

Youth Perceptions in Morocco: Political Parties and Reforms

Findings from Qualitative Research in Morocco
Conducted in July 2011

National Democratic Institute



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ABOUT THE 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.

PREFACE

In the wake of regional events across North Africa, Morocco witnessed an unprecedented level of public mobilization, most notably with the series of nationwide demonstrations bringing together a wide spectrum of citizens led by young people. What began as a “Day of Dignity” on February 20, 2011, as citizens calling for more transparency and accountability in government helped to prompt wide-ranging dialogue across the country and a constitutional reform process announced by King Mohammed VI on March 9, 2011. With the passage of the revised constitution by public referendum on July 1, 2011, Morocco moved into a period of preparations for early legislative elections, the formation of a new government, and implementation of key elements embodied in the constitution, even as the so-called “February 20th Movement” continued to lead limited street protests. This focus group research took place just after the constitutional referendum as parameters for early elections were first being discussed. The findings point to a youth population that is hopeful about the opportunities afforded in the new constitution, but also deeply pessimistic about the ability of existing political elites to effectively steer the country in addressing critical economic and social issues.

Purpose: To provide political and civic leaders in Morocco with timely and objective information on young peoples’ overarching concerns and attitudes given the delicate political situation in Morocco, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) led a qualitative study in towns and cities across Morocco from July 4 to 22, 2011. The study comprised 12 focus group discussions to examine:

- The general mood of youth relative to political developments;
- The sense of which actors are most relevant to the current reform process;
- Perceptions of political parties and suggestions to parties for improving engagement;
- Expectations from the reform process; and
- Prospects for an improved future.

The Institute commissioned Bridgehead Consulting to organize and lead the study in six locations around the country. Bridgehead is a research firm based in Morocco that draws together experienced and professional qualitative research experts with a range of domestic and international experiences in focus groups for concept evaluation, policy and message development, campaign testing, educational materials development, and needs assessments. Given the prominent role youth played in the protests that preceded constitutional reforms, the research was designed to acquire a deeper understanding of how young Moroccans view the current situation and their immediate future.

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. They reveal not just *what* people think, but also *why* they think that way, *how* they formulate opinions, and *how strongly* these opinions are held. They also help researchers to

better understand the various shades of gray – hesitation, enthusiasm, anger, or uncertainty. By listening directly to the voices of participants, focus groups are a valuable tool for understanding the “why” behind the numbers contained in surveys. 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 than the ideal.

Through facilitated, open-ended discussion, focus groups allow decision-makers to understand the motivations, feelings, and values behind participant opinions. Unlike a survey, whose claim to reliability is based on the representativeness of its sample, focus group results are useful because they reflect the views of typical individuals in specific social groups. In other words, the research focuses on understanding attitudes, rather than measuring them. As in a representative survey, researchers can choose focus group participants to ensure that there is no bias in selection within the specified group criteria. Because the number of people who participate in a focus group project is much smaller than that reached by a poll, focus group results cannot be proportionately extrapolated to the national population. Furthermore, focus group findings are only a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. However, the results are particularly useful because they offer far more detail and nuance on the views of particular groups of interest than a poll might.

Method: From July 4 to July 22, 2011, immediately following a constitutional referendum, NDI conducted 12 focus groups in six cities across Morocco. Each location included sessions with adult male and female citizens, segregated by sex, ranging from 18 to 25 years old. At minimum, all participants had completed senior high school. Focus groups were conducted in three urban centers – Agadir, Meknes, and Marrakech – and three rural areas – Beni Mellal, El Jadida, and Ouazzane. Each group contained between eight and eleven participants, who were selected and re-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions.

Staffing and Logistics: Moderators conducting all focus groups were Moroccan citizens trained in standard moderator techniques by NDI and Bridgehead. A female moderator led sessions with women while a male moderator led them for men. All recruitment and moderation of groups was conducted in Moroccan dialectical Arabic and transcripts were prepared in Arabic and English.

