

“MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD”: TUNISIAN CITIZENS EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA
Conducted May 2-9, 2015

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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's 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

After a politically charged year in Tunisia that featured the adoption of a new constitution and a series of democratic elections, new political institutions and leaders are beginning to govern. The 217-member parliament, the Assembly of People's Representatives (ARP), first convened in December 2014. It proceeded to adopt internal rules and procedures, to form committees, and to begin to approve legislation. In early February, a cabinet formed by Prime Minister Habib Essid received the parliament's confidence. The government contains ministers representing four political parties and also includes independents. In addition, Béji Caïd Essebsi began his five-year term in December as President of the Republic with a constitutional mandate to handle defense, national security, and foreign affairs.

Purpose. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized this round of focus groups in May 2015 as the Essid government neared the milestone of its first 100 days. Since March 2011, NDI has conducted regular [qualitative research](#) in Tunisia to provide political and civic leaders with objective information about citizens' attitudes. This 13th round of research—the second organized by NDI since the 2014 elections—sought to gauge the public's evaluation of the performance of new political institutions and leaders in this initial post-electoral period, as well as expectations for the future. Citizens participated in 12 focus group discussions between May 2 and 9, 2015 to share their views on the following topics:

- The direction of the country and priorities that affect citizen's daily lives;
- The performance of the Assembly of Peoples' Representatives (ARP) and of the executive government;
- Expectations of members of parliament and preferences for elected representatives to engage with citizens;
- The causes of various economic challenges and potential solutions to remedy them; and,
- Views on the current security situation and the state's efforts to combat terrorism.

The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in four Tunisian governorates. ELKA is a marketing and public opinion research firm based in Tunisia. For NDI, the study represents the 13th in a series of focus group research in Tunisia dating back to March 2011.

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 comprised of a small number of participants, typically eight to 12 per group. Depending on the situation, however, groups may be slightly smaller or larger. For example, a women's group in a more isolated area may benefit from a larger guest list because it is likely that one or more of the participants will refuse to speak at length, even if pressed. Focus group findings are only 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 in early May 2015.

Method: From May 2 to 9, 2015, NDI held 12 focus groups with a total of 140 participants in four cities across Tunisia: Grand Tunis, Sfax, Kasserine, and Bizerte. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI divided participants at each location into three distinct demographic groups: 1) mixed gender youth (ages 24–35), 2) women over the age of 35, and 3) men over the age of 35. Each group comprised between nine and 12 participants. The gender breakdown was 51 percent men and 49 percent women. Participants were selected and pre-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions. Additional detail on participants' demographic profiles can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

Staffing and Logistics: The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in four cities across the country. A Tunisian citizen trained in focus group moderation techniques by NDI and ELKA served as the moderator for all focus groups in the series. All groups were conducted in the Tunisian dialect of Arabic.

Group Locations: The 12 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in four locations throughout Tunisia: Grand Tunis, Sfax, Kasserine, and Bizerte (see the map in this section). Locations selected for the study were urban or semi-urban areas. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location, and voting patterns in the 2014 elections. Grand Tunis was selected because it encompasses the capital and largest city of Tunis and its surrounding areas, and is the national center for public administration and commerce. Sfax, Tunisia's second-largest city, carries an economic importance as a hub for commerce and is also commonly referred to as the “capital of the South.” Kasserine, a rural governorate along the western border with Algeria, has been challenged by economic stagnation and, in recent years, terrorism. The northern-most governorate of Bizerte and its industrial port also represents an important economic center. 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.

MAP OF TUNISIA



One World Nations Online. July 2015.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings of this report provide insights into public opinions in Tunisia in early May 2015. Based on 12 focus group discussions with 140 Tunisian participants, the report evaluates Tunisian citizens' reactions to the new class of elected and appointed politicians ushered in by the 2014 elections, and their preferences for engagement with these leaders. The study also includes citizens' in-depth evaluations of the causes of economic and security challenges, as well as solutions to confront these problems. Also included are citizens' views on Tunisian youth and the particular obstacles that they face.

A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from participants, are detailed in the Principal Findings section of this report.

Direction of the country. Most participants in the study perceive Tunisia to be headed in the wrong direction, primarily due to the inability of politicians to confront economic problems. Participants are divided about whether the security situation has improved since the elections. The freedoms gained in the 2011 revolution are the aspect the most commonly cited as moving in the right direction, yet some participants worry that the state's response to terrorism is placing these rights in greater jeopardy.

The four cities in the study feature noteworthy differences in how participants evaluate the current situation and identify their priorities. In Bizerte and Sfax, participants are preoccupied with the economic situation, and seek greater attention for their cities from decision-makers in the capital, but largely feel safe. In contrast, Kasserine participants exhibit strong concerns about both terrorism and underdevelopment. In Tunis, participants have mixed feelings about their safety and tend to perceive the economic situation negatively.

Parliament. Participants aspire for members of parliament (MPs) to work hard on behalf of their constituents' interests, but do not believe that current parliamentarians are reaching these standards. For most participants, the parliament has achieved little since its inauguration and its members are far from fulfilling the promises made during the electoral campaign. A range of negative qualities are associated with MPs, such as absenteeism, self- or partisan interest, ineffectiveness, and fighting. As a result, participants describe how they are losing trust in the institution.

Most importantly, few participants believe that their MPs understand citizens' needs and are able to prioritize those needs over MPs' personal interests. The parliament and its members are therefore seen as unable to effectively represent citizens. Despite this, there is a strong desire among participants for more direct interaction with MPs. They

hope to meet MPs face-to-face to discuss their problems and to better understand how MPs' work in parliament can begin to bring solutions to the issues they face.

Government. Participants commend the government of Habib Essid for its efforts to improve security and for the increased visibility of ministers conducting site visits. Still, most participants assert that the government has accomplished little in its first 100 days. They see the government as having failed to make headway on tackling unemployment or inflation. Others argue that citizens need to grant the government more time to deliver on its promises.

Economy. For most participants, the declining economy represents the top national priority, with the issues of unemployment and inflation provoking the greatest concern. Participants are increasingly anxious about strikes, and frustrated with chronic corruption and underdevelopment. Nearly unanimously, they view the government as responsible for these problems and believe the solution requires the state to be more implicated in the economy.

Participants were asked to share their views on five economic challenges: unemployment, inflation, lack of investment, corruption, and the parallel economy. They link the high rate of unemployment to weaknesses in the educational system, the over-dependence on the public sector as a source of jobs, and the lack of investment. Inflation is seen to be caused by smuggling, monopolization, and higher costs of production; participants call on the government to closely oversee prices. Participants see the decline in investment as a result of insecurity, political instability, and strikes. Corruption is attributed to the behavior of citizens and public servants alike, and participants seek more transparency and accountability. Finally, the parallel economy is closely identified with smuggling and border corruption; for some, this parallel trade is a necessary livelihood for struggling citizens.

Security. After the March 18 attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis, participants feel the government has taken a more aggressive stance on combatting terrorism. Views are mixed over whether this approach is working, with some continuing to fear for their safety. Participants believe that Tunisians who participate in terrorism are motivated by money and a misinterpretation of Islam, but they disagree over whether lack of economic opportunity plays a role. They see security forces as a vital part of a short-term solution to combat terrorism, but believe that longer-term solutions involving equitable development, improved education, and moderate religion are equally necessary.

