

# PROMISES VS. PERFORMANCE: TUNISIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT AND ELECTED LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA  
Conducted June 1 – 11, 2012

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National Democratic Institute



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## **NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies. The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens. For more information about NDI, please visit [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).

## PREFACE

Tunisia's first democratic elections following the ouster of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in October 2011 ushered in a new phase of pluralist politics in the country. Newly-elected political leaders in the national constituent assembly (NCA) faced the challenges of negotiating a power-sharing agreement within the new body, appointing a transition government and drafting the country's new constitution – against the backdrop of mounting citizen concerns that economic development and security remain elusive since the revolution.

This round of focus group research took place in June 2012, approximately six months after the commencement of the NCA's work and appointment of the transition government. The findings highlight disappointment on the part of citizens who are unable to identify tangible accomplishments of the transition government and view the work of the Assembly to be falling short of expectations. While those who voted in the October, 2011 elections remain committed to the democratic process, a growing frustration with elected leaders belies concern that those in positions of power lack the necessary skills and experience to ensure timely solutions to issues of greatest concern to citizens – economic development and security enhancements.

**Purpose:** In order to provide political and civic leaders in Tunisia with timely and objective information about citizens' priorities and attitudes toward the political transition, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) has conducted regular qualitative research throughout Tunisia since March 2011<sup>1</sup>. For its second round of focus group research since the 2011 elections, NDI focused on citizen attitudes toward the performance of the NCA and government, as well as expectations for the constitution and future elections. Through the study, conducted from June 1 to 11, 2012, citizens took part in 12 focus group discussions in four cities throughout the country to discuss the following topics:

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<sup>1</sup> *Voices of a Revolution: Conversations with Tunisia's Youth* (published April 2011), *Imagining the Road Ahead: Citizen Attitudes about Tunisia and the Constituent Assembly Election Period* (published July 2011), *Framing the Future: Citizen Attitudes about Electoral and Constitution Drafting Processes* (published September 2011), *Revolution to Reform: Citizen Expectations on the One-Year Anniversary of the Tunisian Uprising* (published January 2012), *Women's Political Participation in Tunisia After the Revolution* (published May 2012).

- Reflections on the extent to which the political transition is meeting citizen expectations;
- Attitudes toward elected leadership and government performance;
- Perceptions about the role citizens can play in a democratic process between elections, and;
- Expectations for upcoming political milestones including drafting of the constitution and future elections.

The findings of this study were used to inform Tunisian decision-makers—in political parties, the NCA and civil society organizations—about citizens' attitudes and opinions. The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in four cities across the country. ELKA is a marketing and public opinion research firm based in Tunisia. For NDI, the study represents the six in an ongoing series of public opinion research conducted since March 2011 to provide analysis on Tunisian citizen attitudes toward the ongoing political transition.

**Focus Group Research:** Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following a pre-set guideline. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions and experiences of participants who are recruited for the exercise. Focus groups are particularly useful in gaining a deeper appreciation of the motivations, feelings and values behind participants' reactions. In addition, the group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas – thus revealing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held – that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys. Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of participants, typically eight to 12 per group. However, depending on the situation, groups may be slightly smaller or larger. For example, a women's group in a more isolated area may benefit from being larger because it is likely that one or more of the participants will refuse to speak at length, even if pressed. Through facilitated, open-ended discussion, focus groups allow decision-makers to understand the motivations, feelings and values behind participant opinions. Further, focus group findings are only a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. Given the dynamism of the Tunisian transition, public opinion is in constant flux as citizens respond to unfolding events. The conclusions of this report therefore only represent opinions when research was conducted in early June 2012.

**Method:** From January 1 to 11, 2012, NDI held 13 focus groups with a total of 120 participants in four cities across Tunisia: Tunis, Siliana, Kairouan and Tataouine. Target cities were selected based on their population size, geographical location and voting patterns in the 2011 elections. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI divided each location into three distinct demographic groups: 1) mixed gender youth (ages 24 – 35), 2) women over age 35, and 3) men over age 35.

Each group comprised between nine and 12 participants. The gender breakdown was 51 percent women and 49 percent men. Participants were selected and re-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels and professions.

**Staffing and Logistics:** The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in five cities across the country. ELKA is a marketing and public opinion research firm based in Tunisia. The focus group moderator was a Tunisian citizen trained in focus group moderation techniques by NDI and ELKA. All groups were conducted in Tunisian Arabic dialect, and transcripts were prepared in Arabic and English.

**Group Locations:** The 13 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in four locations throughout Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Siliana, Kairouan and Tataouine (see the map in this section). Locations selected for the study were urban or semi-urban areas. Greater Tunis was selected because it encompasses the capital and largest city Tunis and its surrounding areas, and is the national center for public administration, commerce and tourism. Siliana, a governorate in Tunisia's historically underrepresented north-west region, had one of the most diverse election results in the 2011 elections. Kairouan, a religious symbol for Tunisians and Muslims alike, was also the site of recent Salafist-led demonstrations which enflamed on-going debates about security in the country. Tataouine, Tunisia's southern-most governorate, shares borders with both of the country's neighbors and has been most affected by the Libyan political transition.

In all cases, appropriate venues for focus group discussions were identified to ensure participant privacy and sufficient space for indirect observation by NDI staff.

**Outside Influence:** In all cases, every effort was made to ensure there was no undue influence exerted on the participants in the groups. The focus group guideline was not shared with local authorities prior to the sessions. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from overall findings, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

## MAP OF TUNISIA



One World Nations Online. July 2012.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores public opinion in Tunisia in early June 2012, but also includes key trends identified over five rounds of qualitative research conducted by NDI since the spring of 2011. Based on 13 focus group discussions with 120 Tunisian participants, the report examines Tunisian citizens' attitudes and concerns about progress of the political transition, performance of elected officials and government over the past six months, and the next phase of Tunisia's political transition, including future elections and expectations for the constitution. As with all NDI public opinion studies, participants were asked about their views on political party and governing institution performance, security, and related issues. A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from participants, can be found in the Principal Findings section of this report.

### I. Direction of the Country

**A greater proportion of participants than in past studies have negative views about the country's direction due to dissatisfaction with the state of economic development, the rising cost of living, and insecurity – all factors that participants agree could be addressed by politicians if they focused their attention to them.** A large majority of participants in this study say Tunisia is headed in the wrong direction, a view especially prevalent among women and young Tunisians. Lack of definitive jobs creation programs and poor management of public services, specifically in health and education, are most often cited as justification for deeming the country on the wrong track. Participants also report that higher prices for commodities are significantly reducing their quality of life, and in the case of employed men, the ability to provide adequately for their families. Politicians – in ruling and opposition political parties alike – are viewed as focusing solely on personal and party interests, rather than finding solutions to the country's pressing problems.

**Insecurity is a key reason for participants' concern about the current situation in the country – ranging from public disturbances believed to be led by Salafist groups and sit-ins, to petty criminality and fear of increased arms circulation as a result of porous borders with Algeria and Libya.** Participants' views of the motivations of Salafist or extremist groups differ, however, broad agreement exists that freedom of expression is a right that should be protected for all, until the point that public order and safety is infringed. Strikes calling for wage increases continue to be seen as hurting the country as a whole and ignoring the critical issue of unemployment.

**Participants who are hopeful about the country's current direction continue to highlight freedom of expression and efforts to curtail the Ben Ali-era nepotism, but stress concern that the framework for corruption has yet to be adequately addressed.** Just under a

quarter of participants state that fair hiring process based on qualifications are in place for civil service positions, and that in many instances, the 'old ways' of nepotism and bribes continue to determine job placement in the public sector.