Outside Influence: In all cases, every effort is made to ensure that there is no undue influence exerted on participants in the groups. Focus group guidelines are not shared with local authorities prior to the discussion. Also, the participants are gathered in random fashion and screened to ensure that they do not know one another. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from findings in the groups overall, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores public opinion among young people in Morocco in the summer of 2011, just after a constitutional referendum. Based on 12 focus group discussions with 98 Moroccan youth aged 18 to 25 years, the report examines attitudes of average young Moroccan citizens toward the current situation in their country, the main political actors, the probable impact of reforms on their daily lives, and the prospects for the future. A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from participants and key conclusions, can be found in the ensuing section of this report.

I. General Mood

- **Many young Moroccans are optimistic about the reforms taking place in their country.** The new constitution and limited economic improvements are cited as evidence of positive change.
- **However, enthusiasm is not uniform and many young Moroccans are concerned that the reforms are cosmetic.** Broader reforms have not yet created improvements in everyday lives. Youth are concerned about the implementation of the new constitution's key provisions.
- **The debates that accompanied the constitutional revisions are viewed positively by participants,** who link these debates to increased levels of freedom of expression in Morocco.
- **Young people do not feel the government is doing enough to invest in human development or education.** They criticize the economic condition where there is widespread unemployment, including for recent university graduates.
- **Endemic corruption is perceived as the major impediment to political reforms and economic development.** The country is seen as continuing to rely on a personal patronage system and favoritism, and any action to date on the part of the government to address corruption is not recognized by youth.
- **Opinions on the February 20th Movement that initiated reform protests are mixed,** though most participants acknowledge that the government initiated a more assertive reform agenda because of on-going pressure from the Movement. However, many also express the desire for the Movement to end protests and play a more constructive role in offering solutions and participating in debate.

II. Attitudes Toward Political Parties

- **Participants recognize the importance of political parties in a democracy, but most believe that Moroccan parties are not fulfilling their obligations to citizens.** Most feel that parties are alienated from youth and have no genuine interest in representing the Moroccan people.
- Although familiar with larger political parties by name, **participants have a very superficial knowledge of party ideologies or platforms.**
- **Most participants do not believe that political parties have played a major role in recent reforms.** Many participants give credit to King Mohamed VI for his efforts while others point to the important impetus provided by the February 20th Movement. Overall, they suggest that political parties were confined to minimal roles.
- **Negative perceptions of parties are reflected in regular references to corruption, nepotism, and favoritism.** Parties are seen as having lost their moral values and forfeited public trust.
- **Despite negative perceptions, participants offer concrete steps for parties to rebuild trust.** They express a cautious hope that parties could be vehicles of positive change in Morocco and provide suggested actions to parties:
 - Create opportunities to **involve youth** in meaningful ways;
 - Maintain **open and regular communication** with citizens in **simple language**;
 - Play a role in **educating citizens about political issues and processes**;
 - **Demonstrate interest in citizens beyond just votes**;
 - Offer **concrete promises and options** to differentiate themselves from other parties;
 - Become **more internally transparent and democratic** to set the example for other institutions; and
 - **Regulate the terms of executive positions** within parties.
- **Participants indicate that parties could and should take a role in leading the implementation of the new constitution.** In their view, this is the most important opportunity for improving people's perceptions of parties.

III. Expectations from Reforms

- **Though hopeful, participants are cautious about the future of reforms.** They are concerned that their expectations will not be met.
- **Three areas of frustration pervade all discussions and are interrelated: education, unemployment, and corruption.** In their view, these must be addressed aggressively for reforms to be successful.

- **The educational system does not prepare young people to adequately compete in the job market.** This perpetuates the unemployment crisis and requires urgent reform.
- **The government is not seen as doing anything serious to address high unemployment,** particularly among recent university graduates.
- **Corruption is costing the country investors and contributing to higher unemployment.** There is no sense among participants that any improvement in this area is being made at the local or national level.
- **The newly revised constitution is a source of hope for many young Moroccans,** although there is some skepticism about whether or not the constitution will be implemented properly.

