

**Citizens Express Their Priorities: Moroccan Citizens' Views and Preferences Ahead of the
2016 Parliamentary Elections**

Findings from Focus Groups in Morocco
Conducted in May-June 2016



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PREFACE

Political Summary: In October 2016, Moroccans will take to the polls in the second elections for the Parliament’s House of Representatives since a 2011 constitutional reform. These upcoming elections, which come roughly one year after the September 2015 regional and local polls, will be marked by a number of adjustments in electoral laws. Several months ahead of October’s elections, Morocco passed a law to officially lower the parliamentary electoral threshold for local lists from six to three percent, enhancing smaller parties’ opportunities to enter parliament and increasing pressure on larger, established parties to field better campaigns. Morocco also formally opened the national youth list to women, offering young female candidates a chance to accrue political experience.¹ These changes, coupled with popular mobilization over the government’s handling of issues such as retirement reform and trainee teacher payments, have set the stage for a competitive campaign period in which candidates will need to demonstrate how they can implement real change. In this regard, this focus group research offers insight on citizens’ actual concerns and demands, which political parties can use to guide their electoral strategies.

Purpose: The National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducts periodic focus group research in Morocco to raise political leaders’ awareness of citizens’ views and contribute to more representative policy-making and governance. This round of research took place in May and June 2016 in the lead-up to parliamentary elections scheduled for October 7, 2016. The study sought to identify the policy issues that most affect Moroccans’ daily lives and citizens’ expectations for improvements in these areas. Citizens participated in 24 focus group discussions between May 19 and June 4, 2016 to share their views on the following topics:

- The predominant issues affecting Moroccan citizens’ daily lives and measures to address them;
- The relative importance of these issues as priorities for electoral campaigns and the to-be-elected government’s term;
- Awareness and evaluation of recent policy initiatives proposed or implemented at the national or local level;
- Desirable and undesirable attributes of candidates running for election to parliament; and
- Specific expectations of and attitudes toward women candidates for parliament.

The Institute commissioned BJ Group—a marketing and public opinion research firm based in Casablanca, Morocco—to organize the study.

Focus Group Research: Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following pre-set guidelines. 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 providing 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

¹ Morocco’s parliament has national quota provisions or “lists” that reserve a number of parliamentary seats for youth and women respectively. Women below 40 will now be allocated 15 of the 30 seats on the youth list.

comprised of a small number of participants, typically eight to 12 per group. Focus group findings only represent a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. The conclusions of this report therefore only represent opinions held when research was conducted.

Method: From May 19 to June 4, 2016, NDI held 24 focus groups with a total of 195 participants in six regions across Morocco: Rabat, Tangier, Fes, Oujda, Marrakesh, and Casablanca. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Moroccan society, NDI organized four groups in each region: two in urban city centers and two in rural areas. One male group and one female group took place at each location. The groups were further organized by age to either include youth (18 to 30 years old) or adults (30 years and above). NDI ensured that these demographic criteria were evenly distributed across the 24 groups by alternating the gender and age specifications across the regions. Participants were selected and pre-screened to ensure a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions. Additional detail on participants' demographic profiles can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Staffing and Logistics: The Institute commissioned BJ Group to organize the study in six regions across the country. A Moroccan citizen trained in focus group moderation techniques by NDI and BJ moderated each focus group in the Moroccan dialect of Arabic.

Group Locations: The 24 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in six locations throughout Morocco: Rabat, Tangier, Fes, Oujda, Marrakesh, and Casablanca (see the map in this section). Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, and geographic location. In all locations, appropriate venues for focus group discussions were identified to ensure participant privacy and sufficient space for indirect observation by NDI staff.

Outside Influence: Every effort was made to ensure there was no undue influence exerted on the participants in the groups. Focus group discussion guides were 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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study provides a snapshot of Moroccan citizens' views and opinions ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections. Participants of 24 focus group discussions explained and identified the measures they expect the next elected government to take to address their most pressing concerns. The report also examines the qualities that citizens value in electoral candidates, with a focus on their perceptions of women candidates.

For participants in this study, life in Morocco is replete with challenges. While participants show a degree of pride in their Moroccan identity and high esteem for their fellow citizens, they are quick to list a range of obstacles to their general well-being and that of their families and friends. Participants share needs related to employment, health, education, housing, infrastructure, transport, and security. They view many of these issues and their solutions as interconnected and assert that elected officials have not delivered necessary improvements in these areas. For many, these failures of public services amount to a denial of citizens' basic rights. Participants articulate this feeling as "marginalization" and "oppression," which is exacerbated by a sense of pervasive corruption and favoritism that permits wealthier citizens to further advance while disadvantaged Moroccans remain stuck in cycles of poverty and neglect. In the past, many participants were driven to vote based on promises made by politicians that touched on some of these issues. With few exceptions, however, participants show severe disappointment with current politicians' inability to take steps to fulfill these campaign pledges.

"The Moroccan citizen is not living a good life; he is suffering." (Fes, women, adult, urban)

"Morocco is a beautiful country and has many good things, but on the other hand you cannot have the simplest rights when you claim them." (Tangier, men, youth, urban)

"The state asks citizens to vote claiming that it is a common right, but it does not guarantee citizens' simplest rights." (Marrakesh, men, youth, rural)

The main findings from the 24 focus groups are listed below:

- **Participants are concerned about employment, education, and health.** Participants' top three priority issues are employment, education, and health, which are consistent with the concerns identified by participants in NDI's March 2015 focus groups. In pointing to these three issues, participants highlight the need for increased government oversight of these sectors in order to reduce corruption and lack of accountability. Many participants routinely note the need for the government to eliminate practices such as teacher absenteeism and bribery in medical care. In addition to underlining the need to reduce corruption, participants also point to areas for improvement, suggesting that the government provide higher-quality public education and facilitate job creation in both the private and public sectors.

