

# Avoiding the Election Error in Tunisia:

## Why U.S. Policy Should Focus on Real Reform, Not Votes

by [Sabina Henneberg \(/experts/sabina-henneberg\)](/experts/sabina-henneberg), [Sarah Yerkes \(/experts/sarah-yerkes\)](/experts/sarah-yerkes)

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Sabina Henneberg \(/experts/sabina-henneberg\)](/experts/sabina-henneberg)

Sabina Henneberg is a 2023-24 Soref Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Junior Research Program.

[Sarah Yerkes \(/experts/sarah-yerkes\)](/experts/sarah-yerkes)

Sarah Yerkes is a senior fellow in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.



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## An opaque process and an apathetic electorate are among the reasons the contest does not warrant U.S. scrutiny.

American officials appraising recent election results in India, Mexico, and the European Union—and awaiting a consequential vote at home—need not pay such close attention to one future contest: the presidential election in Tunisia. Kais Saied, the country’s leader, has drawn widespread reproach for reversing democratic progress since the Arab Spring protests, initiated by his freezing of parliament in July 2021. But overfocusing on this year’s campaign would be a misuse of Washington’s energy amid ambiguity surrounding Tunisia’s electoral law, an oversight authority stacked with Saied acolytes, and stark apathy among voters (the recent parliamentary election saw an abysmal 11 percent turnout).

In this Policy Note, experts Sabina Henneberg and Sarah Yerkes explain why U.S. policymakers should save their efforts for deeper reforms. An effective approach, they argue, would emphasize economic stability and a healthy civic space along with fending off Russian and Chinese influence—all of which could serve American interests and lay the ground for a revitalization of Tunisia’s democratic project. ❖

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