There are heightened concerns that the state's response to terrorism could include a restriction of the civil liberties gained in the 2011 revolution. Participants generally oppose the draft law for the protection of security forces on these grounds, fearing that

it would provide excessive leeway to the police and could even be counter-productive in the fight against terrorism.

Other citizen priorities. Participants worry about the deteriorating quality of the public education and health services in Tunisia, both of which create regular frustration among Tunisian families. The educational system is seen as unable to effectively prepare students for the demands of the labor market. Public hospitals, particularly in interior regions, are found to be lacking sufficient equipment and incapable of providing adequate service.

Youth. Unemployment is seen as the primary challenge facing young Tunisians today for it deprives them of the opportunity to establish economic independence. Instead, youth are seen to seek validation and entertainment through other outlets, some of which include drugs, violence, or terrorism. To reverse these trends, participants call on deep reforms to the educational system as well as initiatives that create avenues for youth to gain an economic foothold. For some, the solution must come from youth themselves.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

This study evaluates Tunisian citizens' evaluations of the situation facing the country several months after the conclusion of the 2014 electoral process and the assumption of new political leadership. NDI conducted 12 focus groups with 140 participants throughout Tunisia in early May 2015. The findings, drawn from participants' comments, are detailed below.

I. Direction of the Country

Participants worry that Tunisia is moving in the wrong direction. The most commonly cited issues supporting this view relate to the economy, in particular rising prices and enduring unemployment. Participants deem politicians to be responsible for the current economic challenges facing the country and unable to resolve them. Drawing a connection between current realities and politicians' campaign promises, participants describe their lack of faith in the political system's ability to deliver positive change. In comparison to past studies, there is a growing recognition among participants that citizens' behavior—for example through strikes or poor work ethic—also contributes to these problems. Some therefore conclude that citizens have a role to play in their solution.

A second concern represents what participants view as rising insecurity, particularly terrorism, which is seen as an impediment to progress in other areas such as the economy and tourism. Many participants recount being fearful in their daily lives about either terrorism or crime. Women participants are more likely to express these concerns than men. Some participants worry that the government's response to terrorism could include restrictions on the human rights obtained through the 2011 revolution. They associate the entrance of new political leadership with a loss of freedom of expression.

“The cost of living is going in the wrong direction. Everything has become expensive. There are strikes everywhere. Teachers' salaries are 1000 dinars but they are organizing strikes and getting pay rises. When someone goes on strike, he should be fired. Many people find the cost of living too high.”
Female, 26, Bizerte, employed

“So many problems should be solved. For example, hospitals and healthcare services should be improved, roads should be repaired, and police officers should talk to people with respect and without insults.”
Male, 32, Sfax, employed

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“We need security because the lack of security affects tourism, economy, and all the other sectors. In the past, Mount Chaambi¹ was a place where we could go. Now, it has become a symbol of terrorism. That's why I think that the most important issue is security.” Female, 25, Kasserine, student

“There is only talk in the media and in political platforms but nothing is real.... If you don't give citizens life essentials like employment, improvement in the standard of living and health care then how can they live?” Male, 45, Kasserine, employed

“What's wrong now is that the fallacies spread by the media and the false promises have made us doubtful of all parties and everything. We trust nothing and no one.” Male, 34, Tunis, employed

“We won liberty and lost many things. We gained freedom of speech and we lost everything else. We lost in terms of how expensive prices have become. One can't make a living anymore, we have lost everything. The decision makers and the people in charge are of course responsible.” Male, 48, Kasserine, employed

“You cannot openly and freely express yourself. During the revolution period and the coalition government or troika² period, we had more freedom of expression.” Female, 55, Sfax, homemaker

When asked to identify what is going right in the country, participants point to political and civic liberties, continuing a trend witnessed in prior studies. Freedom of expression in particular is seen as a direct result of the revolution, although there is an emerging tendency to worry about whether these freedoms will be protected in the future. The successful conduct of the 2014 elections and the peaceful transition of power to a new government are mentioned by a few participants as a positive step. Some participants argue that the security situation began to improve after the March 18 attack at the Bardo Museum in Tunis. They view this improvement as a result of what they see as the government's more concerted efforts to combat terrorism.

“Let's not be pessimistic. There are some advantages that resulted from the revolution, such as the freedom of expression. There are many facts that the media uncovered and that were hidden to us before. We used to live in a world of fiction which depicted Tunisia as the country of

¹ A national park in Kasserine governorate along the border with Algeria that has witnessed frequent terrorist activities in recent years.

² The three-party coalition government that held power following the 2011 elections is commonly referred to as the 'troika.'

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tomorrow; the country of welfare and progress. What we're living now is the outcome of the previous regimes which used to lie to us. The revolution revealed the truth: the infrastructure is not as strong and developed as they used to claim.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“After the Bardo attack, we have felt that [the government] is more vigilant. I noticed the important presence of the police forces when I went to Tunis.” Female, 52, Sfax, employed

“I think security has improved a little bit because police forces are getting our support now. I can see police patrols at night and in the streets of the city. They are working day and night. That is why I think that security is better now.” Female, 35, Sfax, employed

“The most important gain is freedom. We see freedom in the media, in our everyday life. Whether we use this freedom in the right way or not is a different issue but it's very important to feel this freedom.” Male, 29, Sfax, employed

“The major achievement is the elections. People realized that the elections are the only way to freedom so they won't give up this right anymore.” Female, 27, Kasserine, unemployed

“I think citizens' thinking has developed a lot concerning politics. They became aware of the importance of democracy and we'll never accept going back to tyranny.” Male, 34, Kasserine, employed

“Everyone can go to the mosque in the morning for El Fajr (dawn) prayer. This was not possible in the past.” Male, 48, Tunis, employed

Participants in Sfax place a high priority on the economic situation, particularly employment and prices. Despite their pride in the economic prowess associated with their city, participants evince anxieties about a declining local economy. They also harbor concerns about deteriorating infrastructure and worsening pollution. For many participants, an excessive centralization of public administration in Tunis limits the potential for Sfax to further develop economically, such as through greater investment in tourism. The city itself is also seen as heavily centralized in its downtown with few public institutions available to residents in outlying areas. Most participants perceive the city to be safe due to the visible presence of policemen and the lack of terrorism.