**Participants urge the government to focus on regional economic and social disparities.**

With the exception of Tunis residents, the sense of regional victimhood and being left behind are consistent. Social isolation and discrimination along geographic lines, coupled with frustration that local resources serve the state drive most participants' complaints. While there is a definite desire to see tangible signs of development, many participants also indicate that communication and consultation about development are just as, if not more, important.

## II. Citizen Priorities

**In the six months since the interim government was appointed following negotiations between the three governing coalition members, participants are ambivalent about the progress on promises made by their democratically elected leaders.** Participants describe lack of progress on constitution drafting, and limited tangible results on the government's four-point plan announced in April 2012, as examples of unfulfilled promises. Some link this lack of progress to voter choices that brought to office untested leaders.

**Job creation and development projects tailored to the needs of local communities, according to participants, is the most effective way to address economic hardship.**

They say greater knowledge among the public about government development plans and more information about development progress and accomplishments – especially in education, health, and construction – will increase public confidence that the government is working hard to bring development, even if it is not visible in their area yet. Consultation with the public on development is viewed as equally important.

**Swift action by the government to treat social unrest as a disruption to public order – rather than as a debate over identity – is strongly supported by most participants.**

Recent disorder at the University of Manouba, Kairouan's central square and art exhibits in Tunis were most frequently mentioned as instances in which police and/or army intervention could have limited violence and destruction of property.

## III. Engagement and Activism

**Those who voted in the 2011 elections remain proud of exercising this right, but also express regret that the criteria they used to vote for candidates has brought a group of elected officials to power who have limited experience governing.** Voters remain confident that the October 2011 election was conducted fairly and adequately

reflected the will of the Tunisian people. Most participants acknowledge that the criteria they used to select candidates did not take into consideration political experience or tested competencies to perform essential government functions. Divergent views about this approach exist, with some participants defending the need to 'break with the past' while others express remorse for not considering experience in their selection at the ballot box.

**There is hesitance to engage political parties between elections, even as participants view the role of civil society as limited to providing services or organizing awareness campaigns.** Political parties are commonly viewed as vehicles for power and not institutions to solve citizen problems. By comparison, associations hold interest for participants as means to contribute to social life in local communities.

**Participants agree that the media has a critical role to play in ensuring a democratic transition for Tunisia but remain divided on the credibility of available media outlets.** The need to verify information through various sources persists. Social media and word of mouth remain the most trusted source of information.

### IV. Political Leadership

**Most participants believe it is important for any political party that wins an election to set priorities for the make-up of the government, though they also say there must be some type of criteria to define fair participation of others.** Both Ennahda supporters and detractors expressed the view that coalition decision-making is dominated by the lead party and believe there is not consistent communication between coalition members. Some participants questioned the competencies of appointed ministers in the coalition government.

**The presence of a political opposition is considered positive in general, however many participants encouraged these parties to clearly define alternative proposals to government, rather than using their platforms to critique only.** Pluralism is most commonly cited as a milestone for cementing democratic practice in Tunisia, however participants question whether the opposition is playing a constructive role. While careful to stress that dissent are these parties rights, and should be protected to ward against the contrived opposition that existed under Ben Ali, opposition parties have yet to present convincing alternative plans to citizens – especially on the issues of job creation and security.

**While the 2011 elections helped distinguish political parties in the eyes of citizens, political awareness is often limited to leaders rather than ideologies.** Participants in most cases were able to name the parties outside the ruling coalition in the NCA, however knowledge of the party platforms or activists beyond the leader remains limited. Recent

party mergers amongst opposition parties are not widely understood and, in some cases, confusion over new party names and logos exists.

**Participants see political credibility granted through elections and anticipate that there will be more political contenders in future polls.** Participants cited several national figures outside of government who they felt could be credible political contenders in future elections, including former interim prime minister, Beji Caid Essebsi.

### V. Interim Governance

**While awareness of the coalition government's four-point plan varied, most participants agreed that they have seen no tangible progress.** Programs for regional development and job creation are best known and garner greatest interest, followed by security and transitional justice projects.

**Concentration on key areas of economic development, public consultation on local job creation, and communication about plans and accomplishments will convince citizens that the government is committed to progress.** Participants say confidence in the government's ability to enforce public order is a pre-requisite for needed investment and economic regeneration. An equal division of resources to be used for development, based on regions most marginalized under the previous two governments, is suggested by some as an appropriate distribution criterion, while others focus on distribution by need or population.

**Participants do not express uniform views on the need for or priorities of a government-led transitional justice plan.** Some participants find discussing transitional justice a hard topic to understand or do not feel well-informed enough to express their views confidently. Thus, there is a wide range of expectations for the reform process, and the government's plan specifically.

**Most believe the work of the National Constituent Assembly is stalled, due to political infighting and focus on individual interests.** The recent vote to increase NCA member salaries was the most often mentioned example given by participants as justification for their claim that the NCA is not focusing on its core mission – drafting the constitution.

### VI. Looking Forward

**Eight months after the NCA elections, significant frustration is emerging as voters question the credibility of elected leaders in light of their ability to deliver on election promises.** Whether participants continue to support the political party list they voted for or not, nearly all mentioned the pre-election promises made during campaigns and the

contrasting lack of tangible accomplishments to achieve them. A few called for another revolution to remind current leaders how they attained their positions.

**Expectations regarding the constitution-drafting process are varied, with strong support for holding to the October 23, 2012 deadline.** With only one section of the constitution submitted to the public in official and complete form, citizens have little insight into the work of the drafting committee proceedings. Mixed views on the role religion may play in the constitution persist in line with previous reports, with the rights of women and to work equally divisive.

**There are mixed views on the appropriate timing for the next national elections and what system should be used.** More believe a March 2013 election is appropriate, but some indicate that the timeline is too short to adequately prepare for the next election.

## PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

To determine what factors will influence Tunisian citizens' assessment of elected leaders' performance and potential political milestones in the future, NDI conducted 13 focus groups with 120 participants throughout Tunisia in the first two weeks of June 2012. Group discussions were conducted with men and women of various age groups, and education levels. Further information on group composition can be found in Appendix A.

### I. Direction of the Country

**A large majority of participants in this study say the country is headed in the wrong direction.** Although citizen expectations have varied significantly during the course of public opinion studies conducted in this series, this study reveals a significant drop even from past levels. These negative views were expressed consistently across the country, though more participants in Siliana and Tunis hold this view than in Kairouan and Tataouine.

*"It is true that elections decided who the winners were, but we shouldn't let the country go in the wrong direction. What has changed in Kairouan? More than six months and the government has done nothing here."* Male, Kairouan, 40 years old, travel agent

*"Dreams are fine – we need an achievable political project. We have to work together to accomplish this mission. An economic, political and social project collapsed with Ben Ali – we need an alternative but are still searching."* Male, Siliana, 49 years old, telecommunications director

*"To me, women were better off before the revolution. It is true there was dictatorship, but as a woman I used to feel safe when I walked the street. Now I see people belittling women. I worry about the future for my daughter and the coming generations."* Female, Tunis, 50 years old, retired

*"We shouldn't have hurried to give confidence to unqualified people. I am not criticizing a political party or system, but I am criticizing the government officials who are not worthy of the power given to them."* Male, Siliana, 36 years old, unemployed

**Perceptions about regional disparities persist, amidst growing interest in some form of devolved decision-making and budgeting.** The extent to which participants are familiar with decentralization and the implications of this approach to governance is unclear,

however there is clear interest in more active roles for citizens at the regional level in setting local priorities, and exercising control over the central government, especially in terms of revenues generated through local resources.