IV. The Future

- **Citizens continue to place great hope on the constitution,** and though they do not know many details, and believe it holds the remedy for current problems and is a pathway to deeper reforms.
- Despite enthusiasm for the constitution, **few participants express an intention to cast ballots in the coming parliamentary elections,** though any citizen 18 years of age or older is eligible to vote. Current political leaders are seen as no longer capable of coping with the challenges facing the country.
- While noting little incentive to vote for political parties that are disconnected from citizens, a number of participants note they **would reconsider participating if they saw honest efforts and actions by political parties to engage citizens.**

GENERAL MOOD

Many young Moroccans are optimistic about the current reforms and feel that their country is slowly moving in the right direction. Respondents point to the new constitution and limited economic improvements as evidence that Morocco is undergoing positive change. Several respondents reference the overall context of the Arab Spring, crediting the movements in neighboring countries for inspiring change in Morocco while others note with pride that Morocco has managed to achieve reform by peaceful means.

“Morocco is going in the right direction because there are plenty of reforms, including the constitution, and other laws and regulations which didn’t exist before.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“I think Morocco is on the right path, but more political reforms are required to avoid any likely uprising like what’s happening in many Arab countries.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“Compared to other Arab countries that are witnessing uprisings and destabilization, Morocco is moving in the right way.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“I am convinced that Morocco is taking the right path and now, with the new constitution, we’ll see more progress and development projects.” (*Woman, rural, Ouarzazane*)

“The uprisings and revolutions in many Arab countries contributed to the awakening of people’s conscience and calls for change.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

Although the enthusiasm is widespread, it is far from uniform as many young Moroccans also express concerns that the reforms are cosmetic, that young people are still excluded from decision-making processes, and that broad political reforms have yet to translate into concrete improvements in their everyday lives. In almost all groups, participants raise concerns over corruption and unemployment.

“I think Morocco is going in the wrong direction as long as corruption and greed dominate.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“I cannot decide definitively whether or not Morocco is going in the right direction. No one can deny that Morocco has stepped ahead as a democratic country; still, there are many challenges along the way.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“I think that Morocco is not going in the right direction, because right after the referendum, the February 20th Movement is still leading protests. Even at the university, there are people protesting, which means that many people are not for the constitution.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“For me, Morocco is going in the wrong direction because youth are not given a chance to manage the country. It’s young people who know what the country needs.”
(*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

Freedom of Expression

Even though most participants were not old enough to have experienced the more limited freedom of expression under the reign of the previous king, they consider free speech to be one of the most important rights they now enjoy. The debate during the constitutional revision process was seen as opening space to freely discuss previously taboo topics. However, freedom of expression has different meanings for different participants. Some respondents think the state should exercise greater controls over media outlets they perceive as prone to misinformation or negative coverage. Others are grateful for independent media outlets and credit them with providing critical information, while criticizing official media for only providing coverage favorable to the palace.

“I agree that media is a source of information and news, but they should cover all news, because they show only the news the government wants.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“Moroccans can now express themselves freely. This is to me one of the most important things that makes me feel optimistic about the future of my country.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“Freedom of expression should not be confused with lack of discipline. Some Moroccans confuse this noble right with what they think is their right to sometimes disrespect institutions like the monarchy.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“Media makes it easy for people to have access to information. Thanks to media I know what’s going on in Morocco and abroad.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“Media for me doesn’t have any credibility. In my region we have been suffering for ages and no media dares to cover peoples’ daily challenges and their struggle for rights.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

The Socioeconomic Situation

While participants acknowledge some economic improvements, including limited infrastructure projects, most want Morocco to accelerate the pace of economic development to meet the high expectations of all Moroccans. Most of the criticism over economic conditions relates to widespread unemployment and the difficulty young people face in finding jobs after graduation. Several participants see initiatives such as the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) as a welcome effort to improve the socio-economic situation of certain segments of the population that have been historically marginalized. However, participants also note that the initiative has a mixed record of success. Significant recent efforts to attract foreign investments and to liberalize the economy are applauded by several participants who think the country has escaped the international economic crisis. Yet

participants feel the government is not doing enough to invest in human development or education.