- **Perceptions of corruption heavily influence candidate selection.** Participants are concerned about the prevalence of corruption in a variety of sectors in Morocco, including housing, politics, and the legal system. Government authorities are often seen as failing to stymie corruption or even as complicit in it. As such, many participants across the board agree that integrity and honesty are key qualities they value in electoral candidates, since people with these characteristics are considered less inclined to engage in corrupt activities.
- **Participants believe women would be strong electoral candidates.** A notable number of participants describe women politicians as more honest and reliable than their male counterparts. Participants' gender is not a significant factor in determining their attitudes toward women elected officials; men and women express an equal amount of support for women politicians, with a number of participants stating that they want to see more female candidates. Participants also say that women are particularly well-equipped to work on education and healthcare, two of the priority issues that citizens identified.
- **Participants are seeking candidates who are trustworthy, prioritize citizen needs, and can implement campaign promises.** When asked to identify the most important traits they seek in electoral candidates, participants say they want empathetic, honest candidates who understand and will be committed to citizens' problems. Candidates from participants' communities or from lower-class backgrounds are seen as particularly appealing by many participants. The desired candidate qualities cited by participants often correlate to characteristics that would allow them to resolve issues of citizen concern. For instance, participants are dismayed that elected officials do not deliver on their election promises; accordingly, many seek candidates who, unlike current officials, would be able to deliver on their pledges.

FINDINGS

Expectations of Parliamentary Candidates

Most groups demonstrate knowledge of the upcoming parliamentary elections, with a slight tendency for urban and male participants to be more aware. There is a strong consensus across all groups on the factors that most influence participants' decisions of whether to support a candidate for parliament. The predominant candidate attributes sought by participants are integrity, commitment to the public interest, and effectiveness. First, candidates who demonstrate honesty and trustworthiness are heavily favored, as they are seen as less likely to take part in corrupt practices. To this end, participants value candidates who have established reputations and who have not participated in criminal activities in the past. Some participants share complaints about elected officials participating in vote-buying during campaigns or seeking to enrich themselves while in office. Candidates who receive participants' votes are expected to govern with a commitment to transparency and accountability. When asked to describe an ideal candidate, participants often name someone that they

know personally such as a neighbor, family member or friend. They also voice admiration for a range of local, national, and global leaders and explain these choices based on preferences for decisiveness, effectiveness, and proximity to citizens.

“Yes, we only vote for the person who we know, and we don’t vote for someone that we don’t know.” (Oujda, women, adult, rural)

“For example, if the woman who provides us with water is elected, we would vote for her. Because we trust her and know her.” (Rabat, women, youth, rural)

“[I would vote for someone who is] known among us so that we know he is trustworthy.” (Marrakesh, men, adult, urban)

Second, more appealing candidates also demonstrate their commitment to placing citizens’ needs first. Participants seek candidates who grew up in the same community as themselves, believing they will better understand their problems. Candidates with lower-class backgrounds are particularly desirable. There is a longing for candidates to demonstrate empathy, showing voters that they can place themselves in their shoes. A crucial step for candidates seeking to prove their commitment to citizens is to make themselves visible outside of electoral campaigns. MPs’ tendency to only engage with citizens during elections and to disappear after assuming office is a prime source of participants’ profound mistrust of politicians. Participants also admire candidates who are polite, kind, and modest.

“We want our representative in the parliament to be from our category, from the same level, someone who suffered from our problems and can know our demands.” (Rabat, women, adult, urban)

“[A candidate] needs to be close to all different classes, which means poor people, so that he can understand their problems and feel their suffering, because people who live in big houses and lock their cars can’t understand their struggles.” (Marrakesh, men, youth, rural)

“First, [a candidate] needs to have a spirit of citizenship in order to serve his country.” (Casablanca, men, youth, urban)

The third essential quality for candidates to win participants’ support is effectiveness in fulfilling campaign promises. Not only do participants disapprove of how elected representatives become less visible in their communities after elections, but they feel that politicians further disappoint citizens by failing to follow through on their electoral platform pledges. Participants therefore seek candidates who are more likely to contribute to genuine change. As such, participants attribute high importance to candidates’ educational level and public speaking skills. They also believe that candidates who are new to politics are better-positioned to implement fresh, creative ideas.

“I promised myself not to [vote] again after the false promises I heard from the previous candidate to rebuild roads, markets and build schools, and after the elections we have seen nothing.” (Tangier, women, youth, rural)

“[Candidates’] behavior changes after elections and all promises fade away: fixing roads, building schools and eliminating unemployment...” (Fes, women, youth, rural)

“I’m not going to vote for someone who makes a lot of promises because he won’t be able to fulfill all those promises. If he gave me only two or three and I saw that they are logical to implement, I will vote for him. A lot of promises is evidence of lying.” (Marrakesh, men, youth, rural)

Participants are divided on whether certain demographic characteristics would make them more or less likely to support a candidate for parliament. In terms of socioeconomic background, for example, affinity for candidates with lower-class backgrounds was more common. This trait was associated with empathy and awareness of hardships associated with poverty. A minority of participants argue, however, that wealthier candidates would not need to accept bribes. While the majority of participants agree that a candidate’s age was less relevant, significant minorities exhibited a preference for youth candidates (for new ideas and energy) or older candidates (for experience). The desire to see more young candidates is expressed by younger and older participants alike. A sizeable portion of participants—both men and women—say that gender was also irrelevant in determining their support for candidates.