*“Siliana was marginalized under both Bourghiba and Ben Ali. We are still marginalized today, even though the governorate has 22,000 hectares of fertile lands.”* Male, Siliana, 36 years old, farmer

*“In the past, the entire Northwest was ignored. Now at least they talk about Kef, Jendouba, Beja. However Siliana is completely ignored – as if it didn’t exist on the map of Tunisia. I think we suffer most from nepotism here – citizens of Siliana have no control over what happens to the wealth of our area.”* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*“The money devoted to develop regions went to other places. We don’t have factories and tourism is struggling. If we compare Tataouine to other areas, we are disadvantaged. The only reason we can survive is we rely on family who live and work abroad. We should promote opportunities in our own region.”* Male, Tataouine, 35 years old, professor

*“To me, Tunis is like Switzerland. I am originally from Metlaoui and the services and roads are very different. Shouldn’t the people there have the same right to benefit from paying their taxes?”* Male, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed

*“Tataouine hasn’t benefited from the revolution. I feel that Tataouine doesn’t belong to Tunisia.”* Female, Tataouine, 27 years old, housewife

**There are no regional differences, however, in participants’ views on the need for job creation.** Lack of economic development is also regularly cited as justification for deeming that the country is on the wrong track. The rising cost of living is the most common reason participants cite for believing the country is heading in the wrong direction. They say higher prices for commodities are significantly reducing their quality of life.

*“The government should help graduates launch small projects. Why does the Ministry of Development [sic] offer loans to some job seekers and not others?”* Female, Tataouine, 29 years old, housewife

*“The situation is getting worse. Prices are very high – in the past vegetables and fruits were affordable, but not anymore. How are we supposed to manage with no jobs?”* Female, Siliana, 36 years old, factory worker

*“Many people think that after graduation, the government has to employ and feed them. This is no longer a granted right. If a student doesn't find job vacancies in a given field, he should look for alternatives. The government is encouraging people to launch small enterprises. A person who just finished secondary education should find solutions.”* Male, Tataouine, 32 years old, professor

Comments criticize the government's employment recruitment practices and allege a **lack of transparency and fairness.**

*“I am really disappointed. Those who are getting jobs nowadays are religious people who were fired in the past because of their religious attire. New job seekers are still waiting.”* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*“Instead of giving billions of dinars in compensation, why not invest in competitive job creation? I am certain that those who are receiving 120 TND a month now (unemployment stipend issued under previous interim government) would not turn down work if it were offered.”* Female, Kairouan, 41 years old, teacher

*“Recruitment of graduates is random nowadays with no competitions for positions. When I search for jobs and apply online, I don't receive an answer. Recruitment is not transparent.”* Female, Tataouine, 27 years old, housewife

*“Siliana job seekers have to participate in national competitions [for public sector positions]. The vacant posts in Siliana aren't filled by residents. Why do they recruit outsiders? Don't we have people who deserve employment? This makes no sense to me.”* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, business owner

**Insecurity in Tunisia – described mainly as identity-based violence, organized attacks by militia-like groups, and criminality linked to economic hardship – concerns all.** However, security concerns are cited as a key reason for holding negative views on Tunisia's current situation particularly in Tunis and Kairouan.

*“The most important task of the government is to provide security and development for the country. The government is doing nothing and this is very dangerous. The government makes many promises but they don't have the talent or the money to fulfill them. Opposition parties are organizing militias to stage sit-ins. I hope this government will be replaced by more effective one that promotes security and regional development.”* Male, Tunis, 59 years old, professor

*"Many took advantage of the revolution, especially under the name of religion. I am against the small community of Salafists that will increase in the future. This community is a real threat to our identity and our origin. They are a great danger. If we want to save our country, values, principles, clothing traditions, we have to make people aware. Other problems like employment, citizenship, women rights, child rights and men will be solved in the future."* Female, Kairouan, 27 years old, teacher

*"I voted for one of the parties which did best in the elections. Now I am afraid to go to the Monday market because I don't want to be harassed by a man with a beard. This is not what I voted for!"* Female, Kairouan, 48 years old, nurse

*"The only positive thing I see is that Ben Ali and his family left the country. The government is just giving promises, but nothing is concrete yet. The country is in complete disorder and nothing is clear. 18 months have passed since the escape of Ben Ali, but I haven't seen real change. I have seen nothing but mere words and promises. Unemployment rates are increasing. Many people are jobless now because companies are leaving the country."* Female, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed

**Those who consider things moving in the right direction stress the importance of individual responsibility and the need for greater civic awareness.** Throughout the past two studies, participants have consistently noted the need to change 'mentalities' as a prerequisite for the situation in Tunisia to improve. Definitions of this mentality change range from focus on democratic values, commitment to protecting social order, or simply the willingness to consider others' interests at the same time as one's own.

*"From the president to an ordinary citizen, we all have to serve our country from our particular position."* Female, Tataouine, 25 years old, housewife

*"Politically speaking we are on the right path – we have opposition parties, we have newspapers and TV channels who are trying to do well. if we compare to Egypt, we thank God!"* Male, Tunis, 36 years old, researcher

*"Why are people so stressed? We have to learn to live together in spite of our differences, whether religious or class. We have to smile at one another."* Female, Kairouan, 25 years old, housewife

*“Every person has an important role to play. When I go to the baker to buy bread, I have to wait in line for my turn. I have to respect the old man and the young child or the woman in front of me. We have to respect people regardless of their social status – the doctor or the dustman.”* Male, Tunis, 29 years old, kiosk employee

*“Democracy in its simplest sense – your freedom ends where mine begins. We are all responsible. If I litter, I can’t claim the country is dirty. I can’t blame a president or a governor if I am not willing to take responsibility for helping myself.”* Female, Kairouan, 46 years old, office manager

**Several participants expressed concern that government is too distant from the average citizen**, unaware of local concerns and needs, or disinterested in addressing them.

*“When the elected government came to power, we thought the country would be more stable. We expected that police, who swore to protect the people, would do their job honestly and serve the country.”* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, internet café manager

*“Nothing has changed. Corruption and discrimination remains rampant. The government is doing nothing tangible to address this – all we have is words.”* Female, Tataouine, 29 years old, housewife

## II. Citizen Priorities

For the third round of research in a row, Tunisians specify job creation and economic development as their key priorities. The rising cost of living is creating additional strain on all demographics included in the study. Of equal importance to participants is the perception that elected or appointed officials do not appear able to address their concerns in a timeframe consistent with citizen expectations. Eighteen months after the political transition began in Tunisia, citizens continue to point to lack of security as an important priority as well.

*“It is true that elections determined who the winners were, but we still see no new jobs in Kairouan. Six months and the government has done nothing to create jobs. Promises must be achieved.”* Male, Kairouan, 40 years old, travel agent

*“The people of Tataouine should benefit from the resources which come from here. For instance, natural gas is produced here but the revenues do not come back to the governorate and our residents don’t get first*

*selection for jobs.” Female, Tataouine, 42 years old, public administration assistant*

*“Both men and women need to work to help one another because prices are so high. The man cannot provide all the needs of the family without the help of women.” Female, Siliana, 35 years old, office manager*

*“If prices remain high, we will see more problems, such as theft and lack of respect. If people live in poverty, they will be obliged to steal. Unemployment is another problem which needs to be solved. It’s not fair to study without obtaining a job to guarantee a decent life.” Male, Tunis, 31 years old, waiter*

*“When the prices of green peppers, tomatoes and potatoes rose by two dinars, I heard some people say they wished for Ben Ali to come back. I don’t agree that we want him back, but this situation isn’t right.” Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife*

**Citizens question the government’s priorities and its ability to address the main concerns of the public.** While opposition parties are often viewed as a definitive sign that democracy is taking hold in Tunisia, they do not fully appreciate their role.

