Nabil Karoui, a businessman with a large TV station and a nationwide charitable organization, and Kais Saïed, an independent constitutional lawyer with no political history.

While the environment surrounding the presidential elections was largely open and competitive – there were 26 candidates in the first round and a broadly open campaign environment – the process was undermined by what appeared to be politically motivated actions to detain Karoui during most of the process. Karoui was detained for approximately seven weeks and was released from detention shortly before election day.

The election of a more politically diverse parliament and a new and politically inexperienced president means it is critical for Tunisian political leaders to work together to forge inclusive solutions to the country’s difficult political and economic challenges that were the root cause of the 2011 revolution.

Tunisians are rightly proud of the role they played in catalyzing the Arab Spring and for continuing to serve as a beacon for democracy across the region. In order to strengthen their democracy, Tunisia’s new leaders must take concrete steps to demonstrate that democracy can and should benefit the people and not individual politicians.

Political Background

Kaïs Saïed and Nabil Karoui, two political outsiders, finished first and second among 26 candidates who competed in the first round of the presidential election and advanced to the second round. Saïed placed first with 18.4 percent of the vote and Karoui second with 15.58 percent. Several veteran politicians were defeated, including Ennahda's vice president and official nominee, Abdelfattah Mourou, who placed third with 12.88 percent. Defense Minister Abdelkarim Zbidi, an independent who was endorsed by Nidaa Tounes and Afek Tounes, came in fourth with 10.73 percent. Yousef Chahed, current prime minister and president of Tahya Tounes, placed fifth with 7.38 percent.

Saïed and Karoui's advancement to the second round reflected the voter's rejection of Tunisia's traditional political parties and presaged the outcome of the legislative election. Both candidates were perceived as anti-establishment and non-political. Saïed is a constitutional lawyer and independent with no political party. He ran a non-traditional campaign, and, at times, said that he would not campaign personally because his opponent was in detention until just before the polls.

Karoui, the co-owner of a major media outlet who maintains a charitable organization, formed his political party in June 2019. He had been under investigation since 2016 on charges of tax evasion and money laundering, but was never detained until Aug. 23, shortly before the start of the campaign. He remained in detention throughout the first-round and parliamentary campaigns, despite several calls for his release by the High Independent Authority for Elections and most of the political establishment. Karoui was released on Oct. 9, the day of the announcement of the preliminary results of the parliamentary elections, with only two days left in the presidential campaign period.

The timing of his arrest and release, combined with an attempt by parliament to enact amendments that would have effectively barred Karoui and his party from running, led to the perception among many stakeholders that his detention was politically motivated.

In its order releasing Karoui, the Court of Cassation concluded that although Karoui had lodged an appeal against the order freezing his assets and banning him from travelling, the court of appeals had abused its power and violated basic procedural requirements by issuing an additional order of pretrial detention even though the prosecutor had not requested his detention. Therefore, the Court of Cassation found that the court of appeals had violated Karoui's rights and declared the warrant null and void.

Because no candidate received an absolute majority of valid votes cast in the first round, the constitution requires that a second round between the two candidates with the largest number of votes be held within two weeks of the announcement of the final results of the first round. After the exhaustion of all legal challenges, the ISIE announced the final result of the first round on Oct. 2 and scheduled the second-round polls for Oct. 13.

According to the preliminary results of the parliamentary election, Ennahda won the largest share of seats – 52 out of a total of 217, which represents a steady decline from 89 seats in 2011 and 69 seats in 2014. Its win was credited less to its popularity than to the division of the secular parties. Qalb Tounes, the party of Karoui, placed second with 38 seats. Karoui's party's supporters are characterized as marginalized and apolitical citizens who believe he can help them economically

through his welfare association, Khalil Tounes. He promoted his public image as a self-made man who could help Tunisia.

Nidaa Tounes virtually collapsed, mostly as a result of its continuous fractures since 2014. It won only three seats. Moreover, the various parties that emerged from the division of Nidaa Tounes either obtained very few seats (El Machrouu, with four seats) or none at all (Amal Tounes). Tahya Tounes, the prime minister's party and an offshoot of Nidaa Tounes, won 14 seats, which allows it to form a parliamentary bloc.

Abir Moussi's Free Destourian Party greatly advanced, winning 17 seats in 2019. The party was created in 2013 with the intention of regrouping the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), the party of the former regime. Former RCD members were barred from running for seats in the National Constituent Assembly and Moussi's party did not win any seats in parliament in 2014. Its extreme anti-Ennahda rhetoric and praise for the socio-economic situation under the Ben Ali regime appears to have attracted voters who are nostalgic for the country's past stability. Mohamed Abbou's Al Tayar Dimokrati (Democratic Current) won 22 seats, finishing third, compared to 2014, when it won only three seats.