“[A candidate] had better be from the poor as well, to feel their problems.” (Oujda, women, youth, urban)

“It does not matter if [a candidate] is young or old, what matters is that he does his duty as it should be.” (Tangier, men, youth, urban)

“[A candidate] must be young so that he can understand young people because they are the first harmed category in the community.” (Casablanca, women, youth, rural)

The traits that would dissuade participants from voting for a certain candidate tend to reflect the opposites of the desired characteristics: candidates who are dishonest, corrupt, unknown, uneducated, selfish, unable to fulfill promises, distant from citizens, and inaccessible. Participants worry in particular about elected representatives stealing public funds; they share examples of politicians using their offices to enrich themselves. They also reject politicians who appear to view themselves as superior to citizens. Beyond these qualities, some unique ideas for undesirable attributes also emerged. In nearly every group, participants identify alcoholism, or to a lesser extent drug addiction, as a negative quality linked to unreliability and forgetfulness. A criminal past is also commonly associated with a tendency for corrupt behavior.

“I will not vote for someone who repeated his promises for the second time and did not implement them the first time.” (Casablanca, women, youth, rural)

“All characteristics we have seen in [candidates] and that made us trust them fade away right after elections. This is why we lost trust in anybody.” (Oujda, men, youth, rural)

“If [a candidate] is addicted to alcohol, I will not vote for him. Because an alcohol addict cannot solve our problems or treat us well. He will despise us.” (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

“I will not vote for someone who bribes. Someone who starts his journey with cheating, what are we going to expect from him when he takes the position?” (Marrakesh, women, adult, rural)

To explore attitudes toward women candidates in particular, participants were first asked to list characteristics that women in general tend to exhibit. The bulk of these responses center on attributes that could be considered either neutral or positive. Many participants speak of how women display traits such as tenderness, sensitivity, and patience by fulfilling traditional household responsibilities. For some, these qualities translate into political strengths such as empathy and ability to compromise. A significant share of participants believe that women politicians are more honest, trustworthy, hard-working, and reliable than men. However, some participants, particularly men, counter that both men and women are equally likely to exhibit these attributes. For example, they contend that being a woman does not make a politician any less likely to be corrupt. A small number of participants—almost exclusively men—attribute negative qualities to women in terms of intellect and emotional stability.

“A woman is a mother. She is everything. A woman is the foundation of the community.” (Rabat, women, youth, rural)

“When we go to a school or to a public facility, we face neglect from all men, unlike women, who value and appreciate a citizen.” (Casablanca, men, adult, rural)

“A woman can keep her promises compared to a man because a woman is naturally affectionate and has a soft heart.” (Marrakesh, men, adult, urban)

In considering women’s engagement in Moroccan politics, some participants express a particular desire for more women candidates, pointing to the strengths described above. Support for women as politicians is equally present in male and female focus groups. Participants are highly consistent in asserting that women’s strengths prepare them for successful policy-making in the health and education sectors. They defend this view by pointing to women’s proximity to these issues in their daily lives as caretakers of children. Women’s perceived tendency toward patience and tenderness is viewed as an asset for making gains in education and health, respectively. A smaller number of participants feel that women are less well-suited for political office and focus on household roles. Some support more public roles for women but are pessimistic that they can overcome cultural and political barriers to success.

“Maybe [a woman can excel in] health and education. Because a woman always aspires to give her kids a good education and the most important thing for her is the health of her kids and family.” (Oujda, women, youth, urban)

“The woman has a significant role when it comes to educating her kids. The man is busy. The woman takes the responsibility of the house and it includes education.” (Rabat, men, adult, rural)

“[A woman] is comfortable when her husband is working and her kids are educated. A woman feels these issues more than a man does.” (Fes, women, adult, urban)

Evaluation of Priority Issues

Unemployment

When asked to identify the issues that most affect Moroccan citizens in their daily lives, participants consistently name three priorities: unemployment, education, and health. Unemployment is a top-of-mind issue that receives more attention from participants than any other issue. For participants, the government bears primary responsibility for reducing unemployment by creating jobs and better preparing Moroccans for employment. Participants suggest a range of potential government-led measures. They hope that the government will ensure equal chances for Moroccan job applicants by tackling favoritism and corruption, though they struggle to pinpoint concrete strategies for doing so. Foreign investment is the most commonly mentioned means of creating private sector jobs; participants call on the government to incentivize investment by lowering taxes, offering land to foreign firms, reducing red-tape, and creating free industrial zones. Other participants see a government role in assisting small businesses and establishing cooperatives (particularly in rural areas for handicrafts, and for women). Public sector jobs are viewed as more secure and desirable. Participants think that public sector jobs can be created by building schools and hospitals, removing corrupt civil servants, loosening hiring criteria, and ensuring fairness in recruitment exams. To improve job applicants’ prospects, participants expect the government to reform the educational system so that it provides the skills most sought by employers, and to expand vocational training programs. Participants believe that the government should expand unemployment insurance for citizens unable to find jobs.

“We should let the foreigners invest in the country....These investments will create job opportunities and will decrease the rate of unemployment.” (Marrakesh, men, youth, rural)

“[The government should] establish professional training centers for young people who dropped out of school to save them from theft and crime.” (Rabat, women, youth, rural)

“[The government should] lower taxes on companies to encourage them and create job opportunities for young people.” (Oujda, men, youth, rural)

Participants who rank unemployment as the most important issue facing Moroccans argue that a job is the foundation for achieving a better life. Employment is linked to Moroccans’ abilities to stay healthy, support families, pursue better education, find housing, and maintain psychological well-being. If only they had a job, say many participants, they could provide for themselves and require little from the government. Young participants view their capacity to become independent—by obtaining housing and getting married—as entirely dependent on securing a job. In arguing for the central importance of employment as a policy issue, participants list the negative societal outcomes of

high unemployment: poverty, crime, drug usage, psychological problems, school drop-outs, and suicide. Insecurity is seen as a direct result of an inability to provide for oneself and one's family due to long-term unemployment. Participants view these phenomena as disproportionately affecting young people.