“What I would like to highlight is the fact that Morocco enjoys a better economic situation, but this is not enough. A lot needs to be done. Unemployment is still very high.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“It’s great to invest in a tramway [completed last year in Rabat and under construction in Casablanca], but it could be even better if we could teach average citizens how to deal with it. We need to educate citizens and equip them with the right tools to accompany the country’s development.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“Take Ouazzane as an example. The city has touristic potential, but lacks the basics. Universities are so far away that we get discouraged from continuing our higher education. People here are illiterate.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

Recent Political Reforms

The general feeling among most participants is that Morocco is undergoing considerable change politically, economically, and socially. Nearly all participants recognize that the country has made some progress in its reform efforts. However, many participants also cite major impediments to these reforms, and respondents perceive endemic corruption as a threat to the economy and development.

Many participants believe the country still relies on archaic systems of favoritism and patronage that alienate and marginalize Moroccans. Several respondents feel betrayed by official discourse that does not recognize corruption as a challenge. Well-educated young people require the right connections to obtain jobs, according to participants; the political sphere is reserved to a set of political elites and their descendants. Many participants feel that average citizens have no access to opportunities to participate in politics.

“[Corruption] has become so normal that we don’t seem to question it anymore.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“It’s really sad that we Moroccans find excuses to legitimize corruption. We even go so far as to consider it a form of ‘social solidarity.’” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“Why can’t we have young, well-educated average citizens as policy makers? I feel disgusted when I see how an average Moroccan becomes a decision-maker in a foreign country rather than his or hers.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

The New Constitution

Young Moroccans are positive about the new constitution but concerned over whether or not it will be successfully implemented. While most participants speak generally about the constitution as an instrument for further reform, few respondents refer to specific articles or

provisions of the constitution. However, their expectations run very high despite their limited understanding.

“Despite all the negative things we said earlier, the new constitution is able to solve all problems.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“I don’t know what a constitution can bring me, yet I believe it can solve my problems and help me find a job.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“I have no idea about the content of the new constitution, but I wish things like free medical care and health services were included within. And I wish there was a chapter allowing me to go back to university. Briefly, I need something tangible.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakesh*)

In discussing the constitution, many participants point to the role played by the February 20th Movement in creating public pressure for change. While most respondents credit the Movement for igniting public discourse, some express concerns that it lacks a cohesive vision for the country’s future and is attempting to discredit the new constitution.

“The February 20th Movement should get credit for speeding up the process of change.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“The Movement is very dynamic and has the ability to protest every week, but this is not what the country really needs. We need people who know what to do.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“Protesters should go home now and pave the way for the people who would like to work hard for us to make the Moroccan experience a reference in the Arab world.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“The February 20th Movement has done a good job in having the audacity to talk publicly about human rights.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

ATTITUDES TOWARD POLITICAL PARTIES

Many young Moroccans feel that political parties are alienated from youth and have no genuine interest in representing Moroccan people. Respondents are overwhelmingly negative in their descriptions and perceptions of political parties. Based on responses, parties clearly face a collective crisis of credibility, with participants consistently complaining that parties disappear after elections and rarely keep their promises to citizens.

While many participants recognize the importance and the role that political parties should play in any democracy, most believe that Moroccan parties are not fulfilling their obligations to citizens. Although participants seem familiar with most large political parties – specifically the Justice and Development Party (PJD), the Independence Party (PI), the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), and the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM) – they have very superficial knowledge about the parties’ ideologies or platforms. Young Moroccans criticize parties for failing to understand youth concerns. Participants feel political parties are arrogant and fail to communicate with people except in times when they need votes.

“The first thing that comes to my mind when I hear ‘political parties’ is a set of nouns: hypocrisy, deceit, lies, double standards; and the list goes on.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“I can recognize the names of most political parties, but I ignore what they are doing. During campaign times, I hear all about the rosier political programs that make me dream of a better tomorrow. I wake up to the sad reality when elections are over.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“I have never been able to understand a political partisan. I think they speak Chinese on purpose so they aren’t understood by the masses.” (*Man, rural, Ouarzazane*)

“A nation without values is reduced to nothing. Political parties need to have moral values and ethics.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“Morocco has more political parties than any country in the world. Some of them barely get a couple of seats in the parliament. I think this should stop.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

Overall, most participants do not believe that political parties have played a major role in the reforms. The King is generally seen as the main political actor, with parties confined to the sidelines. Several participants criticized the parties for not making efforts to keep people informed and educate citizens during the constitutional reform process.