The parliamentary polls also saw the rise of new political actors such as the El Karama movement, which supported presidential candidate Seif Eddine Makhlouf. It won 21 seats. The Pan-Arab party, Harakat Chaab, which supported the candidate Safi Said, won 16 seats. These two parties both have an aggressive anti-Western discourse. Sixteen political parties, two coalition, and 14 independents are now represented in parliament, and with the exception of nine political parties, all are new.

Legal Framework

According to international best practices, an election's legal framework should be transparent and readily accessible to the public. It should also address all the components of an electoral system necessary to ensure democratic elections.¹ The Tunisian electoral process is governed by the January 2014 constitution, the 2014 electoral law, the law on the ISIE, and the law related to the freedom of audiovisual communication that created the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA). The legal framework for presidential elections is generally in alignment with international standards and remained unchanged during the two rounds of the elections.²

Article 52 of the electoral law guarantees equal opportunities for all candidates during the campaign, although it never defines the meaning of "equal opportunities." The law on the ISIE mandates that the commission guarantee equal treatment of voters, candidates, and all stakeholders.³ The decree on the HAICA requires equal opportunity in the exercise of the rights and liberties of audiovisual communication.⁴ However, there is no explicit definition of what equal opportunities or treatment means for the purpose of implementing the law.

¹ OSCE/ODIHR, Guidelines for Reviewing a Legal Framework for Elections, page 4.

² These include: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Convention against Torture, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CAT); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

³ Article 3 of the law on the ISIE.

⁴ Article 5 of the decree on the HAICA.

International good practice and interpretative international legal sources state that all parties and candidates should enjoy equal opportunity. The state should be impartial and apply the law uniformly to all. Equality should be guaranteed for parties and candidates, and state authorities should have a neutral attitude toward the election campaign and coverage by the media.⁵

Election Administration

According to international standards, there should be an independent and impartial electoral authority, functioning transparently and professionally, in order to ensure that citizens can participate in genuine democratic elections.⁶ State practice suggests that, when scheduling elections, adequate time be allowed to successfully administer the electoral process.⁷ According to the Tunisian constitution, the High Independent Authority for the Elections (known by its French acronym, the ISIE) is the body that ensures the regularity, integrity, and transparency of the electoral process and proclaims the results.⁸

The Carter Center commends the ISIE for administering three well-organized elections within a compressed timeline. All three elections were conducted without major flaws, and the ISIE took steps to improve the process between elections.

The ISIE, as the institution responsible for ensuring application of the electoral law, took all steps within its authority to ensure that Karoui was given equal opportunity. It repeatedly raised the issue with other government institutions and officials and asked that he be released in order to campaign. It did not have the authority to order his release, nor could it force the judiciary to do so.

The ISIE president, Nabil Baffoun, announced on several occasions that the ISIE had done everything within its power to ensure equal opportunities for both candidates. On Sept. 19, Baffoun discussed with interim president Mohammed Ennaceur the need to ensure equal opportunities between candidates and indicated that the ISIE had filed a request with the investigating judge in charge of Karoui's case to ask for his release to allow him to campaign. Baffoun declared on several occasions that he did not see how there could be equal opportunities between the candidates while Karoui remained in detention.⁹

On Sept. 30, the ISIE council met with candidate Saïed to discuss the electoral environment for the second round, and, on Oct. 3, Baffoun visited Karoui in detention to discuss how he could take advantage of equal opportunities while detained.

After Karoui's release on Oct. 9, four days before election day, Baffoun said that Karoui's release would allow for equal opportunities between the two candidates going forward. Karoui participated in a debate with his opponent and conducted a lengthy TV interview, similar to the one accorded to his opponent. These provided limited but significant opportunities to reach voters.

⁵ Venice Commission, CDL-PI (3016)006, Compilation Concerning Media and Elections, Equality of Opportunity, page 8.

⁶ UNHRC, General Comment 25, para. 20.

⁷ U.N., Human Rights and Elections, para. 75.

⁸ 2014 Tunisian Constitution, Article 126.

⁹ Baffoun interview by Sky News Arabic TV channel on Sept. 22, 2019.

