

Tunisia: A New Democracy Is Born

SOUSSE, Tunisia – On the October Sunday of Tunisia's first post-revolution legislative election, I got up early so I could see history in the making.

On the December Sunday of Tunisia's first post-revolution presidential primary, I got up at my regular hour.

On the December Sunday of Tunisia's first post-revolution presidential run-off, I slept late.

Elections have become normal here, like Renaults, couscous, and camels. This is how history is made: what was once poetry becomes prose.

The run-up to the historic 2014 elections was quiet and orderly. There were no huge rallies to pump up the faithful. There was a ban on pre-election polling, which prevented the news media from American-style blather about who's ahead, who's gaining, and who's falling back.

Political posters were permitted only in numbered rectangles on grids that the election commission painted on public walls here and there. Each party's posters were the same shape and size and were placed in their designated numbered rectangles. No one colored outside the lines.

On election eve, there were a few political parades, if you can call them that: restrained processions of a couple dozen vehicles honking horns and flying party flags. The taxi drivers I rely on for political intelligence assured me that the people in the processions were being paid to parade. That seems plausible to me. Later that evening, almost every Tunisian I know received a text message from the elections commission, reminding them where to go to cast their ballots on the following day.

On the morning of each of the three elections, I camped out in my favorite French café. By the time election number three rolled around, I came to recognize the in-

ternational election observers as they staggered in for coffee and pastries around 9. Many of them had already been working since the wee hours.

They were in Tunisia under the auspices of the National Democracy Institute and the Carter Center, both of which are American organizations. I met a man from Burkina Faso who had been a monitor here and was now going home to help his own country manage its upcoming election. It seemed to me that the very modest investment that America and other countries make in election monitoring generates compound interest as its effects ripple out around the world.

Later on the election days, I went out myself to informally observe. Tunisians went to their neighborhood schools, received paper ballots, and got their index fingers dyed purple to combat fraud. I talked with voters in several cities, none of whom reported waiting more than ten minutes at a polling station. Except for the short wait times and the security forces with Austrian-made Steyr Aug assault weapons slung over their shoulders, the scene looked remarkably like elections back home.

Tunisians are a pragmatic people. Perhaps they see the bloody excesses of political passion in Libya to the east and Algeria to the west, shudder, and make a conscious effort to dial back their political fervor.

The final presidential election came down to a choice between two men that many Tunisians thought were both flawed. In that, too, it reminded me of the choices we so often face in American elections, where we often cast our ballots for the less discouraging candidate. But no one I talked to said the results didn't matter. Turnout was high in all three contests.

On the day after the whole election cycle had concluded, I expected to find my Tunisian friends and neighbors in a jubilant mood. After all, they had just done what many naysayers said was impossible: conducted a peaceful and honest election in the Arab world. The country where the Arab Spring began was the one country that got it right in the end. I wouldn't have blamed Tunisians for indulging in a bit of chest-thumping.

But no: on the Monday after the final election, the people got up and calmly went about their business. I caught a few expectant smiles when a couple folks asked me what I thought of the election. Still, the people here are savvy enough to understand that revolutions and elections are easy compared to the actual process of governing. And now the country is waiting to see what their newborn democratic government has in store for them.

– James F. Trumm

You can read more about Jim's experiences of living abroad at www.jftrumm.com.

Honors Assembly

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Nancy and Tom Kabat Scholarship – Katherine Shockey. This award is presented to the graduating senior who is known to be an uplifting person, who makes a positive contribution to his or her class, and is well respected by fellow classmates. The honored senior demonstrates leadership, a good work ethic, high academic achievement, and community and school volunteer service.

National Choral Award – Mackenzie Payton. This award is selected by the vocal music teacher and is presented to the senior who has been a member of the high school concert choir for at least three years and has had at least one year of experience in the Choraliers.

Ohio High School Athletic Association Scholar-Athlete Award – Andrew Boesel and Darcy Davis.

Ottawa Hills Foundation Scholarship – Kevin Hoeflinger.

Phillip W. Longenecker Science Award – Darcy Davis. This award is selected by the science department and is presented to the senior excelling in the field of science.

Pillar Award – Peter Roman. This award is determined by the physical education department and awarded to high school students assisting with special needs students in their physical education class.

Principal's Choice – Olivia Koury. This financial award is presented to a graduating senior who exhibits achievement and effort in his/her studies and is a good citizen of the school.

Red Cross Scholarship – Alisa Martinez. For the successful organization of two high school blood drives during the school year, the recruitment of student blood donors, and the spirit and enthusiasm toward community service, the Red Cross awards a scholarship for general expenses to the attending college of choice.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Award – James Steven. This award is given to an outstanding junior student in mathematics and science as selected by math department chair and chemistry teacher.

St. Lawrence University Book Award – Courtney Hylant. In recognition of the value the St. Lawrence community places on service to others, this award is to honor the achievements of a high school junior who has displayed a significant commitment to community service.

Toledo Spain Award – Kathleen Johnson. This award is presented to an advanced Spanish senior who has demonstrated outstanding proficiency in the language and knowledge about the Spanish-speaking people.

Tom Docis Phenomenal Physics Award – Jackson Schall. This award is given to commemorate the many years of dedicated service, practical wisdom and wry

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