"Employment and housing are constitutional rights. If the employment issue is fixed, housing and education will be fixed too." (Oujda, men, adult, urban)

"Some people have to steal to feed their kids because they did not find an alternative and did not find a job after a long search." (Fes, women, youth, rural)

"Unemployment and illegal work drives young people to delinquency, because they are tired of being deprived of their rights and saying nothing about the injustice they face." (Casablanca, women, adult, urban)

Participants have a strong desire to work and are exasperated over the lack of jobs in Morocco. In seeking to understand the unemployment phenomenon, they identify two trends: an overall shortage of jobs in the economy and an inability of qualified candidates to find employment due to favoritism in the hiring process. According to this view, Moroccans' potential as workers is going to waste due to unfavorable economic conditions and unjust hiring practices. Most participants assert that to be hired, Moroccans either need to pay a bribe or have personal connections to the employer. Participants are particularly perplexed and dismayed by the high rate of unemployment among university graduates; their opinions suggest an expectation that higher education should guarantee subsequent employment. The inability to find a job after completing university leads Moroccans to feel humiliated and cheated, and to question the utility of education. More broadly, participants are troubled by exploitative employment practices, such as unregistered "under-the-table" labor, refusal of benefits, underpayment, and recruitment of underage workers.

"People who go to companies need a connection to be hired. They fire him from the door, why? Because he does not have someone from the family who is a minister to help him. What would people like him do? Should they beg? People have qualifications but do not find a job when they are looking or they are forced to work for a small income in order not to have to beg." (Oujda, men, adult, urban)

"Some company owners exploit the need of the employee for a job and make him work without any document to prove that. Besides, they do not give the salary he deserves. And if he tries to defend his rights, they will fire him." (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

"We aspire to find a job right after having a degree. But our ambition breaks down when we see people before us who studied, got degrees and could not find a job." (Casablanca, women, youth, rural)

Education

Another primary issue of concern for participants is education. In participants' view, improving public education should be a government-led process. To hold teachers accountable for their actions, a large

number of participants call for greater government oversight of the public education system. The most commonly offered solutions are random inspections and installation of cameras in classrooms. Participants believe that punishing teachers for violations will set an example that will improve behavior more widely. There is also a high demand for profound, comprehensive reforms that center on redesigning the curriculum for greater consistency and relevance, reshaping teaching methods, and investing more resources in public education. These resources would be used to build more schools, train teachers on pedagogical best practices and specialized subjects, increase teacher salaries to incentivize public sector teachers, enhance security, expand student transport, and assist families in purchasing school supplies. Participants call on the government to assign qualified civil servants and experts to oversee educational reforms.

“The Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training must supervise and punish every teacher who exhibits [unacceptable] behavior.” (Casablanca, men, adult, rural)

“[Schools should] be monitored continuously and the institution shouldn’t be aware of inspectors’ arrival.” (Marrakesh, women, youth, urban)

“If we had free school transport, our children wouldn’t drop out of school.” (Oujda, women, adult, rural)

Participants emphasize the importance of education, linking successful schooling to employment, poverty reduction, security, national progress, and the success of future generations. Subpar education is seen as a direct cause of poverty and unemployment. For other participants, weaknesses in education lead students to drop out and pursue drugs and crime. Improvements to the educational system can help the country advance in a positive direction and ensure a better future for younger generations. The benefits of a strong education, in participants’ view, multiply throughout society by fostering a more civically engaged, ethically conscious, and reform-minded citizenry. Education is also seen as a cure for corruption.

“If a person is educated, his thinking will be mature, he will grow up. There will no longer be unemployment, bribery, crime or anything.” (Fes, men, adult, rural)

“Thanks to education, the fate of our children and youngsters will be defined. If they receive a good education, they will benefit their parents and country. And if not: delinquency, drugs and theft will be their fate.” (Rabat, women, adult, urban)

“If a person got educated, he will be a useful member of society, will be able to get a job, and from here, poverty and ignorance and many problems will be eliminated.” (Oujda, women, adult, rural)

In identifying the main weaknesses of the Moroccan educational system, participants most often refer to disreputable teacher behavior, flaws in the curriculum, and deficiencies in the educational environment. For participants, these issues plague the public education system and make private education an automatic choice for families with sufficient money. In most groups, participants criticize teachers for failing to prioritize students’ learning, exhibiting behavior such as

absenteeism, neglect of students, and corruption. Participants attribute this to low teacher salaries, insufficient training, lack of oversight and inspection, and occasionally, undisciplined students. The public educational curriculum is viewed by participants as incoherent and irrelevant for the Moroccan context, unable to provide students with skills that align with employers' needs.

Participants refer to a self-perpetuating cycle where quality education can only be found in private schools, which are only accessible to households with higher incomes. According to some participants, efforts to improve education are irrelevant until more jobs are available; until then, the notion that education raises one's odds of finding employment is misleading. Public schools are plagued by an array of resource shortages and environmental flaws. Most important among them are: a high student-to-teacher ratio with multiple grade levels taught simultaneously in some classrooms; a lack of school transport (particularly in rural and low-income areas); dirty and outdated classrooms; and insufficient security that enables crime to flourish. Participants with children complain that students are falling behind and are unable to meet average benchmarks for reading and writing. There is also concern over further privatization of education and the ability of private schools to attract better teachers. Participants feared that the increased focus on private education would create competition for public schools.