The ISIE conducted a limited voter-education campaign, which provided basic information. Based on Carter Center observations, only a limited number of voters who cast a ballot on election day appeared to lack information or an understanding of the procedures.

Campaign Environment

Political pluralism and an open campaign environment that enables genuine choice for voters are critical aspects of democratic elections. Equitable treatment of candidates and parties during an election is important for ensuring the integrity of the democratic election process. A genuine choice of candidates, a free electoral environment, a level playing field for contestants, and an open, transparent campaign environment are all critical aspects of democracy. The equal treatment of candidates and parties is essential for ensuring the integrity of the democratic election process.¹⁰

The campaign for the second round officially began on Oct. 3, the day after the ISIE announced the final results from the first round. Saïed announced that he would not personally campaign as it would create an unfair advantage over his opponent, saying it was the “ethical” thing to do.¹¹ However, because of Karoui’s detention and the novelty of Saïed’s non-traditional campaign, both presidential candidates were constantly in the news, and the coverage in the media never really stopped. Saïed’s supporters continued to campaign for him in the field and on social media.

In the lead-up to the second round, Carter Center long-term observers reported no large campaign events for either candidate in the regions. However, observers reported that volunteers handed out leaflets and engaged in door-to-door campaigning for both candidates. Most of the campaigning took place on social media. The supporters of both candidates held final rallies in Tunis on Oct. 11 on Avenue Habib Bourguiba. Although the two groups mixed with each other, there were no altercations reported.

Nessma TV, co-owned by Karoui, was fined four times by the HAICA for broadcasting political advertising in favor of his candidacy and propaganda against Ennahda. The fines progressively increased for each violation, ranging from 20,000 TND (US\$ 7,000) to 320,000 TND (US\$ 112,000). It was also fined for publishing public opinion poll results, which is prohibited during the electoral period.

Before his release, Karoui’s lawyers filed a petition with the Administrative Court and the ISIE asking that the election be delayed for one week to afford him the opportunity to campaign on an equal footing with Saïed. ISIE president Nabil Baffoun announced on Oct. 2, when the first-round results were finalized, that the ISIE had a constitutional obligation to complete the election process within the allowed timeframe and had no authority to cancel or delay the second round. The Administrative Court dismissed the petition, stating that it had no authority to override the constitutional provision mandating that the second round take place within two weeks of the announcement of the final result of the first round.

¹⁰ ICCPR, Article 25.

¹¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/tunisia-presidential-hopeful-halts-campaign-ethical-reasons-191005143313410.html>.

Karoui received significant media coverage upon his release on Oct. 9 and afterward gave several interviews to the media. On Oct.11, the public television network organized a historic debate with Saïed and Karoui. Moderators selected four topics for the debate – defense and national security, foreign policy, the president’s relationship with parliament and the head of government, and public affairs. For each topic, they asked the candidates to respond to three questions. The candidates were allotted time at the end of each topic to elaborate on their electoral promises. Despite efforts by the moderators to encourage the candidates to interact with each other, they mostly refrained from doing so.

According to one of the organizers of the debate, The Munathara Initiative, some 6.4 million citizens watched Friday’s debate, the largest audience on record in the history of Tunisian television. This number does not include at least 1 million livestreaming viewers, or the radio audience, or viewers in countries across the Arab world.

Campaign finance

Democratic elections cannot be held without equitable rules for the financing of electoral campaigns. According to international good practice, electoral legislation should specifically provide for the transparency of donations to the campaign activities of the candidates, the standardized presentation of campaign accounts, reasonable limits on campaign expenditure, regular reporting mechanisms, and effective and dissuasive sanctions.¹²

According to the decree issued by the government, each candidate who receives a minimum of three percent of the vote is entitled to receive 106,118 TND (US\$38,000) in public funding for the second-round presidential campaign.¹³ Saïed previously announced that he would not accept any public funding.

The ISIE assigned 1,500 campaign monitors to assess the second-round campaign for adherence to campaign and campaign-finance rules. However, the ISIE did not release statistics or information on their findings to the public.

The campaign-finance system suffers from a lack of transparency, as no interim reports are required. The lack of reporting requirements on campaign donations or spending makes it difficult for voters to evaluate the candidate’s funding sources or potential conflicts of interest before voting.

Social Media Monitoring

International election standards prescribe that everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression. This right includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds.¹⁴ The Tunisian constitution guarantees the freedom of opinion, thought, and expression

¹² Council of Europe (Committee of Ministers) Recommendations (2003)4, Article 3(b).