*“The governing parties presented their program and swore to serve the country. We are not dreamers – we just want the country to recover. We haven’t seen any change. On the contrary, we are moving backward.” Female, Kairouan, 25 years old, student*

*“The revolution brought us freedom, but politicians don’t know how to make use of it. Now we have political parties but no one is thinking of how to serve Tunisia. All anyone talks about is who got the most votes and who will win in the next election.” Female, Tunis, 46 years old, teacher*

*“There is a crisis of confidence between the government and the people. I wish people would be more truthful with one another.” Female, Tataouine, 26 years old, housewife*

*“Many people are starting to say they miss the Ben Ali era. People don’t feel secure now. Women do not leave their homes after sunset. In the past we used to stroll wherever we liked in the evenings. Police don’t intervene to solve quarrels. The government isn’t doing anything to address our problems.” Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife*

*"We have to respect the work of others. The opposition has to work and show what it stands for, instead of only criticizing Ennahda." Male, Tunis, 49 years old, business-owner*

**The government is seen as primarily responsible for improving the security situation throughout the country. Widespread support exists for immediate government intervention to address both physical and symbolic violence.**

*"The principle question is security. It is impossible to provide job opportunities and increase investment in the current environment. Many companies have moved to Morocco due to the security problems here." Male, Tataouine, 55 years old, agriculture laborer*

*"The government should be firm and decisive...they should bring people to trial and show this on TV. I think there is a militia being used to distract people to secure votes for the next election." Female, Tunis, 66 years old, retired*

*"The government fell into the trap of defending one side against the other. The police are politicized, it is no longer a national institution." Female, Siliana, 34 years old, engineer*

*"Why should I be harassed every Monday when I go to the market by a bearded man? I pray, I take care of my family. He has the right to be there, as I do – respecting one another." Female, Kairouan, 48 years old, nurse*

*"The security forces should regain their place – we used to hate the police under Ben Ali, but now we want security. When security forces arrest criminals, the courts should prosecute people seriously." Male, Kairouan, 41 years old, factory worker*

*"In the past, social violence was oppressed by Ben Ali, it only manifested itself in football stadiums. Now, a group of people are practicing social violence on the streets, which is being transformed into political violence. The Ministry of Interior should act now, act in the name of the country." Male, Siliana, 49 years old, office manager*

### III. Engagement and Activism

Eighteen months since Tunisia's political transition began, citizens remain interested in politics generally, and more specifically in the newfound plurality of parties that secured

power in the country's first genuinely democratic elections. **Those who voted in the October 2011 elections continue to be proud to have exercised their right – many for the first time – but express concern about the governance skills of elected officials.** In some cases, participants go so far as to say that they would have voted differently if they had the benefit of hindsight.

*"I felt it was my obligation to vote. For the first time, we didn't know the outcome of the election before it happened!"* Female, Tataouine, 32 years old, housewife

*"We used to listen to Ben Ali say "We will do, we will do, we will do..." We hear the same thing now, but see nothing!"* Female, Kairouan, 35 years old, agricultural laborer

*"Had Tunisians kept in mind that they were voting to lay the foundation for their country and not specifically to choose a government, I think the results would have been very different."* Male, Tunis, 53 years old, retired

*"I had never voted before and I felt it was my duty. Unfortunately nothing has happened. During the last election, many people were making their choice as they stood in line to vote. People have to get informed about parties' programs and not listen to rumors."* Female, Siliana, 30 years old, unemployed

*"I voted last year, but today I see that the situation is still the same. People are getting jobs based on who they know. Corruption and discrimination are still rampant. So far we have heard many words, but seen no deeds."* Female, Tataouine, 27 years old, student

**Participants expressed hesitance about engaging political parties between elections.** In some cases this was due to the low presence of parties in their communities; however a significant number of participants also voiced skepticism that parties could be a viable avenue to address citizen concerns.

*"It's a problem of credibility. Parties make many promises, but we fear that nothing will be achieved. Giving promises about bread is ridiculous"* Male, Tataouine, 35 years old, professor

*"I don't have confidence in parties – I also know they will resort to bargaining to serve their own interests. I have to rely on myself."* Male, Kairouan, 27 years old, waiter

*"I wouldn't get involved with a political party because I think only people who really understand politics should. I have noticed that 10 million Tunisians have become politicians. We are excellent football analysts when that is the topics. If gynecology was the topic, we would all be experts in that too!"* Male, Tunis, 29 years old, kiosk manager

*"I try to understand what parties are doing, so whenever there is a meeting, I will try to attend. What I have noticed is that many parties are very similar. They just want to get power. One party may approach you through the path of democracy, another through the path of religion, but they all want to get to Rome!"* Female, Kairouan, 46 years old, teacher

*"Parties true agendas and motives are becoming clear after elections. I haven't seen any competent party that can govern the country and lead Tunisia in the right direction."* Female, Kairouan, 27 years old, professor

**In contrast, civil society is viewed as a positive outlet for community engagement, although limited definitions of its role in the democratic process persist.** Women are more likely to consider volunteering with associations, regardless of employment or education levels.

*"The role of civil society is to alleviate tension, absorbing people's anger and frustration through awareness raising campaigns. They may play an important role, especially in helping the victims of the revolution."* Female, Tunis, 45 years old, teacher

*"Associations are supposed to work with citizens to be more patriotic, more unified. They should also help us determine how to solve our problems."* Male, Tataouine, 35 years old, taxi driver

*"The role of associations is not only donating groceries. People need a radical solution because they will always need aid. Instead of giving people temporary solutions, associations should be working to engage people in decision-making."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"They should be reflecting the conscience of the people. We should not rely totally on the government. Civil society should be monitoring the government performance and ensure there is no manipulation."* Female, Kairouan, 46 years old, teacher

*"One important difference between the past and the present is that civil society is playing a more active role. Before deciding on the development and investment plans for the regions, [the government] invites civil society*

*organizations to propose solutions.” Female, Tataouine, 25 years old, housewife*

**Views on the role of the media vary, and the need to verify information through multiple sources persists.** Social media and word of mouth remain the most trusted sources of information.

*“The relationship between mass media and citizens has improved. In the past we didn't watch the news. Now we gather to watch political programs on Nessma, Hannibal, Etounisya and Wataniya.” Female, Siliana, 35 years old, internet café manager*

*“When I watch the national TV channel I feel like the journalists are uncomfortable. People on Al Arabia dare to speak clearly, but in Tunisia and mainly on Wataniya, when they read the news you get the feeling that journalists are looking at someone charged with imposing limits.” Female, Tunis, 47 years old, factory worker*

*“They are still serving the interests of the former regime. They lack transparency because I watch many events on Facebook that are not reported on Wataniya.” Female, Tataouine, 28 years old, housewife*

*“Sometimes the truth is shocking. We've been living in Tunisia for a long time but we've never seen the snow in Tabarka. Now we've seen it and it makes us want to go visit. The problems facing the region happen every winter but we never used to hear about it.” Female, Kairouan, 46 years old, teacher*

## IV. Political Leadership

**Six months after assuming the position of Prime Minister, Hamadi Jebali's track record as a militant who suffered under the Ben Ali regime continues to resonate with citizens, even as his decisions as head of government are closely scrutinized.** Some participants doubt Jebali's sincerity, but many expressed their confidence in his ability to make sound decisions for the party and the country.