“If businessmen from Sfax wanted to they could have turned Sfax into the Dubai of Tunisia but all the investments are in the capital....In the past,

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they used to say that Sfax was the economic capital but now it's no longer an economic capital.” Male, 31, Sfax, employed

“We feel secure here. Everywhere you go you see policemen.” Female, 25, Sfax, employed

“Sfaxians are behind the success of Sfax. Were it not for the efforts of its citizens, Sfax would have been just like any other city in the far South.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

“I worked all over the country and I didn't find any security services as effective as the security service in Sfax.” Male, 32, Sfax, employed

“Our situation is bad because everything is centralized in the capital. I mean that all ministries and administrations are in the capital.” Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

“The problem in Sfax is that all administrations and services are in the center of Sfax city. Only recently have they created some administrations and services in the surrounding towns.” Male, 32, Sfax, employed

“We don't have tourism because we're not like cities on the coast. The government chose the life that we should live. For example, they didn't invest in tourism, they just created the chemical factory for example, and even the air we breathe is not clean. At least people who live on the coast can breathe clean air.” Male, 32, Sfax, employed

“Cleanliness is a priority. Once a circus came to the city of Sfax. We really enjoyed it. But when we got out of the circus, we came across rubbish. I had told my husband that inside the circus, we were in Europe. Outside of the circus, we are back in Tunisia and I am in Sfax.” Female, 35, Sfax, employed

Kasserine participants resent what they view as the results of the long-term marginalization of their region. They speak of decades of neglect at the hands of the government in Tunis that has resulted in the severe underdevelopment of the region, and the poor quality of its health services, education, and infrastructure. For many, the advent of terrorism in Kasserine in recent years represents the latest in a series of humiliations suffered by the city. Some lament how residents of Kasserine are seen by other Tunisians—and in media outlets—to be aiding terrorists. Suspicion of politicians is deeply felt among Kasserine participants, many of whom do not believe that there is a political willingness to address their problems.

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“Kasserine was already known for its problems. Now, we also have terrorism. They keep telling us that they were going to help the region but unfortunately you have terrorism. It’s just an alibi for the government because they don’t really want to help the region.” Male, 33, Kasserine, employed

“Kasserine is unlucky compared to other regions. We suffered during the revolution but we have gained nothing. We are the most affected but they still consider us accountable for terrorism whereas God knows who is behind it.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

“In Kasserine so many regions still don’t have access to drinking water. They keep promising that we’ll get drinking water but we’re still waiting. The situation is really unbearable.” Female, 25, Kasserine, student

“We have the logic of defeatism, too, the logic of giving in. This is a negative logic. We consider ourselves as inferior compared to people from the coastal areas.” Female, 36, Kasserine, employed

“Kasserine is in the last rank. It is unlucky. It did not get its share from investment and wealth distribution. It is forgotten.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

“In the constitution, there is supposed to be affirmative action [for interior regions] but actually these are only words. Kasserine has been neglected from the beginning. Kasserine was ignored from [President] Bourguiba to [President] Ben Ali and until now. Kasserine has always been looked down upon and completely neglected.” Male, 53, Kasserine, employed

“We are threatened by terrorism here in Kasserine. Once I went to the hospital in Tunis and the doctor told me ‘You’re from Kasserine so why come here for medical treatment?’ He also told me that we help the terrorists with food.” Female, 55, Kasserine, homemaker

In the capital, participants also believe that the country is on a negative path, particularly on economic issues. Participants demonstrate awareness of the problems that face other regions, particularly in the less-developed interior, but feel that Tunis faces its own set of challenges, such as overcrowding, corruption, and a lack of a strong community fabric. There is debate about whether Tunis is secure. Concerns about crime tend to be more elevated among Tunis participants, and the Bardo attack raised concerns that terrorist attacks may occur more regularly in the city in the future.

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“Things are the same everywhere. Expensive prices and hardships and unemployment are even getting to the North.” Male, 32, Tunis, employed
“There are fewer traffic jams and less pollution [outside of Tunis]. There is a better climate and a richer environment to live in. Maybe the cost of living is a little bit cheaper there. Also people are warmer and friendlier because they help and check on each other. At the same time there is a marginalization and higher unemployment rates and people have no means of entertainment....Everyone here is isolated with their doors closed. The heat here is unbearable. Here it is overcrowded.” Female, 25, Tunis, student

“Before, I used to leave my garden and house doors open, while feeling safe. Now, I am obliged to carry no more than 10 dinars with me so that I don't get killed.” Female, 63, Tunis, retired

“Citizens should get involved in municipalities. I am here in Tunis and I feel the drawbacks of centralization, so what would people from other regions feel?” Male, 26, Tunis, student

“The difference between the internal regions and the coastal ones in general is that people in internal regions don't call the police to solve the conflicts that happen between them while here there is a stronger connection with the security forces.” Male, 26, Tunis, student

“Organized crime is threatening everyone. There are stick-ups, kidnapping women from their husbands in the daylight, theft. For example yesterday a man lost his motorbike when he went to buy a loaf of bread.” Male, 40, Tunis, unemployed

“Since the breakdown of the revolution, I personally haven't needed to be accompanied by anybody. Besides, nobody has ever harmed me. I have been safe.” Female, 60, Tunis, homemaker

In Bizerte, most participants assess the current situation negatively, focusing on the local economy, which is seen as deteriorating due to lack of investment and attention from the capital. Participants speak with nostalgia about Bizerte's past economic weight, and believe strongly in the potential for the governorate to re-emerge as an economic hub. Many are concerned about Bizerte's aging infrastructure, in particular its unique drawbridge, as a restraint on economic growth. Bizerte participants generally feel that the city is safe.

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“Bizerte is one of the most strategic tourist spots in Tunisia. It is neglected by the government whose main focus is on Hammamet, Sousse, and the other coastal areas.” Female, 26, Bizerte, employed

“All politicians who come to rule the country consider Bizerte to be stable in comparison to the other regions which are full of problems. So, they put it on the bottom of the list of their priorities.... Fifteen years ago, it stopped developing due to that neglect.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“In comparison to other cities like in the interior or on the borders, Bizerte can be considered to be safe.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“I wanted to launch a project in Bizerte with an American partner. But on the day my partner came, he witnessed a problem at the drawbridge³ of the city. He asked me how we could invest in a city that depended on a bridge? Every time I remember that bridge I feel sick.” Male, 47, Bizerte, employed

“People emigrate from other regions to work in Bizerte. Bizerte’s jobs are taken by outsiders who will work under any conditions while Bizerte’s sons are jobless.” Female, 34, Bizerte, unemployed

“When you compare Bizerte to other interior regions, the situation here is much better. But when you compare it to other coastal areas, the situation is worse. If we want to improve the living conditions in Bizerte, we first need to focus on infrastructure. In the 1960s and 1970s Bizerte was one of the best regions in Tunisia.” Male, 47, Bizerte, employed

“The problem in Bizerte is the bridge and the investors who own many factories run away from Bizerte. I hope that they come back and we rely on the government to do this....Investment is the key to the problems.” Female, 29, Bizerte, employed

II. Parliament

Participants aspire for an effective parliament whose members are hard-working, transparent, and communicative. According to this vision, MPs would represent and defend the interests of their district’s constituents, and would take bold decisions to resolve priority issues. Some assign the parliament responsibility for drafting a new framework of laws in accordance with the 2014 constitution. Others expect the parliament to expose the government’s shortcomings and wrongdoings. These

³ A drawbridge in Bizerte spans a canal and provides maritime access to the lake of Bizerte.

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expectations are often conveyed through participants' criticisms of the current parliament and its members—their descriptions of the parliament's failures illustrate the role they had hoped the institution would play.