¹³ Decree Number 3038 of Aug. 29, 2014, relating to the ceiling of expenditure for the electoral campaign, ceiling of private funding, and ceiling of public funding and their conditions and procedures for the presidential elections of 2014.

¹⁴ ICCPR, Article 19; in addition, General Comment 25 to the ICCPR specifies that “voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind.”

and the right of access to information and communication networks.¹⁵ To date, there is no specific legal framework in Tunisia regulating social media.¹⁶

The Carter Center monitored Facebook pages supporting and opposing both presidential candidates. Only Karoui maintained an official page on Facebook. Saïed did not, nor did he declare an official page to the ISIE.¹⁷

Karoui's online campaign consists of his official Facebook page, the pages of his party, Qalb Tounes, and pages supporting both the candidate and the party. This resulted in a blurring of the campaigns for Karoui and of his party's candidates for parliament.¹⁸

Besides highlighting campaign activities, pages supporting Karoui largely focused on his detention and called for his release; disparaged other parties and political figures, including Ennahda, Ich Tounsi, and Saïed; and denied rumors that had circulated on social media.¹⁹ Karoui's official page has run paid ads on a continuous basis since the first round.

About 55 Facebook pages monitored by The Carter Center focused explicitly on supporting Saïed. Some pages that supported Ennahda during the parliamentary elections called on their supporters to turn out in favor of Saïed, while others focused on opposing Karoui.

The number of pages and followers supporting Saïed grew after the first round.²⁰ The Center found online public groups supporting Saïed on Facebook that have as many as 200,000 members. The source and administrators of most of the pages supporting Saïed are unclear; it is difficult to identify his real supporters.²¹ A limited number of pages supporting Saïed have run paid ads; their affiliations also are unclear.

Saïed's online campaign was composed of Facebook pages without apparent hierarchy or direct relation to the candidate. Most of those pages had unclear affiliations. Pages supporting Saïed gathered a significantly larger number of followers and likes than those supporting Karoui.²²

¹⁵ Articles 31 and 32.

¹⁶ Defamation is liable to imprisonment according to the Penal Code, articles 245 to 248, and the Military Justice Code, Article 91. According to Human Rights Watch, at least nine bloggers have faced criminal charges since 2017 for comments on social media platforms criticizing high public officials.

¹⁷ ISIE decision 2019-22 dated Aug. 22 requires candidates to submit a list of their websites, electronic medium, and social media accounts that will be used in the campaign.

¹⁸ The joint decision between ISIE and HAICA (article Article 12) prevents the media from mixing between presidential and legislative programs and provides that each program has to be preceded by an audio or visual specific sign that identifies the election for which it is dedicated.

¹⁹ A number of publications were posted to deny rumors of the withdrawal of Nabil Karoui or of the cancelation of his candidacy against the backdrop of the lobbying controversy that went viral a few days before the parliamentary elections, according to which Nabil Karoui was linked to a former member of Israeli secret services.

²⁰ In the lead up to the second round, the number of followers grew by more than 750,000 in total on the 55 pages supporting Kaïs Saïed that were monitored by The Carter Center, the numbers of followers on Nabil Karoui's pages grew by 150,000 during the same period on the 20 pages monitored by The Carter Center.

²¹ One of the community managers of Kaïs Saïed's campaign team informed The Carter Center that only about 18 Facebook pages were administered by the team.

²² According to Carter Center monitors, pages supporting Karoui had 756,716 followers and 754,201 likes, while those supporting Saïed had 2,060,291 followers and 1,926,037 likes.

The number of pages supporting Karoui was limited compared to that of Saïed, 55 for Saïed and 20 for Karoui. Karoui’s online campaign was structured around his official Facebook page, those of his friends, and the official page of his party, Qalb Tounes, content from these pages was frequently shared by supportive pages.

Smear campaigns and inflammatory language were observed on several pages supporting both presidential candidates.²³ Some of these posts were widely shared online. On a few occasions, Saïed publicly distanced himself from inflammatory posts and called on his supporters to refrain from posting such messages.

To fight disinformation, the Tunisian Television and Radio Establishments (ETT), together with the Tunis-Afrique-Press agency (TAP), launched an online platform on Oct. 6. The groups used the platform to debunk some of the viral rumors that spread during the campaign.²⁴

Overall, the use of social media was intense and passionate during the presidential campaign. While the two candidates adopted different strategies, the large number of pages administered by unknown or undeclared sources blurred the lines of the online campaign.