*“He spent 15 years in solitary confinement. He made many sacrifices. He is competent and modest.” Male, Tataouine, 31 years old, waiter*

*“He [Jebali] is always smiling but I think he hides bitterness. He suffers because people do not let him do his job. If someone inherits something, who do you think he will appoint to take care of his property? His son or*

*someone he trusts, of course. This is what Ennahda has done and people are accusing them of nepotism. How would someone appoint a person he doesn't know and be held accountable for what this person does?"* Male, Tunis, 53 years old, retired

*"I heard that he was in prison and struggled in the past. When I see his smiling face now, I wonder whether he is really concerned with the needy people of his country. Since all powers are in his hands, why doesn't he react effectively?"* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"I appreciate that he is an activist, but I am not certain he can be a good politician."* Male, Tataouine, 35 years old, professor

*"He doesn't have the right experience – from prison to power!"* Male, Kairouan, 72 years old, retired

*"He is staid and solemn. He gives the impression that you can trust him, have confidence in him. He is a respectful man."* Female, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed

**Moncef Marzouki's experience as a human rights activist continues to garner respect. However, participants regularly express befuddlement with what they consider to be his erratic behavior.** Of the three coalition partners, Marzouki's performance as president is most often critiqued by participants.

*"He is intelligent, but the president of the republic needs prestige and an iron fist – not to oppress people, but to govern effectively. I do appreciate his modesty, but people perceive this as weakness. He is a good man but he needs to be firm."* Male, Tataouine, 36 years old, unemployed

*"We have a new type of president – one with few powers and the freedom to behave very differently than the last one. This is good because a president with too much power will become a tyrant."* Male, Tunis, 36 years old, technician

*"When he was first appointed, he asked people to give him six months to start seeing change. We've given him that time and we see nothing – he's a liar."* Female, Kairouan, 35 years old, housewife

*"He plays the fool excessively. He portrays himself as a misunderstood philosopher and is too humble."* Male, Siliana, 25 years old, public sector employee

*"He should get rid of his bodyguards and luxurious car. He should contact people again and listen to them. I wish people would stop applauding him."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, office manager

*"He doesn't have the charisma other Tunisian presidents have had, but I like him."* Female, Tataouine, 35 years old, housewife

*"He doesn't enjoy the same authority as the previous president. He is popular, not a thief. He seems rebellious as well. He is an intellectual but lacks political experience."* Male, Kairouan, 35 years old, agricultural laborer

**NCA President, Mustapha Ben Jaafar, has demonstrated to participants that he is a serious and experienced politician trying to maintain order in the NCA's political diversity.** Participants see his education and manner of speaking as both positive and negative attributes.

*"It's a pity he was nominated as president of the NCA. His role has been reduced to settling disputes. He has been devalued."* Female, Siliana, 27 years old, student

*"He is a real politician. When I watch him being interviewed on television, I feel that he is a respectful and solemn person. He is thoughtful."* Female, Kairouan, 27 years old, professor

*"He is like the superintendent at the school where I teach. He just decides on the time devoted to each member to speak and bangs on the desk. He appears on media outlets asking people to stop sit-ins. Practically speaking though, he hasn't accomplished much."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"He is the right person in the right place. He is the best person to fill the position of presidency at the NCA. He is a talented and honest person."* Female, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed

*"I respect him, but I have the feeling he's discriminatory. Not only with Kassass [Aridha Chaabia NCA member]. I have noticed that sometimes he is unfair and even aggressive toward some members."* Female, Kairouan, 46 years old, teacher

**There is a wide perception that the ruling coalition is dominated by Ennahda and skewed to serve its interests.** In some cases, this is explained by Ennahda's level of organization and the number of seats attained in the NCA elections.

*"Ennahda is the ruling party and I have the impression that they want to control everything. They have the potential to become despots. They were going in the right direction before but now they want to subdue everything."* Male, Tunis, 35 years old, technician

*"We haven't seen any improvements since Ennahda won. They serve their personal interests. These people left prison and are enjoying life now."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"Twenty-three years of opposition to the state has been engraved on the society. It has become part of our nature to oppose – this is why people are criticizing Ennahda, but we should just let them do their job."* Female, Tataouine, 35 years old, teacher

*"It was legitimately elected, so people should help them. Ennahda may not win the next elections – they are working hard but have limited experience and are making slow progress. Any elected government should be supported by Tunisian citizens."* Male, Kairouan, 58 years old, small business owner

*"Both Ben Jaafar and Marzouki are not authorities. Hamadi Jebali has the right to use authority."* Male, Tunis, 29 years old, store employee

Others attribute the imbalance of power to the weaknesses of the other two coalition members.

*"[Ettakatol's] alliances are in stark contrast to its convictions. Ettakatol is implementing a political project which is totally different than what its members talked about before the elections. This is an opportunistic party."* Male, Siliana, 49 years old, project director

*"I was a member of Ettakatol before the elections. But now its program has completely changed after joining the 'troika.' That is why only a small percentage of its original members remain in the party today."* Male, Kairouan, 40 years old, travel agent

*"Ettakatol is a clever and realistic party. It is trying to deal with things in a sound manner, but they struggle to explain this to their supporters – this is why they keep splitting."* Male, Tataouine, 35 years old, taxi driver

*"We were blind when we voted for CPR. We thought we would see better with the glasses but we were mistaken."* Female, Kairouan, 25 years old, housewife

*"We lost Marzouki and other members of CPR. We lost them as human rights activists. It is clear that CPR doesn't know how to govern."* Male, Siliana, 49 years old, project director

*"Marzouki wanted to be president at any cost. A person with dignity would not accept such a position with reduced powers. The real president is Rached Ghannouchi [Ennahda] and all others are just puppets."* Female, Tunis, 60 years old, retired

*"I voted for CPR and was convinced they would lead the country to safety. I think the problem is that Marzouki is too kind and naïve. Politics is a dirty game and he is caught in a trap."* Female, Kairouan, 25 years old, student

**The party mergers that have taken place since the elections are generally viewed positively, though awareness of the new names and programs remains unclear.** A small group of participants also question the motives of these parties and doubt their ability to address pressing challenges.

*"The Republican Party is a group of parties that didn't succeed in the elections so they have merged to try to increase their chances in the future. Unfortunately they will lose again because what united them is not a program, but their loss."* Male, Tunis, 49 years old, office manager

*"Maya [Jribi – party secretary general] is undoubtedly an activist icon. [The Republican Party] has a moderate progressive perspective. They represent a great deal of the Tunisian social fabric. With the presence of Ahmed Ibrahim [Ettajdid], and the former Minister of Tourism, they can win the next elections."* Male, Siliana, 32 years old, engineer

*"[Néjib Chebbi's] party gave money to people to vote for him. What can we expect from a party that buys the voices of citizens?"* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"We hope that this party will serve Tunisia. We shouldn't judge a person because he was an ex-minister for one or two years. We shouldn't evaluate people before making sure they are guilty. If the party represents the opposition, we hope they will be constructive and if they reach*

power, we hope they will serve Tunisia." Male, Kairouan, 41 years old, factory worker

"Al Massar – this is a combination of the most divided parties...Ettajdid, the Pole. They believe they are modernist." Male, Tataouine, 29 years old, unemployed

"[Al Massar] is one of the parties that played a role in the fake opposition to Ben Ali. Their leader accepted money to run in the presidential election of 2009. I can't really classify him as opposition." Male, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed

"Al Massar? They choose great names but who are they? What are they doing? We have seen nothing." Male, Kairouan, 41 years old, factory worker

"Al Massar is Ahmed Ibrahim. That is all." Female, Tunis, 34 years old, housewife

Despite attaining the third highest number of seats in the NCA elections, the **Aridha Chaabia list is viewed as having taken advantage of a naïve electorate** and not constructively contributing to the work of the Assembly.