“The elected person is expected to make our voices heard. He has to be able to speak in the parliament, with the prime minister or elsewhere. He has to honor his promises. He got our trust; he saw what we have and what we lack. He has to convey our social situation, to talk about the jobless people, the disabled people, and people who cannot educate their children. We hope that others in the parliament hear him and our messages will be delivered to decision-makers.” Male, 53, Kasserine, employed

“I think that the relationship between the state and the people is the parliament. The public will trust the government through the parliament.” Male, 26, Tunis, student

“The whole country is in the hands of the members of parliament. We trusted those members and voted for them in order to represent us. Now, we're waiting for them and for what they're going to do. This doesn't mean that we're not satisfied with their work, action, activities, and achievement. If we say that they have failed, it's because we want them to improve their performance.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“An MP should be competent and have reformative ideas. They should be able to evaluate the work of the government and give advice, guidance, and monitoring. I think that their roles should be more effective. They should suggest projects to the government.” Male, 33, Tunis, employed

“I expect them to deal with the problem of joblessness, reduce the high cost of living and encourage investment.” Female, 29, Bizerte, employed

“The constitution is the achievement of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA)⁴. The role of the parliament is to implement the laws under this constitution. In addition, it should also execute the plans of the parties that won seats inside it. Each party should defend the platforms that led citizens to vote for them.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

⁴ The National Constituent Assembly (NCA) was elected on October 23, 2011 and was responsible for drafting Tunisia's new constitution. It ceded authority to the Assembly of People's Representatives after the October 26, 2014 legislative elections.

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“MPs have to reveal the truths and expose every defect. I am not pessimistic but I don't think their consciences can be awakened unless the citizens are active.” Female, 36, Kasserine, employed

A small number of participants are satisfied with how members of the new parliament have begun their work. One area of progress identified by some participants is security; participants point to the parliament's consideration of an anti-terrorism bill as an example of MPs' attention to the issue. Other participants find MPs' interactions with one another to be more respectful in comparison to their predecessors in the NCA. Participants in Tunis and Bizerte are more likely to believe in the parliament's potential to gain experience and improve its performance.

“The last five months in Kasserine were the same as it has always been during the last five years—nothing has changed. However the parliament made progress on security. Their decisions are 100% right.” Male, 36, Kasserine, employed

“Let's not forget that they divided themselves into committees. These committees are working on bills, some of them were passed, and others are still the subjects of debate.” Male, 62, Sfax, retired

“I don't want to be pessimistic. I think that there are things that are better now. There is more respect between MPs. We used to be deafened by the shouting and the quarreling of MPs. Now they are more respectful and they listen to each other.” Female, 30, Tunis, unemployed

“They're working on the law on terrorism. It's a plan and they're discussing it. This law is very important in that security is vital to building the country and attracting investments. Who dares to invest in a country which is attacked by terrorism?” Female, 39, Bizerte, employed

“Now, we see that [representatives] are more respectful because there is a parliament. Now, they care about the prestige of the state.” Male, 25, Kasserine, employed

“I am satisfied with those who attend the sessions of parliament because they provide us with information that we cannot get from TV or elsewhere, such as the information about the project of the bridge and how the final study will be ready in October....This kind of information can only be provided by the representatives of the regions. I speak of those who attend not those who serve their own interests.” Male, 27, Bizerte, unemployed

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“The current parliament is different from the NCA. There are MPs working hard nowadays especially the opposition. This is different from the MPs who used to attend just to agree on everything. Even the fights that occur during debates now are signs of a healthy parliament.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“I will not ask what they did but what they will do.... We should wait for more five years and then decide what there is and what is missing.” Male, 57, Tunis, retired

A strong majority of participants rate the parliament's performance to date as poor. They maintain that the parliament has achieved nothing in comparison to promises made by candidates during the 2014 elections. Participants criticize the parliament for its slow pace of work. Many participants say that they feel disconnected from the parliament and that they have lost trust in the institution. These views are held nationwide; however they are expressed the most fiercely in Kasserine. A small number of participants can imagine the challenges facing the parliament and urge fellow citizens to be more patient.

“It has been five months now and they have not put into practice any laws. They have worked only on their internal law, their salaries, and their cars. They serve only their personal interests. They have not done anything and we need something to be done because the situation of the country is crucial.” Male, 39, Tunis, employed

“I can't evaluate the legislative work unless I see achievements on the real ground....They haven't done anything even about the necessities of life, the infrastructure which is destroyed, the potable water which is cut every week....These things benefit the citizen so why don't they talk about it so that at least citizens are knowledgeable about everything that occurs in the region.” Male, 48, Kasserine, employed

“All I can say is that they're working so slowly. I also hope all the MPs attend the debates because they don't seem to be so committed.” Male, 62, Sfax, retired

“The country has gone into a ditch and the MPs are just watching.” Female, 58, Bizerte, homemaker

“I personally prefer the old parliament and president that were stealing from us while we were well off. At least we were able to eat, drink, and wear clothes, unlike now.” Female, 35, Tunis, homemaker

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“It's all about money. This proves that such representatives don't have anything to do with people, with the government, or the state. They just want to be elected to have a better future for themselves.” Male, 29, Sfax, employed

“Representatives are helping the government to lie to you. The MP that I elected to represent me, i.e. to help me and check and balance the government, is complying with the government. He doesn't say anything when the minister does wrong things to the detriment of the citizens.” Male, 72, Kasserine, retired

Participants attribute a wide range of negative characteristics to MPs. The most common include: absenteeism, self- or partisan interest, failure to fulfill promises, and fighting or otherwise divisive behavior. Many participants are aware of rates of absenteeism and discussions over MPs' compensation and benefits. In several cases, participants refer to examples from the NCA when evaluating the current parliament.

“There's a high rate of absenteeism in the parliament these days; many chairs are empty. These absences should be dealt with by the parliament's president or administration.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“The discussions in the parliament are just fights.” Female, 29, Sfax, homemaker

“A day's work takes an MP a month.” Male, 26, Tunis, student

“It is a shame to see that the room is empty during a plenary session while the MPs are just hanging around, conducting their personal affairs, or doing their other jobs like the lawyers whom you can see in the court at the same time a plenary session is taking place in the parliament.” Male, 69, Bizerte, retired

“Yesterday the members of parliament were fighting using their hands. Next time, they'll use weapons... They have so many duties and tasks to perform, but they're doing nothing.” Female, 63, Tunis, retired

“The seats are empty since their salaries are not affected by whether or not they attend.... Our meeting now maybe better than theirs as we are present here and we're discussing things. If you count the members who attend the sessions you will not find more than 21.” Male, 58, Kasserine, employed

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“There is no harmony between the MPs and they haven't kept their promises.... I think they are just playing a role.” Female, 25, Sfax, employed
“There are some MPs that who are sincere and reliable but there are also those who are preventing others from making any progress.” Female, 40, Sfax, homemaker

“We feel that our representatives have stronger relationships with their parties than with the problems of the region.” Male, 34, Kasserine, employed

Participants do not believe that the current parliament represents them. There is a pronounced sense of disconnect between the parliament and citizens' daily lives. Politicians are instead viewed as working toward their self-interest, unaware of the everyday problems that citizens face.