Citizen and Candidate Observation

Citizen observation is a critical manifestation of the right to participate in public affairs and to hold governments accountable.²⁵ Sources of public international law recognize the right to take part in citizen observer organizations and to contribute to voter-education efforts.²⁶ Both Tunisian civil society and political parties took an active part in observing the presidential electoral processes.

The ISIE accredited approximately 18,000 citizen observers for the presidential elections.²⁷ The General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) deployed around 8,000 observers for these elections. The Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH) deployed 150 monitors during the electoral campaign. The LTDH monitored candidates’ speeches for any violent rhetoric or human right violations.

Many civil society organizations (CSOs) published reports about their observation of particular parts of the electoral process. For the second round of presidential elections, most CSOs continued their observation activities in their respective fields of action. The citizen observer organization Mourakiboun deployed some 3,000 observers on election day and conducted a parallel vote tabulation. The Tunisian Mediterranean Center (TU-MED) continued to assess the participation of women living in rural areas in seven constituencies. On election day, TU-MED deployed around 60 observers. The Association for Transparency and the Integrity of the Elections (ATIDE) deployed 600 observers around the country on election day and also monitored social media. Chahed Observatory deployed 1,000 observers around the country, in addition to its observation of election disputes and challenges to the election results.

²³ Some Facebook pages supporting Saïed repeatedly used inflammatory language calling those who opposed him “infidels,” “homosexuals,” “scumbags,” or “corrupt” people.

²⁴ <http://factchecking.watania1.tn/>.

²⁵ Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Observation and Monitoring of Elections by Citizen Organizations, GNDEM, 2012, Preamble.

²⁶ EISA, Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region, p.19.

²⁷ The total number of accredited citizen observers in 2014 for the presidential election was 20,610.

Overall, Tunisian civil society took an active part in observing the presidential electoral processes, although not as extensively as for the parliamentary elections. Many suffered from a lack of funding, perhaps partly because of the compressed timeframe for the three elections. There were 32,000 candidate agents accredited for the runoff. Of these, 19,000 assessed the process for Karoui and 13,000 for Saïed.

Electoral Dispute Resolution

The guarantee of a timely remedy is integral to the principle of effective means of redress.²⁸ Appeal procedures, and especially the powers and responsibilities of the various bodies involved in them, should be clearly regulated by law in order to avoid any conflicts of jurisdiction. In addition, the right to file such appeals must be granted as widely as possible, open to every elector in the constituency and to every candidate running in the election.²⁹ International treaties require that the judgment, findings, evidence of judicial proceedings and legal reasoning of the judgment be made public in all cases.³⁰

The ISIE announced that its monitors had reported 657 campaign violations during the first round of the presidential elections. Around 140 of them were serious violations, which the ISIE said it would refer to the relevant public prosecutor's office on the constituency level to investigate and to take appropriate legal measures. At the time of this statement, the ISIE had not published the campaign monitors' reports on campaign violations that affected the transparency of the process.³¹

The Carter Center observed the hearings for the six challenges filed with the Administrative Court against the results of the first-round presidential election. All of the challenges were denied. Five cases were appealed to the general assembly of the Administrative Court; all were denied.

Although the hearings were conducted in an orderly manner and lawyers had sufficient time to present their cases. The timeline for filing and hearing these cases was compressed in order to meet the deadline to elect a new president within 90 days after the death of former President Beji Caïd Essebi. Lawyers complained that it was impossible to collect enough evidence to prove to the court that the violations significantly affected the results.

Election Day

The voting process is the cornerstone of the obligation to ensure the will of the people is expressed through genuine, periodic elections and a secret ballot.³² ³³The quality of voting operations on election day is crucial to determining whether an election was held according to democratic obligations.

²⁸ U.N., ICCPR Article 2; AU, AfCHPR, Article 7.

²⁹ Para. 99 of European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, CDL-AD (2002) 23.

³⁰ U.N., ICCPR ; Article 14(1) ; CoE, ECHR Article (6)(1).

³¹ U.N., ICCPR; /Article 14(1); CoE, ECHR, Article (6)(1). U.N., ICCPR, Article 19(2); AU, Convention on Corruption, Article 9; OAS, ACHR, Article 13(1); CoE, ECHR, Article 10(1); CIS, Convention on Human Rights, Article 11(1).

³² ICCPR, articles 2, 25(a) and 9.

³³ U.N., ICCPR, Article 25; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23. EISA and Electoral Commission Forum of SADC Countries, Principles for Election Management, Monitoring, and Observation in the SADC Region, p. 24.