"I believe Aridha Chaabia has profited from their manipulation of the media and have taken advantage of the Tunisian people who are simple." Male, Siliana, 32 years old, engineer

"The only person who took advantage of tribal divisions was [Aridha Chaabia leader Hechmi] Hamdi. Discord exists and Hechmi made this an issue again." Female, Kairouan, 46 years old, teacher

"They distributed money to buy the voices of the electorate. People wonder how [Hamdi] obtained such a large number of votes." Female, Kairouan, 25 years old, student

"They don't have a clear program. The only NCA member who is active is Kassass because he is one of the people." Female, Siliana, 36 years old, administrative assistant

"I was fond of Al Mostakella TV. At a certain time, Hechmi Hamdi criticized Ben Ali. When everyone else used to praise Ben Ali, he was the only one who said 'no' and highlighted all of the regimes faults." Male, Kairouan, 39 years old, institute director

## PROMISES VS. PERFORMANCE

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*"Hechmi Hamdi used his private television channel to deliver popular speeches 24 hours a day. He deceived simple-minded people. If Hamma Hammami had the same chance, he would have obtained 30 to 40 percent of the vote."* Male, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed

By comparison, Al Moubadara party leader Kamel Morjane receives mixed responses, with many participants referring to his previous experience in politics and government as traits that distinguish him from other politicians.

*"Before the elections, the actions of Al Moubadara strengthened the party. However, after the elections the party has attempted to make alliances with others who seek to overthrow the current government. It is a good party, but at present, we don't see its actions. I think they are selling illusions."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, office manager

*"Morjane might have different ideas but his past will not permit him to return to political power."* Female, Tataouine, 35 years old, teacher

*"When Marzouki expelled the Syrian ambassador, Morjane was the only person who expresses his worries about the Tunisian community in Syria. As a former RCD member, he is hated by many Tunisians, but he has shown his concern for the citizens."* Male, Kairouan, 30 years old, technician

*"Kamel Morjane? He attempted to establish an office in Siliana, but some people burned it down so he left."* Female, Siliana, 36 years old, factory worker

*"I will attempt to evaluate him without referring to the RCD. He is an excellent diplomat. He is a good speaker. He is a competent politician. We have to take advantage of his sound advice."* Male, Kairouan, 25 years old, student

Focus groups were conducted the week prior to official launch of the Nidaa Tunis party by former interim prime minister, Beji Caid Essebsi. Feedback on the initiative indicated confusion between the to-be-founded party and the recent merger that resulted in the new Republican Party alliance.

*"I have confidence in two politicians. First Maya Jribi is not greedy or a social climber. She refused to agree to NCA members salary increases. Second is Beji Caid Essebsi. He is a veteran politician and can work with others."* Male, Kairouan, 25 years old, student

*"Essebsi? The 'godfather' of Tunisia! He is a clever politician and has prestige."* Female, Kairouan, 32 years old, housewife

*"It includes many members of Bourghiba's Constitutional Party. Essebsi served Bourghiba since he was 30 years old. I don't think the ex-Constitutional, ex-RCD parties would convince people to trust them again. If we don't exclude the people who worked with Ben Ali, we'll encounter many problems."* Male, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed

*"The dissolution of the RCD shouldn't have happened. Now you have old members joining other parties. Many RCD members re-emerged again under the cover of new parties. In the past, it was clear how to identify them, now this is no longer the case."* Female, Tunis, 25 years old, student

*"I may have confidence in Essebsi as a politician. I think Mohamed Ghannouchi is an expert in economics. If they worked together, they may be able to save the country. They are skilled enough to make change."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

## V. Interim Governance

In April, four months after assuming office, Prime Minister Jebali announced the coalition government's four-point action plan for 2012, including focus on: promotion of regional development, job creation, enhancing security and stability, and addressing transitional justice. Focus group participants were asked to share what they knew about each point of the government plan, their evaluation of the government's performance so far, and how they personally believe the issue should be addressed. While citizen awareness about details of the plan vary widely, there is general consensus that few, if any, tangible results have been accomplished. In some instances, participants call for more patience, though growing frustration and impatience is more commonly expressed.

**Local development efforts are seen as linked to the previous Ben Ali regime, with limited tangible progress to date.**

*"There have been rumors about investors' intentions to open businesses and hire people, but so far we have seen nothing."* Female, Tunis, 48 years old, teacher

*"According to the government, there is a plan to promote regions through development projects – we notice that they are the same*

*projects from the previous regime. This government does not have a real alternative agenda.” Male, Siliana, 49 years old, office manager*

*“The project studies need to be accelerated so investors don't look elsewhere.” Male, Tataouine, 29 years old, unemployed*

*“They are busy doing things which are not important like compensating former prisoners and raising the salary of the NCA members. The money should be spent on solving local problems.” Female, Siliana, 27 years old, student*

*“Patience, please! Do you want everything overnight? The government announced its plan. The problem is that people don't understand that the government needs time to implement programs. Some people are patient, some are not, and others want to take advantage of the delays for political purposes.” Male, Kairouan, 34 years old, barber*

### **Low awareness of government plans for economic development coupled with disagreement over models for job creation drive participant frustration.**

*“It is a priority and the reason for the revolution. People suggested solutions so look at those proposals. You don't like to employ in the public sector so why don't you facilitate the creation of private projects. When someone opens a project on his own he will hire at least 4 or 5 others so you don't have to think about them anymore.” Female, Siliana, 30 years old, unemployed*

*“There should be big projects to satisfy the needs of people and employ unskilled job seekers.” Male, Tataouine, 33 years old, university assistant*

*“We know that public sector jobs cannot generate profit for the country that is why political parties and civil society need to raise awareness and encourage businessmen to set up investment projects as there are not many projects.” Male, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed*

*“My sister is trained as a teacher. She's been unemployed for a long time. There are no job opportunities. [The government] should at least provide jobs for graduates.” Female, 41 years old, Kairouan, housewife*

*“A portion of the 2011 budget was devoted to job opportunities in the public sector. Until today, we haven't seen any recruitment of unemployed people. We just get promises, nothing more.” Female, Tunis, 25 years old, unemployed*

*"Most oil wells are in Tataouine, but the drilling training centers are in Gabes. Why don't they establish centers here? People are jobless here."* Male, Tataouine, 37 years old, taxi driver

*"The government has to think about building factories and preparing regional competitions to recruit job seekers. The government organized regional competitions in Gafsa and Sidi Bouzid, but not in Siliana."* Female, Siliana, 36 years old, factory worker

**Participants expressed disparate views on the need for transitional justice, but made a consistent link to the need for security.**

*"Only Salafists enjoy security and stability. When we complained about their behavior policemen said that they received instructions not to arrest them. This also happened in Jendouba and Tabarka. The security forces in Jendouba and Tabarka sent a fax to the Minister of Interior to inform him that they would do their job in the regions whether he appreciated that or not. This is not justice."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, project manager

*"All the important criminals are still free. Look at the Trabelsi...why is Ben Ali still in Saudi Arabia? We should start with him and his wife, and then move to the reform of the corrupt courts."* Female, Tunis, 48 years old, office manager

*"Apparently they are collecting the files and will prepare cases against them, but we haven't seen anything tangible yet. If we had a real idea about what happened in the first days of the revolution, we would know who should be prosecuted."* Male, Kairouan, 25 years old, student