“MPs are the representatives of the people. But they do not know what the people want. They only care about their own interests and want to get as much as they can.” Female, 37, Tunis, employed

“I think the MPs are useless. If they let citizens talk about their own problems, it would be better. They haven't done anything. They are from Kasserine and when they go to the capital Tunis, they don't speak a word about it.” Male, 48, Kasserine, employed

“MPs represent me a little bit. One percent I would say. In some debates, I sometimes can see that an MP represents me when he or she is talking about employment, healthcare, etc. But we need to see things on the ground.” Female, 35, Sfax, employed

“There are those who come to Kasserine and attend meetings with people but their mission as MPs is only to convey the citizen's voice. They are not a high authority that makes decisions.” Male, 35, Kasserine, unemployed

“There are some MPs who give half their salaries to their parties in order for their parties to survive. The result is that some MPs never speak in defense of the interests of their region. I remember that in the previous parliament, only one MP talked about the bridge of Bizerte. Where were the other seven ones? There are some MPs who don't speak at all.” Male, 66, Bizerte, retired

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“They are in the parliament and they get four or five thousand dinars per month, so they can't really feel what we're feeling. Do you believe that any one of them is thinking about me?” Male, 25, Kasserine, employed

“If only MPs could leave their golden cages and live in reality. They should leave their offices and suits and ties and mingle with common people so as to know about their living conditions....They were elected by citizens so they should be working for us.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

While there is unanimous agreement that MPs are responsible for representing their constituents' interests in parliament, most participants do not feel that the MPs from their district are currently doing so. Instead, they believe their representatives are placing personal and partisan interests before the needs of their constituents. Participants demonstrate a low to moderate awareness of their district's MPs. Some are able to correctly identify a few of the MPs from their district.

“I'm in Sfax 2⁵ and I don't know who represents us. I hope they make a TV program so that we know them better. We want to know who represents us, his history, where he was before the elections. They can do this in short ads or in meetings.” Male, 32, Sfax, employed

“We voted for the MPs so that they would talk about our problems in the parliament. If any one of them does this, we will consider him as a champion....If he works hard, he will become a hero.” Male, 25, Kasserine, employed

“I feel they represent me when I see them working on the ground, i.e. when I hear about an MP or a governor who goes to the market and investigates the conditions.” Male, 29, Bizerte, employed

“During the election campaigns we see MPs every day to the point that you think they will appear in your dreams but after they get elected they just disappear and they lose their connection with voters! I want each MP to organize a monthly meeting with voters in their respective constituencies and to account for what they have achieved.” Male, 26, Tunis, student

“Even the MP that we elected and who is supposed to do something for us is idle.... He has to be active not just sitting and watching the other

⁵ The Sfax governorate is divided into two electoral districts for legislative elections: Sfax 1 and Sfax 2.

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representatives dealing with development and investment of their regions.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

“[MPs from Kasserine] should at least speak. We don't even know their names or notice them in the parliament. We don't hear about achievements.” Female, 36, Kasserine, employed

“MPs represent me but the pace is slow. It is obvious that the five years after the election will be hard. The MPs are aware of this, maybe not all of them. Here in Bizerte there are five or six MPs out of 10 who are aware.” Female, 29, Bizerte, employed

Despite their acute disappointment with the parliament, participants want more engagement from MPs and are able to imagine settings for such outreach. They long for the opportunity to speak directly with MPs. Participants regularly compare their experiences interacting with politicians during the campaign with the present lack of attention that they feel. To facilitate engagement with citizens, participants propose that MPs assign district-based staff or form advisory committees of constituents. It is common for participants to point to the focus group in which they are participating as an example of the civil, substantive discussions they would like to hold with their representatives.

“The MP should listen to the people, talk about what is going right and what is going wrong, listen to their suggestions. In this case, if the MP manages to make any improvements, he would be thanked for this. If he doesn't, he'd still be thanked for listening.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

“I wish that each MP had his own secretary whose role it was to arrange or schedule meetings with the people.... There are days when he must be in the parliament but there are some other days when he would be available to listen to the people who voted for him.” Male, 59, Bizerte, employed

“Every representative should create a committee of 15 or 20 people and give them tasks to do in accordance with his region. These individuals should interact with people and listen to them on behalf of this representative. If I want to meet someone in the parliament, how can I do so? Am I free to meet him? I am working all the time.” Male, 48, Tunis, employed

“Twice a year MPs could meet the people who voted for them and discuss the promises they told them.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

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“Three weeks ago we had a meeting with civil society to discuss four large stalled projects in Bizerte. Only one MP is supporting us and providing us with the needed information from the parliament. The day of the meeting only two MPs came. Where were the rest?” Male, 27, Bizerte, employed

“Their job is not easy. They need offices in all regions so they could do a better job at communicating with the people.” Female, 31, Tunis, unemployed

“MPs should take the initiative; they shouldn't wait for an organization to invite them. They have to contact people in the marketplace, their houses, in shops. They should assume their responsibilities.” Female, 28, Bizerte, student

Although participants are generally open to consuming information about the parliament, they indicate that their interest is waning in comparison to the NCA period. Their comments show that their interest in the parliament hinges on whether they feel that the institution is working in a productive and respectful manner. Most participants receive information about the parliament through TV, radio, and social media. Participants doubt the accuracy of reporting on the parliament's work. Participants feel that it is difficult to receive accurate, objective information on the parliament. They believe that official sources within the parliament inflate its successes, while the private media focuses exclusively on irrelevant controversies.

“Due to the absence of communication between MPs and citizens, the only way we can receive information is through the media. However, the media is sometimes biased. They're not revealing the truths. We know what they like for us to know.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“The official website of the parliament is not always updated. It reflects a bad image of our country since it is not always updated and it doesn't contain sufficient information. Their most recent update took place 4 days ago while the process should be daily....There is always exaggeration. For example, when you search for the resume of an MP you find out that they are magnifying the real image a great deal. I think that they do that in order to lie afterwards about the budget and the ways of spending it and to sound credible.” Female, 25, Tunis, student

“I followed the news of the previous parliament and former members but as for the new one I have no idea. I am desperate. I am hopeless. I used to watch them on TV but now I don't know what they are doing or saying at all.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

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“The press in the parliament is not doing their job. They don't show us important events like ratification of laws for instance. They show us trivial things....There should be a website for the parliament activities.” Male, 47, Bizerte, employed

“I used to be interested. At the beginning, we were so optimistic about the future in a way that we were waiting for surprises. Then years passed and the same game is being played so we lost hope. We're no longer optimistic and we're no longer interested.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

“No, there's no transparency. Since there's hypocrisy and hidden issues then we can't talk about transparency.” Female, 25, Sfax, employed

For participants, the role of the parliamentary majority is to form the government, pass laws, and enact reforms. Participants hope that the majority will organize itself around a concrete, issue-based program, and that individual members of the coalition will look beyond their partisan interests.

“The majority's role is to cooperate with the government in order to issue laws and make them effective.” Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

“Each party now occupies a different position. It is their plans that should be discussed and not their positions. They still have five more years to think about positions again.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“The role of the majority in the parliament is so simple.... They should discuss the nation's interests. As members in the parliament, these people are nationalistic enough to care for the interest of the country. Being engaged as members of the parliament for the next five years, their obligation is moral. It's not a deal for them to make. It's a question of logic, ethics, humanity! They should respect the people who voted for them. They should care about the families which were devastated and the youth who became victims. They should think about the future of these people. They should think of the youth who put an end to their education, became drug addicts, and fell into delinquency. These MPs should have the minimal degree of humanity and goodwill, they should save the country. It is very hard for this country to get its stability back.” Male, 50, Sfax, employed

Participants expect the opposition to balance the majority, conduct credible oversight, and constructively suggest alternative ideas.