Election day proceeded smoothly, and election officials understood the procedures well. Voter lists were displayed in the majority of polling stations visited. The configuration of nearly all polling stations protected voter secrecy. Polling staff properly sealed ballot boxes and verified the seals. Polling staff closed polling stations on time; no voters were queuing to vote.

Opening and Polling

Carter Center observers described the opening process in all 30 of the polling stations visited as professional and orderly. The overall assessment of the election environment was positive in 100 percent of polling stations observed, with all polling stations opening on time. Candidate agents were present in 15 of the 30 polling stations, while citizen observers were present in only 11.

Carter Center observers assessed the voting process at 337 polling stations during election day. The overall election environment and implementation of procedures was assessed as positive in all of the polling stations visited. Observers reported that all electoral material was present in 100 percent of polling stations visited; that 86 percent of polling stations visited appeared to be accessible to physically challenged persons; and that no ineligible voters were allowed to vote.

Across the 337 polling stations visited, Carter Center observers reported only minor irregularities in a small number of polling stations. Although many voters still had dried ink on their fingers from voting in the parliamentary elections just a week ago (on Oct. 6), Carter Center observers did not report any instances of multiple voting, and noted that that polling staff checked voter IDs and voters' signing of the voter list in all stations.

According to reports from polling stations visited by Carter Center observers, candidate representatives were present in 67 percent of polling stations (227 of 337); 47 percent (160/337) of station had agents for Saïed present, and 39 percent (130 of 337) had agents for Karoui. Citizen observers were present at 48 percent of polling stations (161 of 337); observers from UGTT were present in 27 percent (91 of 337), from Mourakiboun in 12 percent (41 of 337); and from IWatch in 5 percent (17 of 337). Polling center presidents were 14 percent female (47 of 337), while polling station presidents were 44 percent female (148 of 337).

Closing and Counting

Closing was assessed as very good or reasonable in 100 percent of the 30 polling stations observed. All eligible voters waiting in the queue at closing were allowed to vote. The overall environment and the implementation of procedures at the counting process was assessed as very good or reasonable in all 30 polling stations observed. There were no reports from Carter Center observers about interference by any candidate agents or citizen observers in the counting process. No official complaints were filed at the observed polling stations.

Officials read out the ballot box seals, verifying them against the official minutes before emptying the ballot boxes. The presiding officer read each vote out loud and, in all cases, publicly displayed the ballot paper to those observers and party agents who were present. Carter Center observers noted a reduced presence of candidate agents and citizens observers compared to the legislative elections. Officials reconciled the number of used ballots against the total number of ballots received and recorded the count in the official minutes. Officials signed the protocols and posted them at the entrance of polling stations before sending secured copies of the official minutes to the tabulation centers.

Tabulation

Carter Center observers rated the implementation of procedures and overall aggregation process as very good or reasonable in all 27 tally centers. Observers reported that access to the process for international observers was much improved over the first round and parliamentary elections.

Background: The Carter Center was accredited by the ISIE to observe the elections and deployed more than 80 observers who visited 337 unique polling stations as well as the 27 tabulation centers. The mission was led by Salam Fayyad, former prime minister of the Palestinian Authority and included observers from more than 30 countries.

The Center has had a presence in Tunisia since 2011. It observed the 2011 National Constituent Assembly elections, the 2014 presidential and legislative elections, as well as the constitution-making process that culminated in the adoption of the constitution in January 2014.

For the 2019 elections, The Carter Center deployed a core team in May 2019. In mid-July, the Center, in collaboration with the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, deployed 16 long-term observers throughout Tunisia. The core team and long-term observers are from 18 different countries. The Center will remain in Tunisia to observe the final tabulation process and resolution of electoral complaints.

The objectives of the Center's observation mission in Tunisia are to provide an impartial assessment of the overall quality of the electoral process, promote an inclusive process for all Tunisians, and demonstrate support for its democratic transition.

The Carter Center assesses Tunisia's electoral process against the Tunisian constitution, the domestic electoral legal framework, and obligations and standards derived from international treaties, interpretive bodies and international state practice. The Center's observation mission is conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.³⁴

The Center wishes to thank Tunisian officials, political party members, civil society members, individuals, and representatives of the international community who have generously offered their time and energy to facilitate the Center's efforts to observe the election process.

³⁴ The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation was commemorated on Oct. 27, 2005, at the U.N. and is now endorsed by 55 intergovernmental and international organizations, which are engaged in the process of improving international election observation.