*"Some judges have harmed the public good. They should be brought to justice and not just fired, to send a strong message to other judges about what is unacceptable."* Female, Tataouine, 38 years old, housewife

*"The families of the martyrs and injured need to be prioritized. Punishing Ben Ali and the family is needed too, but can be postponed. Solving the urgent problems of unemployment is more important now."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"Have we really had a revolution? How do you sentence an army captain to death while his boss, General Ammar, is still free? All the people who committed crimes should be punished."* Male, Siliana, 49 years old, kiosk owner

Alongside the coalition government, members of the NCA have been in office for the past six months. Focus group participants were asked to reflect on this work and the extent to which they feel they can access these elected officials. **While pride in voting in Tunisia's first genuinely democratic election remains high, voters express discontent that access to NCA members and their ability to address constituent concerns is limited.**

*"They do not interact with people. At the beginning they were excited about the revolution, but now they just enjoy many privileges and are worried about getting 4,200 TND. They are also totally engaged in writing the constitution so they forget the problems of the people."* Male, Tataouine, 35 years old, taxi driver

*"I haven't tried to contact an NCA member myself, but I would say there are no clear channels to do so. Some would say we elected them to make decisions on our behalf so we should let them work."* Male, Tunis, 49 years old, office manager

*"They are not serving the people. They are neither writing the constitution nor suggesting projects of laws. You can feel they know they are wrong, which is why they can't face the people."* Female, Tunis, 50 years old, teacher

*"Troika members are busy serving the interests of their parties for the next elections. Opposition parties are busy competing and starting conflicts."* Male, Kairouan, 25 years old, student

## VI. Looking Forward

Eight months after the NCA elections, frustration is growing as voters question the ability of elected leaders to deliver on election promises. Economic and social concerns eclipse interest in political developments, including the drafting of the constitution. **Despite this growing disconnect from decision-making on the formation of the country's political framework, citizen priorities for the constitution remain consistent.**

*"We are ready to say "degage" again. We are patient with Ennahda unwillingly because we are waiting for the constitution to be drafted. They could have selected six experts to modify the previous constitution. We are not convinced with the idea that the NCA will prepare a new constitution. They are wasting time, and we have no choice, but to wait."* Female, Siliiana, 35 years old, housewife

*"Tunisia is an Arab and Islamic country; its language is Arabic, and its religion is Islam. [referencing the first article of Tunisia's previous constitution]"* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"Religion should not be mentioned because in religion you should be tolerant, but in politics, this is not the case."* Male, Kairouan, 26 years old, barber

*"Most Tunisians are Muslim. We have some Jewish and Christian minorities. They are welcome, but Tunisia is a Muslim country. For me, Salafists are not true Muslims because their ideas are very fundamentalist. The Niqab is not obligatory in Islam. Salafists want to set many obligations on people."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

*"The president doesn't have the right to renew his candidacy after two presidential mandates. The bank accounts of the president and his family should be checked before his appointment and after quitting presidency."* Male, Tataouine, 50 years old, administrator

*"Our identity, dignity, the right to work and freedom of expression should be our priorities for the constitution."* Male, Siliana, 32 years old, engineer

*"The independence of the judiciary should be enhanced. The old constitution doesn't include any clarifications about this."* Male, Tataouine, 62 years old, retired

*"The laws related to marriage, heritage, personal and family issues shouldn't be changed. The rights gained by women mustn't be modified."* Female, Tataouine, 28 years old, housewife

*"Equality between men and women should be highlighted in the constitution. Islam honors women. Women shouldn't have to stay at home."* Male, Tunis, 29 years old, shop employee

*"[The right to employment] should be in the preamble. The right to work is to be a constitutional right."* Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife

**Beyond the constitution, citizens have mixed views on Tunisia's next set of elections.** While many reference March 2012, others state concern that the timeframe is too short to achieve the needed political agreement and re-initiate the election administration body.

*"We hope politicians will not pay money to buy voices." Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife*

*"I think the choice of the citizen is known well in advance. People support the party that leads the government today, and they will again tomorrow." Male, Tataouine, 36 years old, unemployed*

*"The ISIE is supposed to become a permanent government ministry, recognized in the constitution. Kamel Jendoubi is an honest man – if he and people like him remain involved, the elections will go well." Male, Tunis, 49 years old, office manager*

*"There will be problems because of the number of parties and political money too." Male, Siliana, 25 years old, IT specialist*

*"The next elections will not go as smoothly as the last ones. Some are already saying if Ennahda doesn't win, it will mean the elections have been falsified. They have already started campaigning... some parties will certainly create problems next time." Female, Tunis, 60 years old, retired*

*"They will be postponed. There is nothing clear up to now." Male, Siliana, 25 years old, student*

### **A blended model, consisting of strong presidential powers with parliamentary oversight is most often favored.**

*"Tunisians want an effective and influential president. We are not used to powerless presidents, just like Queen Elizabeth who has no authority. The previous elections were not transparent. We hope the next one will be sound." Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife*

*"The system should be half parliamentary and half presidential." Male, Siliana, 32 years old, engineer*

*"We need a parliamentary system – we have had enough of strong presidents." Male, Tunis, 33 years old, unemployed*

*"We hope it will not be a parliamentary system as it would be like the Italian parliament. Tunisian people will witness violent and aggressive discussions between members every day. Other countries will watch scandals on Aljazeera and France 24." Female, Siliana, 35 years old, housewife*

*"Honestly, while the system is important, what matters most is that they all have Tefal seats. No one should be allowed to stick to their seats beyond a reasonable point."* Female, Kairouan, 42 years old, teacher

*"We will be governed by the stick."* Female, Siliana, 30 years old, unemployed

### **Those who voted in the NCA elections acknowledged their naïveté in candidate selection and intend to base future decisions on proven political track records.**

*"People were misled during the first elections. Now, they should understand things better."* Male, Siliana, 25 years old, IT specialist

*"I think Tunisians will correct the mistakes of the last elections. People won't be victims of infringements by political parties. From Ennahda stickers on people's hands to cars paid for by Hechmi Hamdi taking people to vote. I think people won't be tools for falsification in the future."* Male, Kairouan, 30 years old, technician

*"My willingness to vote will depend on the candidates' promises and whether I believe they can deliver."* Female, Siliana, 36 years old, employee

*"Now we have a clear idea about the performance of all the parties. If I voted for X in the past and they didn't convince me, I will vote for Y. I would not vote for the same party because the agendas are clearer now."* Female, Tunis, 25 years old, student

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Six months after a coalition government was appointed following Tunisia's first genuinely democratic elections, citizens continue to demand that economic and security developments keep pace with political accomplishments. Focus group participants are proud of Tunisia's political accomplishments – for their country, and the example they have set for the region – but are becoming weary of what they consider unnecessary feuding by politicians and their parties. Rising prices for basic goods, coupled with limited visible efforts to create jobs to address the country's unemployment rate is fueling the sentiment that elected leaders are unable or unwilling to focus on the priorities of average citizens. Citizens desire to be represented by legitimately elected political leaders is on par with urgent demands for concrete improvements in their daily lives.

Participant responses indicate that, while political liberties and increased freedoms are greatly valued, there is deep disappointment that they have yet to see their daily lives improve. Managing these expectations while at the same time ensuring all feel included and represented are essential ingredients to guaranteeing the stability and vitality of Tunisia's democracy in the future. The task is complex, but participant contributions in this study point to actions that can help put the country on the right track. Recommendations, based on these contributions, are below.