"They must reconsider the education system in our country. The alarm has sounded, because it became a failed system producing unemployed generations." (Tangier, women, youth, rural)

"We used to sit in the classroom and feel that we are in a prison; we have been beaten just because we didn't do our homework." (Marrakesh, men, adult, urban)

"I take my daughter to school and I worry about her. I trust no one, not even the teacher. I worry about kids that are her age. I worry about that fact that she might be raped inside of the school. The fences of the school are destroyed and anyone can enter, there are no cameras, no security agents..." (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

Health

Health represents the third and final top priority for participants. Good health is cherished by participants as a foundation of a happy life. Participants describe how poor quality, unaffordable, or inaccessible health care imposes a heavy toll on families' abilities to subsist financially during times of illness or need. For participants, the primary way to remedy the wide range of shortcomings in the public health system is through significantly greater government oversight. To increase accountability, a large number call on the government, and Ministry of Health in particular, to implement random, unannounced hospital inspections and to install cameras. Some suggest that hospitals should install customer service counters to receive patients' complaints. In addition, participants expect the government to build more hospitals and hire more doctors and staff; adopt laws to mandate best practices for patient care; and lower the cost of health care and medications. There is some hope that Moroccan hospitals can learn from the best practices of other countries' health systems.

“The health minister must be pressured to make adjustments, consider the status of hospitals, and have inspectors to look at the factual situation.” (Tangier, men, youth, urban)

“[The government] should send people to supervise hospitals without their knowing. For example, use hidden cameras.” (Oujda, women, youth, urban)

“[They should] hire a social assistant inside of the hospital to receive citizens’ complaints in case they do not receive good care.” (Marrakesh, men, adult, urban)

In evaluating the public health sector, participants are outraged by the pervasive corruption witnessed in hospitals. Across all groups, participants are incensed over the bribes that they pay to receive care at each step of a hospital visit, from security guards all the way to doctors. Participants speak of the humiliation of waiting for hours to be seen while others bypass queues by bribing hospital staff. Mothers in the groups describe how they were required to pay bribes when giving birth. Nurses receive particularly harsh criticism for exploitative behavior.

“There is also bribery in hospitals, the nurses let the people who give bribes go first even if other people came before him.” (Marrakesh, men, adult, urban)

“Hospitals ask for bribes and nepotism to deliver treatment. We are all Moroccans and equal, poor or wealthy, old or young. We should be treated equally in public places. We should fight discrimination. They give the priority to people with money.” (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

“If you do not give bribes in hospitals, you will not be able to give birth. Even if a woman dies they will not pay attention to her.” (Rabat, women, youth, rural)

Beyond corruption, participants’ comments depict a deteriorating public health system where a number of obstacles inhibit adequate care. Wait times for appointments can be as long as several months and participants claim that appointments are not made based on need. Rural participants have particular difficulty accessing hospitals. Hospitals themselves suffer from poor hygiene, lacking and deteriorating equipment, insufficient supplies, minimal security, and under-staffing. Participants are frustrated by the inaccessibility of doctors and overreliance on interns or trainees. They describe hospitals as hostile environments where employees treat patients with disdain or superiority. Private hospitals are unanimously seen as offering superior care and participants are irritated by public hospital doctors’ ability to simultaneously work in private hospitals.

“We find in public hospitals emergency cases of young men that require intervention as soon as possible while the doctor and the nurses are checking their Facebook feed on their mobile phones.” (Fes, men, youth, urban)

“There is one hospital. The city is growing and the hospital is the same. A million people in one hospital. That hospital has sections; you find one or two doctors in each section. My wife went to the hospital and found only one doctor.” (Oujda, men, adult, urban)

“We suffer from neglect and marginalization in hospitals despite the severity of the cases. They do not pay attention to us.” (Rabat, women, youth, rural)

The cost of health care is also a top concern for participants of all socioeconomic classes, who tend to find both care and medication to be prohibitively expensive. Participants are divided over the impact of the government-led Medical Assistance Program (Régime d’Assistance Médicale or RAMED), designed to provide more affordable care to Moroccans with the lowest incomes. Supporters commend the government’s intent to help the poor and some share personal anecdotes about how their costs have decreased. The government also receives praise for its effort to lower the price of medications. Other participants, however, point to flaws in the execution of the RAMED program, such as: insufficient coverage of costs or applicability to certain medications; difficulty scheduling appointments; hospitals neglecting RAMED enrollees; and ineligible (higher-income) people benefiting illegally.

“The state designated the RAMED card to help and support people in need. The strange thing is that people who benefit from it are wealthy and not in need.” (Fes, women, adult, urban)

“We have the RAMED card but when we go to see a doctor, he gives us a prescription that costs up to 500 dirhams. Why was it called RAMED if it does not allow us to get medication?” (Casablanca, women, youth, rural)

“[Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane] suggested the RAMED card solution and implemented it. It was very effective. It helped the poor class very much and they were able to be treated for free and get medication.” (Rabat, women, youth, rural)

Other Priority Issues

Housing

Housing represents another issue commonly raised by participants, with several asserting that living in adequate housing is a fundamental right of Moroccan citizens. For many young people, this means living independently from their parents; for poorer participants, it means ensuring decent living conditions. In terms of solutions, participants hope for government assistance to provide loans and lower rates, improvements to social housing, and the offering of mortgage-like options where monthly payments eventually lead to property ownership. For many participants, obtaining a house is a first step toward establishing a successful independent life; this is especially pertinent to youth seeking to be married or have children. When participants discuss the importance of housing, they invoke a sense of safety and stability for them and their children. Participants deplore the high cost of housing, asserting that modest salaries cannot keep pace with high rental rates and interest rates on loans. As a result, many participants report having little remaining disposable income after paying housing expenses. They explain that social housing provided by the government is also too expensive, inconveniently located, marked by high eligibility requirements, and rife with corruption. Participants

also speak of the poor quality of their current housing, particularly in low-income areas where participants describe shantytowns where large families occupy one room.