“Political parties should have educated us about this constitution. Where are they? I bet I’ll see them in the coming elections sweet talking me.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“It’s strange and undemocratic that all the parties said ‘vote yes’ for the constitution. No political party dared to say no. Some parties only boycotted the vote, but they didn’t dare say no. What democracy is that?” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

The negative perceptions of political parties are often reflected in references to corruption, nepotism, and favoritism. Participants express disgust with a political system that has not changed over the years. Participants generally perceive political parties as having lost their moral values and forfeited the public’s trust. Many participants express the desire for parties to build confidence and trust to gain back the respect that some of them once had.

Within the political context they describe, most focus group participants believe the parliament is a failed institution that can do nothing to solve the pressing economic and social problems.

“When you see the King moving from one corner of the country to another to launch different projects, you understand that there is no one else to do this.” (*Woman, rural, Ouarzazane*)

“I did not vote during the latest elections; I am not planning to vote in the coming ones. I trust no political party and I think the King does not trust them either. They are incapable of doing things by themselves.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“What is the parliament? It’s a bunch of political figures napping in a cozy place.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

Opportunities to Improve Perceptions

Despite the negative perceptions they have about political parties, participants acknowledge their role in a democratic system and many respondents articulate concrete steps parties could take to increase their public standing. Some participants express cautious hope that parties will ultimately be able to effect positive changes in Morocco. Despite the image problems that parties have – particularly with youth – it is encouraging that participants envision opportunities for improvement.

“If political parties take into consideration the fact that young people exist, I could review my position towards voting” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“If only political parties knew how much they can do to improve the life of ordinary citizens!” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

- ***Communication and Commitment***

Participants emphasize that political parties should provide youth with the opportunity to participate in the country’s local and national management. This will improve the image of parties within an age segment that has the potential to affect the polls. Most participants think that political parties should maintain open and regular communication with citizens in a

language that is clearly understood by everyone. In the same vein, political parties should educate citizens and help them better understand the political and socio-economic challenges facing the country. Political parties, participants argue, should gain back the trust of citizens and prove to them that it is not only their votes that matter. They need to simplify the political game so that all citizens can more actively and positively participate.

“The only way out for political parties to improve their image is to start showing interest in younger generations.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“If I get the feeling that my voice matters, I’ll support a political party that is close to my ideology.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“Political parties should fulfill their promises whenever they given any.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“Communicating with citizens on a regular basis is what political parties need to do if they want to have a better proximity with people. They have to show us that we are not important only during election time.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“Political parties should speak a language understood by all. It’s their role to educate citizens. That’s why they have to come down to Earth and take into consideration that half of Moroccans cannot understand their messages because they are illiterate.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

- ***Democracy Starts at Home***

Focus group participants call for political parties to become more transparent and democratic, and to set the example for other institutions. Participants also ask parties to increase opportunities for young people to participate in parties and politics. Respondents frequently express frustration with aging leadership that is out of touch with the needs and concerns of youth. The fact that some secretaries general of political parties stick to their positions and turn a deaf ear to the many voices calling for their departure is a practice that needs to change, according to most participants. Some suggest that regulating the terms of executive positions could gain back the respect that participants argue Moroccans once had for political parties.

“I will never vote or join a political party as long as internal democracy does not exist. I refuse to be a pawn helping sons of the elite to make it to the parliament.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“I have never seen in any other country a political party secretary general refusing to step down despite the calls of all partisans for him to do so.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“If the members of a political party have no trust in each other, how can we trust them?” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“Political leaders in Morocco lack charisma. I see them on TV and I feel embarrassed because some of them are so old that they no longer have a vision for the country.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“People who struggle to keep their positions within political parties are definitely taking advantage of the system. If responsibility is a headache, as some pretend, why don’t they pass that headache on to other people?” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

- ***Leading Implementation of the New Constitution***

The most important opportunity for political parties to improve citizens’ perceptions, according to focus group participants, is to work hard to make the new constitutional reforms as successful as citizens expect them to be. Participants feel that parties could take leading roles in the implementation phase and demonstrate the value of parties to average citizens. Some participants claim that the constitution has raised the stakes for parties by mandating that the prime minister be chosen from the political party that wins the most seats in the parliament. Respondents state that this increase in status requires parties to create well developed political programs for the five-year term.