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“Normally the opposition is supposed to create a balance between the government and the parliament but this not the case in Tunisia.” Male, 29, Sfax, employed

“The opposition's role is to create a balance in the parliament. For example, the opposition had an important role in passing the law to fight terrorism after the Bardo terrorist act.” Female, 52, Sfax, employed

“I think that the opposition, no matter what parties constitute it, is the safety belt of Tunisia. Because the opposition represents difference and stands as a watchdog. Besides, in the opposition, there are people who are specialized in law. They are the watchdogs of the MPs elected by the people.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“The opposition needs to focus on solving the current issues. They should refrain from digging into old files. We need them to achieve something concrete.” Female, 35, Sfax, employed

“The opposition helps us understand what's going on. When I watch them on TV programs I can grasp things that I could not understand before. This is something good even if I don't agree with the opposition.” Female, 52, Sfax, employed

“When the ruling party announces that it plans to do something, the others should not reject it by claiming that this party should not have been the leader. They should instead discuss its plans. This applies for example to the plans concerning the education or health sector. These plans should be discussed, not the nature of the party that designed them. They should no longer talk about positions.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

III. Government

Participants struggle to identify the achievements of Prime Minister Habib Essid's government in its first 100 days. Many affirm that the government has made security its chief priority, and the issue is the most commonly cited as a success for the government. Participants commend the government for its perceived proactive efforts to combat terrorism. The March 18 attack on the Bardo Museum is seen as having alerted the government to the importance of confronting the issue.

Ministries that are seen as hard-working and able to take bold decisions elicit the most positive reviews. Ministers are also credited for conducting site visits across the country. A number of participants believe that citizens should afford more time to the government before judging its performance. They recognize the complexity of the

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various economic and social issues—many of which, they assert, were inherited due to the unsatisfactory performance of prior governments. These participants also tend to call on fellow citizens to be patient and to afford the government space to work.

“The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense are improved. They are the only ones that have been improved in this country.” Female, 26, Bizerte, employed

“I’d like to salute the Ministries of Interior and of Defense for their particularly good performance. As for the rest of ministries, they have all performed particularly poorly.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“This government has the political will to fight terrorism unlike the previous governments.” Male, 32, Sfax, employed

“[The government] succeeded in killing the terrorists.” Female, 60, Tunis, homemaker

“This government has a policy; the military forces started fighting terrorism on the mountain not only in the areas surrounding it.” Male, 31, Sfax, employed

“Habib Essid is currently working hard. He’s paying visits to different regions. He attends important events taking place in the country. He meets citizens.” Female, 58, Bizerte, homemaker

“[The government has also succeeded] at the level of communication. There are ministers, mainly those of industry and trade, who are making site visits in order to know the situation in depth.” Male, 62, Sfax, retired

“They still have time... Three months are not enough to evaluate the performance of the government.” Female, 45, Sfax, homemaker

“This government is facing huge troubles and hardships. That is why we have to support this government and uphold its efforts to develop and reform. No one is perfect but the government is working for reform.” Male, 60, Tunis, employed

For a large number of participants, however, the government has failed to deliver any concrete achievements since taking office. They claim that the government has taken a passive approach to urgent needs, such as revitalizing the economy, and has failed to coordinate effectively across ministries. These participants point to the lack of tangible progress on unemployment and inflation, and the lack of broader reforms in

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the education and health sectors. The government's response on security is occasionally viewed as reactive and insufficient.

For some, the government has shown signs of weakness and inexperience. Participants are particularly critical of what they see as a lack of coordination across ministries, and the majority of participants' comments on ministries' performance are negative. Underperforming ministries are criticized for perceived inaction or poor decisions, as well as insufficient communication with the public.

“The government failed in the 100-days period that it set as a deadline to decrease unemployment, attract investors, and reduce prices.” Male, 33, Bizerte, employed

“It's true that [the government] is fighting terrorism but we feel like it is focusing on this in order to make us forget about other problems because they don't have solutions for unemployment and prices.” Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

“We haven't seen any investments. The Minister of Equipment made a visit but we didn't even see him....He held a meeting with the governor and then he left without talking to the inhabitants of Kasserine.” Male, 34, Kasserine, unemployed

“The government has to work more seriously and come up with firm decisions and solutions which should be made public so that trust can be built. Only then can the citizen be patient and wait for the government until it finds a solution.” Female, 33, Bizerte, unemployed

“The government does not intervene quickly in some matters and it stands by watching situations getting complicated and aggravated.... There are no efficient solutions, no ideas, and no audacity.” Male, 33, Tunis, employed

“The government has done nothing. What we see going on that is working is not thanks to the government. Security, for example is improving not thanks to the government but because policemen are motivated by the increases in their salaries.” Male, 27, Bizerte, unemployed

“Every minister offers a separate program. There is no coordination of programs and unity among the different components of the government. Each ministry is disconnected from the other. We need plans that include objectives planned for a definite deadline with clear results.” Male, 26, Tunis, student

IV. Economy

Most participants perceive the economy to be in decline at both the national and local levels. Participants' immediate priorities are to reduce unemployment and stem inflation. They see insecurity, strikes, and lack of investment as prime contributors to the stagnant economy. Some participants share concerns about the national debt and the loans taken out by the government. Many describe a lack of social justice and equality, demonstrating a high degree of awareness of the challenges facing the lower class and citizens living in interior regions. Participants show distaste for citizens seen to be protesting to further advance their self-interest without considering their broader impact.

There is widespread consensus that the government should play a greater role in resolving economic problems and promoting growth. Nevertheless, participants recognize that citizens also have a part to play. They call on Tunisians to work diligently in their jobs, reject bribery, boycott expensive products, and refrain from strikes.

“Our top priority is for prices to fall. Nowadays, it became very hard for us to pay our necessary expenses.” Female, 58, Bizerte, retired

“In Kasserine we have the strongest economy in the world for coffee shops. The number of coffee shops is continuously increasing. A new coffee shop opens every day. The number of jobless people is so high that you see all of them spending their time in coffee shops.” Male, 25, Kasserine, employed

“I hope I'll find a job before I die.” Male, 33, Kasserine, unemployed

“[In Bizerte] we have delayed projects and others which I'm sure will not be implemented. If these projects were implemented they would employ all the jobless people.” Male, 33, Bizerte, employed

“The citizen should perform his duties before asking for rights. The teachers who ask for pay raises should have fulfilled their duties first.” Male, 48, Kasserine, employed

“The economy in Sfax is in a difficult situation. No entrepreneur dares to come to Sfax and invest his money in a project here. The reason is that these investors keep thinking about the future when they could go through a period of stagnation. They have a lot of risks to fear.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

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“The private sector is not really cooperating with the government concerning the problem of unemployment. The public sector doesn't have any opportunities. You have to wait for national recruitment examinations. You see thousands of applications but at the end they employ just two or three people.” Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

“[The government] has to play a greater role. It has to find solutions to all the economic problems that it is facing. It needs to know how to bring back the country in the right direction.” Female, 52, Sfax, employed

“The people in power must try to find out a solution. They must regulate prices and mind the purchasing capacity of citizens.” Female, 42, Tunis, homemaker

The primary cause of unemployment according to participants is the substandard education system, which is criticized for failing to match the demands of the labor market. Other participants attribute unemployment to Tunisia's overreliance on public sector jobs and investors' diminishing confidence. The most commonly cited solutions suggested by participants include educational reforms, financial support for youth entrepreneurs, and measures to attract investment.