### *Building Confidence in Political Leadership's Ability to Govern*

Tunisia's political leaders enjoy newfound legitimacy in the eyes of Tunisian people. However, expectations for rapid political and economic development have created strain on elected officials, who for the most part, are governing for the first time in their lives. As was the case in previous studies, citizens expect leaders to take their positions seriously, looking beyond personal or party lines, and make decisions for the good of the country. Focus group participants unanimously express that they expect leaders to serve the people – a dramatic shift for a society that has been dominated by a strong state-centered model for decades.

Most focus group participants expressed frustration over what they see as political infighting, which is hampering decision-making and progress on Tunisia's political, economic, and social priorities. Even one participant who had positive views about the government indicated it has failed thus far in this regard: "All we have is promises – we see no action."

While the government's plan was announced in April, focus group participants see little tangible progress to achieving goals outlined in the plan and in many cases challenge the priorities of government, especially regarding projects aimed to address regional

development. They believe the government should acknowledge the deep regional divisions and development discrepancies that exist in Tunisia. Even if well-funded projects may not seem so to the general public, the government should ensure that projects meet their goals, and on time. Talking about development accomplishments, especially in education, health, and road construction, will reduce the cynicism of those taking a wait-and-see approach, but government communication should take place consistently throughout a project's timeframe.

Progress reports on development projects, even if delayed, help increase faith that they eventually will be completed. Most citizens are focused on what is happening in their local areas, so greater attention should be paid to strengthening communication between national, regional, and local governments and to assisting local government in boosting their communication capabilities.

When citizens are given more information to understand development plans, especially for their areas, and when they are asked their opinion in how plans should be implemented, there is a good chance that expectations will become more realistic. Thus, if the government wants to raise the public's trust in its abilities, the quickest and cheapest way to do so is by encouraging local officials to consult regularly with their constituents on development needs, plans, and timelines to address those, even if it is not in the future.

In order to overcome the perception that the NCA is little more than a political sparring ground, the NCA should recommit to transparency, including publicizing minutes of public and private proceedings on the Assembly's website. NCA leadership should also launch a public communications strategy to raise awareness about progress made in the elected body and receive citizen input. Actively encouraging Tunisian civil society to track and highlight the work of government could be an effective way to aggregate citizen interest and further build trust that the Assembly is committed to meeting its mandate.

### *Managing Expectations for Job Creation and Security Improvements*

Some participants suggest that if the government could demonstrate it was delivering on promises of equitable economic development, it would promote the feeling of an inclusive government. The government's approach to the distribution of development funds in a way that favors historically disenfranchised regions, is generally well-received. Yet there also needs to be support for defined criteria in allocating development funds that is well explained and based on credible data. The perception of inequitable development exists in virtually every governorate, highlighting the need for the government to communicate plans better and reassure the public that civilians are being treated fairly in development distribution. Government and civil society also should develop additional mechanisms for monitoring service delivery distribution and

accomplishments as a way to increase public confidence. For example, members of the NCA could monitor and report on their constituencies, and/or civil society could join together to provide continually updated monitoring reports on expenditures of the national budget at the governorate level.

Several participants suggest that the government has been distracted by debates about Tunisian identity and is not exercising its responsibility to enforce public order. Insecurity negatively affects participants' perceptions of Tunisia's ability to thrive – whether or not they are experiencing problems themselves. The multi-faceted nature of current insecurity in the country – sit-ins and strikes, thefts, and clashes allegedly linked to extremist groups – also raises concerns that citizens may be more exposed and vulnerable to insecurity. Thus far, the government's efforts to improve security are viewed as limited and inadequate. Participants consistently support the army and want it to have greater resources, but police are viewed as insufficient in number and quality, and the legacy of a corrupt security service continues to linger.

Participants note time and again that nothing can be achieved without security, so they expect the government to prioritize reducing insecurity and improving the police force without delay. Immediate steps could include training and deploying in sufficient numbers a professional, disciplined and well-equipped police force to play a lead role in reducing crime and unrest as a prerequisite for rebuilding trust that the police services are expected to protect citizens and administer justice. Additionally, the government should directly confront and reduce corruption and bribery in the police and legal system to prevent a further loss of faith in law and order in Tunisia.

### *Developing Mechanisms for Rigorous Public Consultation*

Participants believe that citizen involvement – through frequent meetings with local and national officials – in both development planning and in the drafting of the constitution will increase satisfaction with government and simultaneously address historic grievances about regional disparities. Announcements of large-scale government plans that do not include localized public outreach to promote awareness about the plans, or proof they are being implemented, are viewed as political grandstanding and met with a high degree of skepticism from participants. They warn that empty promises are leading to an erosion of trust in the government.

When participants in this study highlighted disappointment over lack of access to government, it underscored aspirations expressed just after the NCA elections that they expect a different and much closer relationship with their government than Tunisians have had in the past. They value close government-citizen ties because they believe that is the best way to ensure government officials will work hard to improve their quality of life and respect citizen views.

Beyond its current efforts to communicate with the public, the NCA should undertake a wide-reaching and wide-ranging consultation effort for the constitution and demonstrate seriousness and respect for citizen views by incorporating citizen input into the final document. NCA members should be encouraged, perhaps through an incentive structure, to return to their constituencies during the regularly scheduled outreach week each month for consultations with citizens, to demonstrate citizens' concerns are being addressed. In addition to face-to-face contact, NCA members and government officials should also use the media to increase communication with citizens and to solicit citizen feedback; the medium of radio and social media are well-suited for this task and should be leveraged as much as possible.

### *Laying Foundation for Inclusive Political Framework*

Participant responses in this study demonstrate that Tunisians view themselves as one people, united under a framework of individual liberties and collective responsibilities, and see this as both a means of achieving the goals of the political transition and encouraging stability. Citizens generally expect the constitution drafting process to be completed by the fall of 2012, coinciding with the one-year anniversary of the NCA elections. Diversity emerges when discussions move to future elections – with participants expressing a range of opinions about whether they prefer a strong presidential or parliamentary system. Citizens anticipate elections being held in 2013, with some following the pronouncements of Ennahda that elections will take place in the spring. Still others anticipate polls will be held after Ramadan, citing the need for technical and political systems to be put in place, especially the formation of an independent election management body. To sum up, 2012 and 2013 are viewed as an extension of the 'transition' period which began last year, with expectations that a permanent political system will come into view during that time.

In this context, NCA members should endeavor to meet the one-year timeframe for drafting the constitution. If the date slips, the NCA should organize a broad outreach campaign to explain to citizens the need for the delay. Participants in this study are able to provide some insight into their wishes for the constitution, but the scope and depth of those opinions vary and are often hampered by their lack of experience with different democratic forms of government. For citizens' participation to be meaningful in the constitutional process, greater effort must be made to ensure the public has a wider understanding of basic governance options, especially those relating to decentralization and the divisions of roles and powers between a future president and parliament.

Beyond the constitution, efforts to define uniting values for the country based on a national philosophy that embodies equality and inclusion should be promoted, with emphasis on citizen engagement. The ruling coalition, in partnership with other political parties, could engage citizens in the development of national symbols and symbolically

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important national decisions, so that all can feel a part of building their nation. A longer term prospect would be to develop a civics curriculum for schools that educates the population about Tunisia' system of government and its values and encourages children to view each other as equals, regardless of region or economic status.

## APPENDIX A: Focus Group Locations and Participant Demographics

- **120 participants** from Greater Tunis, Siliana, Kairouan and Tataouine

Gender	Count
Female	61
Male	59

- **Fieldwork** conducted from June 1 to 11

Age	Count
25-34	44
35+	76

- **Diversity** of ages, professions and neighborhoods within each group

- **Nine to twelve participants** per group

Profession	Count
Employed	70
Unemployed	20
House wives	30