“If political parties are as serious as they pretend to be, they should show that in the coming elections. The new constitution provides the background for everybody to honor his/her discourse.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“The time has come for all political formations to get down to business. I believe that if political parties miss this opportunity, they will lose citizens’ trust forever.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

EXPECTATIONS FROM REFORMS

While focus group participants recognize the advances the country has experienced, they are cautious about the future of the reforms and concerned that their expectations will not be met. When queried on what issues they felt were most urgent and important, participants overwhelmingly focused on three areas of frustration that they expect new reforms to be able to address and that could provide decision-makers and political actors with opportunities for policy focus: education, unemployment, and corruption. In rural areas, health and infrastructure development such as roads were also important issues that participants identified.

Education

Many young Moroccans perceive education as a priority issue in need of urgent reforms. Citizens seem to acknowledge efforts made by the state to improve the education system, yet feel very concerned about what they see as a decline in the quality of the country's educational institutions. Many young Moroccans express frustration that the educational system does not prepare them to adequately compete in the job market, leading to larger unemployment problems.

“I don't know what happened to our system of education. It's no longer as competitive as it once was.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“I feel embarrassed when I look at reports from institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Countries like Libya and Kuwait are better ranked than Morocco as far as education is concerned.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“Lots of people have higher education degrees, but they are not very convincing. I think they are victims of a terrible educational system.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“The educational system is not matching the reality of the job market. Students are not well-prepared to cope with the challenges of enterprises. Maybe we need to change our entire system and adopt a more successful one – the American, the Japanese, or even the Indian. These have proven to work.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

Unemployment

Focus group participants unanimously think that unemployment is another significant and related social problem that requires immediate attention. They associate the deficiency of the educational system with the high rate of unemployment. Participants do not believe that the government is doing anything to seriously address the issue.

“When I hear the official unemployment rate, I laugh to tears. The government talks about 12 percent. International institutions like the World Bank talk about 20 percent. The former is a joke; the latter is a sad reality.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“Again, because of the bad quality of education, most graduates can’t find jobs. The content of the courses does not have any link to reality whatsoever.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“Morocco had minimal impact from the international economic crisis for one reason or another. Instead of being aggressive in attracting foreign investments, however, the government missed the opportunity.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“I’m confident the new constitution will bring some of the right policymakers to get us out of the mud. I’m in my twenties and I don’t want to reach the sixties achieving nothing in my life.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

Corruption

Young Moroccans are concerned with the endemic corruption they perceive as a serious impediment to successful reform. Even with international conventions and anti-corruption initiatives, participants note that they do not see improvements at the local or national level. They overtly ask for concrete measures to bring to court officials that commit crimes or otherwise benefit from traditions of favoritism. Participants feel that the pervasive corruption is costing the country investors and contributing to high unemployment for young graduates who do not have the political connections necessary to secure jobs.

“Since I was young, I have heard about corruption and up until today nothing has been done to fight it. I have the impression that this will remain the case for years and years to come.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“Corruption exists all over the world, but with a degree of variance. Corruption in Morocco is a monster that devours everything.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“You watch the news and you hear a lot of things about corruption and ways to fight it. The following day, you have to give a bribe to get a birth certificate. What hypocrisy!” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“Why don’t we bring guilty corrupted people to trial? I’ll tell why we don’t. Because these corrupt people are protected by other corrupt people.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

LOOKING FORWARD

Invited to imagine how they would like to see Morocco in the future, respondents raised the same key issues. They emphasize the development of a better educational system as a critical step to eradicating illiteracy, which many see as the source of most problems. They also wish the country would be rid of corruption and that citizens could have access to health and other services without having to pay bribes. Unemployment was also cited as a nightmare they would like to wipe out. Citizens place great hope on the new constitution and look forward to an honest application that paves the way for further reforms that will address other economic issues.