“I suffer from the problem of housing and I cannot afford the loans that banks require. They ask twice the original price of the house. Moreover, despite all this, it is only public housing.” (Rabat, men, youth, urban)

“We live in houses that are about to fall apart. We suffer from anxiety every day. We sleep expecting to die at any moment.” (Marrakesh, men, adult, urban)

“[The government] must facilitate things so that everyone can benefit from social housing. Not everybody who is working have the papers to prove it.” (Oujda, men, adult, urban)

Cost of Living

Participants feel that their purchasing power has declined significantly due to rising costs of staple goods such as food and fuel, as well as utilities such as water and electricity. A widespread sentiment exists among participants that with the little disposable income they have remaining after health and housing expenses, they are having difficulty maintaining their standard of living due to rising prices, with lower classes suffering the most. Some express concern about covering costs during the Ramadan holiday. Electricity and water prices are most commonly mentioned and are seen as increasing on a monthly basis regardless of usage. There is suspicion in particular of billing by electric utility companies, with participants alleging that the calculation of costs does not correspond to usage. A few participants draw a connection between rising prices and the government’s reduction of subsidies. It is challenging for participants to brainstorm solutions to this issue aside from raising salaries. Some call for greater accountability for those fixing prices. Discontent over high prices is a nationwide phenomenon, but is felt most acutely among participants in Tangier and Fes.

“The family man has a small income and he is the only provider for that family. He spends his salary on water, electricity and rent bills. He is left with nothing to survive.” (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

“We have limited incomes. Everything is expensive, vegetables. A poor person when he does not find something to eat, he cooks onions and tomatoes. Now they cost 15 dirhams. The farmer sells it for five dirhams and they sell it for 15 dirhams.” (Fes, men, adult, rural)

“Our purchasing power does not allow us to pay 100 dirhams for flour, 5 dirhams for lentils. How can we survive?” (Casablanca, women, youth, rural)

Infrastructure

Participants relate the quality of infrastructure to their ability to stay healthy, travel between rural and urban areas, and ensure their children can go to school. They hope that the government will invest greater attention in improving the infrastructure systems used every day by citizens. Participants are discouraged by the quality and durability of infrastructure in Morocco, notably roads, water, and

electricity. These opinions are most pronounced in low-income and remote areas where participants explain how roads deteriorate rapidly with rain, resulting in more dangerous travel and frequent accidents. Low-income participants also struggle with a lack of running water and electricity, particularly in rural areas, with women raising the issue more often than men. In Tangier, rural participants walk to a local water source at night to avoid long lines. Participants in a rural area outside of Rabat rely on the charity of a nearby landowner to obtain water. Sewage systems in these areas are also non-existent or dysfunctional. In higher-income and urban areas, participants are more prone to focus on the weak state of infrastructure in schools and hospitals.

“In winter, students cannot go to school because of mud that accumulates in roads, which are not appropriate for transport because they are in deplorable condition.” (Fes, women, youth, rural)

“We get water only from a wealthy man. He provides it to the local residents. If this man leaves, we will be permanently without water.” (Rabat, women, youth, rural)

“We suffer from pollution because the area lacks sewage canals which leads to a lot of garbage and dirtiness in the streets. The local residents don’t have the money to dig a hole and use it instead of sewage canals.” (Marrakesh, women, adult, rural)

Transport

The minimal availability and poor reliability of transport options also evoke concern among participants. They voice frustration with inconsistent or overcrowded public transportation systems that prevent them from arriving at work on time. Rural areas are marked by dissatisfaction with the lack of transport to cities for residents and students. In remote areas outside of Fes, Oujda, and Rabat, participants walk several miles to bus stops and residents resort to hitchhiking, raising safety issues, particularly for young students. These transport issues impinge on participants’ lives in several ways, preventing them from: finding and holding jobs, continuing education through secondary school, traveling in safety, and accessing hospitals.

“Buses are late. For example, to be at work at 8 AM, you need to leave the house at 6 AM to be on time.” (Tangier, men, adult, rural)

“The school is far from the neighborhood we live in, about 3 km. So we have to get up early and go on foot. The road is full of construction and we are girls; we are exposed to rape and robbery at any moment.” (Casablanca, women, youth, rural)

“Many women are robbed in the streets every day because they lack a means of transport which makes them return home late.” (Casablanca, men, adult, rural)

Security and Drugs

While some participants are satisfied that Morocco is more stable and secure than other countries in the region, others encounter insecurity in their daily lives, often undetected by authorities. Participants assert that unemployment causes more frequent criminal behavior in their neighborhoods such as theft, robbery, and rape. They conclude that a general lack of trust has taken hold in Moroccan society. Women report being afraid to be outside of their homes at night. Many participants worry about more widespread drug use among Moroccans, which they attribute to unemployed individuals and school drop-outs. They credit a range of societal ills to drug use and trade, such as anti-social behavior, crime, and domestic violence.