“The cause of unemployment is that we have an education system which is incompatible with the labor market. Some people graduate with degrees that no one needs in the labor market.” Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

“The more you study, the more you find it difficult to get a job. You are studying in order to escape idleness. You are bewildered.” Female, 33, Bizerte, unemployed

“Employed people should stop asking for wage increases while so many others are unemployed.” Female, 27, Kasserine, unemployed

“Investors refrain from investing in Tunisia because they are afraid of robbery, violence, and terrorism. All of this led to the rise in unemployment.” Female, 63, Tunis, retired

“The most important cause behind unemployment is corruption. You may be hired the second day after graduation if you bribe people while I may apply for hundreds of jobs and sit for exams in vain.” Male, 58, Kasserine, employed

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“The government is no longer able to provide employment for everybody. So the youth must turn to the private sector.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“Why don't they give young people small loans to let them work and kill time instead of being idle? 1,500 dinars as a start for working is better than idly spending time in the café.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

“How is the young person supposed to start?...Why doesn't the government intervene to give privileges to the young entrepreneurs?” Male, 45, Tunis, employed

Participants believe inflation is caused by smuggling, monopolization, and increases in production costs. There is a strong demand for the state to play a greater role in overseeing prices and intervening to reduce them when necessary. Few participants refer to the state subsidies that are already in place to lower prices of staple goods. Many call on citizens to coordinate in boycotting expensive products.

“The causes of inflation are the rise in the cost of production, the intermediaries, monopolism, corruption, and smuggling. There must be urgent and deterrent measures taken to address this problem. A committee of supervisors must be established within the Ministry of Economy to address this problem.” Female, 63, Tunis, homemaker

“Inflation is caused by the decrease in production. Price increases are caused by monopolies. Businessmen monopolize some products in order to sell them at higher prices. So, the solution is to increase production and fight monopoly.” Male, 34, Kasserine, employed

“The multitude of intermediaries between the producer and the consumer causes a drastic rise in price and fall in quality.” Female, 25, Tunis, student

“Inflation is due to speculation. The market is controlled by some businessmen. They hide stocks of products and even meat in big refrigerators in order to control prices.” Male, 68, Bizerte, retired

“Do not let us enter into a vicious circle. When the salaries rise, the farmer raises the price of vegetables so the worker asks for a pay raise. When his boss increases his salary the farmer increases his prices so the worker asks for more, and so on. The solution is to freeze salaries and prices for a period of time.” Male, 47, Bizerte, employed

“When a can of tomatoes goes from 1.7 dinars to 2.5 dinars, all the citizens of the country can agree, if they are united, not to buy tomatoes for a

whole week. This way the government could make tomatoes cheaper.”
Female, 34, Bizerte, unemployed

“The government should pay for a percentage of the price of essential goods so that the price becomes cheaper for us.” Male, 32, Sfax, employed

Both Tunisian and foreign investors are seen to be deterred by insecurity, political instability, and strikes. Participants call on the government to improve conditions to attract investors by reforming the investment law and reducing administrative hurdles to would-be investors.

“The transitional period we’re going through, together with the absence of an adequate infrastructure, the terrorist threats, and the requirements of global markets, all repulse investors.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“The ramifications of administrative procedures [limit investment]. In order to get one paper you have 20,000 procedures to follow.” Male, 26, Tunis, student

“Houcine Abassi⁶ is not the one who rules. The bases rule. They go on strikes whenever they see fit. More than 1,800 firms moved to Morocco after the revolution because of social unrest. Six hundred of them belong to Tunisian entrepreneurs.” Male, 66, Bizerte, retired

“For local investment, I think the trade union⁷ is the biggest obstacle. As for foreign investment, it is the responsibility of all Tunisians. We need to provide security to encourage foreign investments and motivate young people to work.” Female, 40, Sfax, homemaker

“If I were rich, I wouldn’t dare invest in a project. I would fear the workers protesting, forming a trade union, starting to read articles of laws to me, going on strikes. I wouldn’t dare to invest 20 million dinars in a company that would go bankrupt in the end like many other companies.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

“The state plays a major role in providing investments and it has to supervise them. The fact that there is terrorism is not a justification for letting people die....The state has to assume its responsibility especially in

⁶ Houcine Abassi has served as General Secretary of the Tunisian General Labour Union (French acronym UGTT) since 2011.

⁷ The UGTT.

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the internal regions which are forgotten and marginalized.” Male, 36, Kasserine, employed

“We’re still waiting for legislative measures—reforms of investments, taxation, etc. If these reforms take place, the situation will improve and investors will come.” Male, 34, Kasserine, employed

Participants blame both public servants and citizens for taking part in corruption, and believe that solving the problem would require all Tunisians to change their mentalities. For some, corruption is motivated by economic hardship, as the discrepancy between salaries and rising prices obliges government employees to take bribes to fill in the gaps. It is common for participants to describe how bribes represent the only means to have their requests processed by public servants. There are frequent demands for greater oversight, transparency, and accountability.

“[Corruption is caused by] the absence of conscience in every employee in the public sector not to mention the private sector. The awakening of the conscience begins in the relationship between teachers and pupils.” Female, 36, Kasserine, employed

“Some employees in the public sector can’t provide for their families with their low salaries so, if they can find a way to earn more money they don’t hesitate even if it leads them to corruption.” Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

“The problem is due to both the administrators and to the people. The people themselves encourage corruption when they accept it.” Female, 35, Sfax, employed

“The citizen plays an important part in encouraging corruption. He offers bribes to get his papers done although the employee in charge doesn’t ask him for a bribe. In hospitals also, people offer bribes to avoid standing in the line. The citizen should stop giving bribes and if someone asks him to do so he should complain.” Male, 38, Kasserine, employed

“The problem is with the judiciary. It is not doing its job properly. If one knew the sentence he would receive if he stole or gave bribes, he would not do it.” Male, 47, Bizerte, employed

“I think that each citizen should report any kind of corruption that they witness. They need to fight for their rights through the law and be persistent in getting their due rights.” Male, 33, Tunis, employed

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“I want to comment on the suggestion of lowering prices so workers won't take bribes. I don't think that it is the solution. We should address the problem differently because people who take bribes will just continue taking bribes under all circumstances.” Female, 25, Tunis, unemployed

The parallel economy is closely associated with cross-border smuggling, which participants believe is enabled by corruption at borders and customs. For many participants, however, the parallel economy plays an essential role by offering the only means for some citizens to earn a living and for consumers to avoid high prices. Some propose that the government attempt to normalize the parallel economy by easing the requirements for starting a business, reforming the labor law, and reducing taxes on small enterprises.