“I want to see the content of the new constitution applied seriously so that Morocco can move ahead.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“If all Moroccans can have access to good education, illiteracy will be eradicated and economic development will be a *fait accompli*.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“I wish to wake up tomorrow and be able to get all the documents I want without having to pay a bribe.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“I wish all Moroccans could get a job. Unemployment is what I really hope Morocco can get rid of.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“For me, I want to see potable water in every house in my region, that’s all.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

Many participants express a desire for youth to play a role in the ongoing reform process. Some respondents criticize the “old guard” of political elites and express the desire for the currently active politicians, ministers, parliamentarians, and party leaders to be replaced by people who are more in touch with the needs and concerns of young Moroccans. Participants believe current political elites are no longer equipped to cope with the challenges facing the country now and in the near future.

“I hear a lot about democracy. I don’t know it. I haven’t seen it. I wish I could see Morocco as a true democracy. To me, that’s how all our problems could be resolved.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“My wish is to involve young people in the management of political life. Old people should go.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“My dream is that all Moroccans get a decent wage which allows them to live in dignity.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

Most participants do not believe that current policymakers have the political will to initiate positive change. While some participants claim that they will not participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections, others believe the elections could present a window of opportunity for serious reforms, if parties and decision-makers take action now to reach out and engage citizens – particularly young Moroccans – in their country’s unfolding political processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Focus groups conducted by NDI during July 2011 point to a very high expectation among young Moroccans that provisions of the new constitution passed by referendum on July 1 will soon impact their daily lives. At the same time, they point to very low levels of confidence in political institutions, most notably political parties. While issues such as freedom of expression and political reforms are of interest, Moroccan youth are overwhelmingly preoccupied with three inter-related issues:

- Reform of the education system;
- Addressing unemployment; and
- Curbing corruption.

Within this context, political parties as a whole face the challenging task of rebuilding faith among voters and developing messages for a relatively disenchanted constituency. Although they laud the passage of the new constitution, young Moroccans see political parties as having played a very limited role in that process and express deep frustration over political elites who they say are not concerned with the welfare of the people, engage in corrupt practices, and refuse to actively engage or promote youth.

Identification of political ideologies and platforms remains weak. Though respondents could name several parties, the number is small and the amount of information that participants know about them remains limited. At the same time, participants indicate that they want more information and realistic, concrete proposals to make choices among parties. *Parties are encouraged to build and communicate effective brands and specific platforms.*

Communication remains feeble and disconnected. Participants overwhelmingly feel that parties are only interested in securing votes at election time and do not make efforts to engage the public outside of campaign periods. They acknowledge, however, that parties that would demonstrate more regular and two-way communication would be taken more seriously. *Parties are encouraged to undertake dialogue initiatives with citizens, to use basic language when speaking with citizens, and to maintain communication outside of campaign periods.*

Youth are focused on universal issues for which they seek meaningful options. Across the board, participants ranked education, unemployment, and corruption as the key issues for which they would like to see policy proposals and responses. They view these issues as intimately related and, while somewhat naïve on options, are realistic about the challenge in addressing the problems; they seem willing to give policymakers time if they offer reasonable proposals and honest efforts. *Parties should develop detailed policy proposals for these key areas to demonstrate responsiveness and their capacity to act independently.*

Expectations run very high. Generally speaking, participants have limited understanding of the details of the new constitution or how it relates to policy prescriptions for the issues with which they are most concerned. While optimistic about the direction of the country, they

expect, if not immediate results, at least initial actions to begin addressing implementation of key provisions in the revised constitution. *Parties should seize the opportunity to lead the implementation process and, as suggested by participants, position themselves as looking out for the interests of citizens.*

Youth do not feel that parties are engaging them seriously. Although some participants note initiatives to hold dialogues with young people, these are not seen as serious efforts by parties or other decision-makers to effectively include them in decision-making. They see current leaders as out of touch and grasping to hold on to power. Parties should make honest efforts to include youth meaningfully at all levels of party structures and elicit their input on policy decisions. *Parties should develop the capacity to speak to youth in their language and on their issues of concern, and should give serious consideration to processes of renewal and internal democracy.*