“A woman can’t go out alone and go to a place alone because she is scared. She just goes with a group.”
(Oujda, women, adult, rural)

“The young man finds himself without an education or employment....He is forced to use drugs that will make him forget his problem.” (Casablanca, men, adult, rural)

Cross-Cutting Issues

In all groups regardless of demographic, several common themes emerge that cut across these priority issues:

Corruption

According to participants in all groups, corruption permeates Moroccan public institutions and services with detrimental effects on citizens’ well-being. Participants often object to the need to pay bribes to accomplish simple administrative tasks such as obtaining an identification card, birth certificate, or housing permit. Corruption in public administration angers participants, who feel that they are paying for services that are basic citizen rights. Authorities who are associated with the three most important policy issues—unemployment, education, and health—are seen by participants as plagued by corrupt practices. In this view, bribes represent a tool for wealthier individuals to bypass otherwise merit-based or need-based transactions, such as hiring, educational exams, and medical appointments. As lower-income individuals cannot afford bribes, they are viewed as a form of class discrimination. Participants also refer to corruption in politics (vote-buying, clientelism), justice (impunity for bribe-paying criminals), and policing (bribery to avoid fines). These issues provoke acute resentment and frustration among participants, who assert that corruption is degrading public services, corroding trust among citizens, and stalling national progress.

“If the Moroccan citizen has connections in this country, he will be able to live easily. Otherwise, he will get beaten, suppressed and marginalized no matter how educated and cultured he is and no matter how many degrees he has.” (Marrakesh, men, youth, rural)

“It is unbelievable that I am a Moroccan citizen and I cannot have my ID without bribing.” (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

“Bribery created hatred between social classes where a poor person hates a wealthy person because he takes over his rights.” (Fes, men, youth, urban)

Mirroring the solutions offered for the priority issues above, participants point to greater government oversight as the most effective response to corruption. They believe this can be accomplished through inspections, cameras, and government-appointed commissions. To set an example for other wrongdoers, those found guilty of corruption should receive harsh sentences. There are extremely few references to the role of the media or civil society in promoting transparency and accountability. Some participants attribute equal responsibility for corruption to citizens and assert that these practices would cease if people refused to pay bribes. Participants believe that experienced politicians and older civil servants are more likely to be corrupt, and as such should be replaced by younger Moroccans. Some speculate that civil servants are simply taking bribes to make ends meet, and that an increase in public sector salaries would reduce the need for bribery.

“The state must increase salaries of public employees so that they will not need bribes in exchange for their work.” (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

“Citizens must also report every employee who asks for bribes in return for something he has the right to have.” (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

“The citizen must claim his rights and not be silent when they ask him for bribes and expose the briber.” (Tangier, women, youth, rural)

Gender

Male and female participants alike feel that Moroccan society prevents women from reaching their full potential. Women receive praise for their commitment to household and child-raising responsibilities, and for exhibiting qualities of tenderness, patience, and sensitivity, discussed in greater detail below in terms of political strengths. Yet a range of participants—mostly women but with some support from men—describe women as marginalized and isolated. The most common evidence cited by participants is that well-educated women are not able to find work due to the lack of job opportunities and access to transport and childcare. These issues are particularly salient in rural areas, where women feel especially isolated. Participants hope that government efforts to create cooperatives or provide loans to support small businesses would stimulate employment among women. Women’s daily lives are also marked by verbal and physical harassment in public, a trend which some see as a worsening, and by violence at home.

“A woman is marginalized in our area and oppressed. She has no value.” (Fes, women, youth, rural)

“The rural woman suffers from marginalization and neglect by society, she does not have a role or importance in society and she suffers from a lot of problems.” (Oujda, women, adult, rural)

“Women are the most harmed category in the community.” (Casablanca, women, adult, urban)

Youth

Many of the problems identified by participants are deemed to affect young Moroccans in unequal measure. Older and younger participants alike worry about a lost generation that is unable to gain a foothold in life as independent, successful adults. This phenomenon begins with inadequacies in the Moroccan educational system that deter attendance and encourage drop-outs, limiting employment prospects. Young people who receive diplomas are still far from guaranteed to receive employment, particularly in their desired sector. Without jobs, they are unable to secure their own housing, which limits prospects for marriage and raising families. According to participants, the resulting sense of disappointment and hopelessness drives young people—particularly men—to drugs, crime, and extremism. Older participants exhibit sympathy for young people’s predicament and tend to assign fault to Moroccan society rather than to youth themselves. Young people are seen as having fresh ideas and strong potential to contribute to Moroccan politics, workplaces, and society, but are limited by systemic obstacles.

“The young Moroccan man uses drugs to run away from the miserable reality he lives in this community. Unemployment is a main reason for this phenomenon. As for the girl, she heads towards corruption and drugs after getting tired of being harassed from bosses at work, in addition to her family problems.” (Tangier, women, adult, urban)

“Young people of today have ambition and goals, but find many obstacles that stop them from reaching them. Though a young man has degrees and diplomas from universities, he will not be able to have a job because his father is an ordinary man and has no value in the country. It frustrates young people’s prospects and breaks their psychology.” (Oujda, men, youth, rural)

“The majority of young people do not vote and they do not trust candidates or the government in general. They do not have any hope for change.” (Casablanca, men, youth, urban)

Poverty

Participants worry that economic and social trends are forming a country with severe poverty issues and greater class inequality. Amid rising prices, intractable unemployment, and stagnating wages, lower-income participants feel increasingly unable to make ends meet and provide for their families. They feel that their low quality of life—marked by sub-standard housing, bad health, poor education, and lack of transport—receives little attention from authorities or wealthier Moroccans. Higher-income participants are often concerned about the extent of poverty in their country. Across the groups, participants feel that Morocco’s middle class is being hollowed out as the poor get poorer and rich get richer. While unemployment is viewed as the main cause of poverty, corruption is often cited to explain how wealthier Moroccans are able to succeed economically. Participants believe that government efforts to expand employment and improve education could allow Moroccans to pull themselves out of poverty without receiving government handouts. In the absence of these changes, many participants expect more direct government assistance to make ends meet. In this environment,

participants also demonstrate particular admiration for individuals and politicians who show empathy and charity towards those affected by poverty.

“My friend lost her husband and she is alone. She and her daughter are alone and she is still young. She found some people to help her; she wanted to look for a job because she is not sure if these people will keep helping her or not. She wanted to take her daughter to school. She is looking for a school for her daughter and did not find someone to help her. Where does the state exist?” (Fes, women, adult, urban)

“If you do not have money in this country, you are oppressed. For example, if I go with the clothes I am wearing and sit next to someone who is well-dressed, everyone will keep looking at me in a weird way and I will be oppressed either when sitting, talking or anything.” (Fes, men, adult, rural)

“I also work for only three months per year and my family is waiting for me to spend money on them. So how does the income of only three months repay the expenses of my family? Therefore I’m forced to go to the market to buy and sell to have daily pocket money.” (Marrakesh, men, adult, urban)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As parties and candidates gear up for the upcoming parliamentary elections, they will need to promote political platforms and field parliamentary campaigns that resonate with Moroccan citizens. The focus group results demonstrate that Moroccan citizens are frustrated with what they view as endemic corruption, which exacerbates and entrenches poverty. Elected officials or government authorities with significant experience are often viewed as likely to engage in more corrupt practices, which in turn makes new, less experienced candidates more appealing. Moroccan citizens are looking for candidates who have the capacity to implement their proposed policy solutions, who will be committed to transparency, and who will focus on citizens' needs. This focus on the credibility of candidates and their policies, coupled with interest in candidates who are new to politics, incentivizes parties to reshape their campaigns, platforms, and candidate selections to match citizens' demands.

In order to launch campaigns and choose representatives that will mobilize citizen support both before and after the elections, NDI suggests that candidates and parties implement the following recommendations:

- **Highlight Specific Policy Options that Address Health, Education, and Employment Issues in Campaigns.** Participants' major areas of concern during this round of focus groups mirrored the issues they had articulated during the March 2015 focus groups administered by NDI. This consistency demonstrates that there is a sustained need for the government to take greater action to address the persistent issues of unemployment, healthcare, and education. Parties should therefore ensure that their electoral platforms include policies for reforming or improving these sectors.
- **Promote Feasible, Responsive Policies.** Participants express a preference for candidates who promote policies that address citizens' real needs. However, citizens are skeptical of promises that seem unrealistic; they reflect having been disappointed by officials who failed to implement electoral promises and stress the importance of having officials follow through with their pledges. To address this frustration, candidates should therefore identify citizens' actual needs and formulate matching policies, while ensuring that they are capable of implementing these promises. Once candidates are elected, parties should provide sustained policy implementation support to elected officials to ensure that they have the tools and skillset to legislate effectively.
- **Communicate Regularly With Constituents.** Participants exhibit a strong preference for candidates who had been visibly engaged with citizens outside of the campaign period. When describing their ideal candidates, participants typically name a personal acquaintance of theirs. Many participants say that they prefer candidates from their own communities, since they were more likely to understand local concerns. These demands underline the need for parties and elected officials to consistently communicate with constituents to demonstrate that they understand and are committed to citizen needs. By remaining present

in the community during the campaign period and once they are in office, elected officials and parties will be able to establish relationships with their constituents, allowing them to better identify, represent, and advocate for citizens' needs.

- **Highlight Perceived Strengths of Women and Youth Candidates.** While candidate gender alone is not a decisive factor in determining participants' support, a number of participants say that women's experience with child-rearing makes them particularly strong candidates for crafting policy in the health and education sectors. This is an especially compelling statement given that these issues are two of the top priorities listed by Moroccans. Many participants also say that women are less corrupt than men, a significant appraisal in light of participants' emphasis on honesty and accountability as desired candidate qualities. Similarly, a number of participants voiced support for electing younger Moroccans over more experienced elected officials, whom they view as more likely to be engaged in corrupt practices. Participants believe that Moroccan youth would have new, innovative ideas that could effect real change. Still, although both youth and women have the capacity to contribute positively to political life, these groups often face discrimination from Moroccan society. Political parties should accordingly work to support and empower their women and youth members in fielding candidacies through trainings, campaign funding, and list placement. Parties should strive to highlight these candidates' perceived strengths, both in terms of their personal credibility and in terms of their policy development expertise.

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PROFILES

The location, gender, age, and socioeconomic class (SEC)² for the 24 focus groups was as follows:

| Region | Urban Groups | Rural Groups |
|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Rabat | Young Men SEC- | Adult Men SEC+ |
| | Adult Women SEC+ | Young Women SEC- |
| Tangier | Young Men SEC+ | Adult Men SEC- |
| | Adult Women SEC+ | Young Women SEC- |
| Fes | Young Men SEC- | Adult Men SEC+ |
| | Adult Women SEC+ | Young Women SEC- |
| Oujda | Adult Men SEC+ | Young Men SEC- |
| | Young Women SEC+ | Adult Women SEC- |
| Casablanca | Young Men SEC+ | Adult Men SEC- |
| | Adult Women SEC+ | Young Women SEC- |
| Marrakesh | Adult Men SEC- | Young Men SEC+ |
| | Young Women SEC- | Adult Women SEC- |

² “SEC-” refers to lower-income participants, “SEC+” denotes higher-income participants