“Corruption in the security sector is also an important reason behind the spread of this type of economy. Were it not for security agents accepting bribes, there would be no parallel economy.” Female, 58, Bizerte, homemaker

“Customs officers are corrupt. A truck with smuggled tobacco enters in a warehouse in Tunis opposite the governorate and delivers it there and nothing happens while a poor vendor in Bizerte who has 500 dinars worth merchandise is quickly exposed and gets his goods confiscated.” Male, 68, Bizerte, retired

“The government is not offering solutions to save the economy. It wants to destroy the parallel economy while offering no solutions.” Male, 33, Tunis, employed

“The parallel economy is a catastrophe for the country but at the same time it is beneficial for poor people who go to the popular markets because they cannot buy brands. This is our mentality: I don't care as long as I'm not hurt directly. When you speak with a poor person about that he uses the argument 'it is cheaper' as a justification for encouraging the parallel economy.” Female, 27, Bizerte, unemployed

“Citizens should not encourage illegal trade. They should stop buying goods from parallel markets because this affects the national economy.” Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

“People have the right to [buy illegal goods] because they can't live. They don't have any source of income and they can't afford the costs of living in Tunisia. The government should create employment opportunities so that these people stop trading illegally.” Male, 34, Kasserine, employed

“The solution is to create employment. If they do this, then they can judge us if we work in illegal trade. If a policeman arrests me he will only find some t-shirts, shoes, and perfumes. I have to do this in order to be able to live. That's the only source of income that I have.” Male, 33, Kasserine, employed

V. Security

Participants generally see the government as being more proactive on security. Many participants cite the increased visibility of security forces as a reason for their enhanced confidence. Some describe how the Bardo attack awakened the government to the need to for concerted efforts to address the terrorism issue. On the other hand, such comments prompt others to criticize what they see as the government's reactive decision-making and to remark that it should not take a crisis to spur the government to act. While some believe that the government's renewed efforts are having a positive initial effect, others still remain less confident about their personal safety.

Comments from participants illustrate widespread concerns about how the government balances the security issue with other priorities. Some worry that the government may seek to exaggerate security threats to justify the lack of progress on economic and social issues. While participants are fearful of terrorism, they are confident that the issue can be effectively addressed.

“Our biggest problem in Kasserine is terrorism and I think that this government is working hard to fight terrorism.” Female, 25, Kasserine, student

“Despite the fact that there are many terrorist attacks taking place, we feel more secure. Security improved and is increasing, maybe because citizens are more collaborative with the police.” Male, 32, Tunis, employed
“The government takes an action whenever a catastrophe happens but nothing apart from that.” Female, 26, Bizerte, employed

“Security is going in the right direction. There is stability....Security was the first priority for the state.” Female, 29, Bizerte, employed

“The whole situation is not clear. They tell us that they killed terrorists and show us pictures, but who can guarantee that those pictures are valid?” Female, 57, Tunis, employed

“We are constantly terrified; when we go shopping, our handbags are frequently checked, and we feel that everybody is suspicious. We feel

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that we are ourselves under surveillance. There is fear in people's eyes everywhere. Terrorism is a great harm to us.” Female, 63, Tunis, homemaker

“Terrorists used to attack security forces only; now they moved to citizens.... they enlarged their actions to include attacking public places and citizens just because they felt encircled by the security forces.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

“It's true that the government has started working recently but I think it failed concerning the problem of terrorism. Terrorism reached the capital. This is very serious. It's no longer a threat for the South, now it even threatens the capital.” Male, 25, Kasserine, employed

Participants have mixed opinions on the factors that lead some Tunisians to participate in terrorism. They agree that newly recruited terrorists are often motivated by offers of money and a misinterpretation of religious ideology. Another commonly cited factor is resentment toward the government or security forces as a result of past experiences with abuse or humiliation at the hands of the police. Willingness to engage in terrorism is associated with psychological issues; the term “brainwashing” is often used to describe the recruitment of new terrorists.

There is a lack of consensus among participants, however, on terrorism's relationship with economic opportunity and religious freedom. Some see terrorism as a source of identity and validation for people who lack economic opportunities, while others counter by sharing examples of people who were economically prosperous before turning to terrorism. On religious freedom, some believe that the liberties gained in the revolution created space for extremist groups to maneuver. Other participants caution that restrictions on religious freedoms would provoke resentment that would lead to extremism.

“Maybe someone becomes a terrorist because of society, poverty or the way in which security forces deal with people. I mean someone who was subjected to aggression or torture by the police may become a terrorist....We saw many confessions on Facebook saying that what led them to become terrorists are the economic, social, and psychological situations.” Male, 29, Sfax, employed

“There are some who go for money but there are some who go for jihad. Some believe that they are fighting for a cause. There are some who just want to escape from here. It depends.” Female, 40, Sfax, homemaker

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“[Terrorists] hate the previous regime....when the state makes life difficult for the citizen he can take a weapon and go to the mountain.” Male, 53, Kasserine, employed

“When they arrest young people because they are suspected of being terrorists, they take them to El Gorjeni⁸ where they are tortured. When they are released they become indignant and they want revenge on those who tortured them.” Female, 27, Kasserine, unemployed

“[Terrorism] is due to the absence of conscience. It is the group that pushes them to become terrorists to make money or that brainwashes them with religion that makes them see the world differently and have a different mentality.” Female, 28, Bizerte, student

“There are some sick people who, driven by social and psychological complexes, have engaged in terrorism... For us, terrorism is a mystery with two dimensions: religious extremism and political manipulation.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“Extremists affect marginalized youth by convincing them of financial gains and the spiritual reward of going to paradise.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

In the short-term, participants believe that security forces can be effective in combatting terrorism. There is a common desire for a professional and effective security force that can oversee a targeted response to terrorism. Participants generally welcome the greater visibility of security forces. Some advocate for heightened punishments for terrorist activities. They are quick to stress that in responding to terrorism, security forces should be careful not to restrict civil liberties or disrespect citizens. Some participants call on citizens to work collaboratively with security forces, by methods such as sharing information on suspected terrorists.

In general, however, participants believe that longer-term solutions are necessary for addressing the root causes of terrorism. Security sector reform that promotes transparency, addresses corruption, and improves the behavior of security forces, is seen as a key component of a long-term anti-terrorism strategy. Participants also support educational reforms and promotion of moderate religious ideology that would inhibit radicalization. Some call for equitable development to ensure that citizens, particularly youth, develop economic livelihoods. While participants assign responsibility for combatting terrorism to the government, they call on Tunisians to be vigilant as parents, neighbors, and educators.

⁸ A detention center in Tunis.

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"There are two solutions to fight terrorism: a temporary solution achieved through the military forces and arms, and a radical solution that is achieved through better cultural education." Male, 26, Tunis, student

"We shouldn't be tolerant with terrorists. They should be severely punished so that they think twice before doing anything." Female, 27, Sfax, unemployed

"The government should reinforce security by recruiting more security personnel and soldiers." Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

"The state must have an intelligence agency to fight terrorism....But we need always to be careful not to go back to old practices and threaten freedoms and human rights." Female, 52, Sfax, employed

"It's the state as well as the family's responsibility. If parents watch their children, nothing will happen." Female, 45, Sfax, homemaker

*"We're all responsible for fighting terrorism." Female, 25, Kasserine, student
"I think that the Ministry of Religious Affairs should supervise imams in the mosques because some of them give wrong information about religion."
Male, 35, Kasserine, unemployed*

*"First, we need to take care of the marginalized regions.... Second, we need to work more on culture. Third, we need to improve the police."
Male, 66, Bizerte, retired*

"We have to educate them and raise their awareness. We have to explain to them that this is not our religion." Female, 25, Kasserine, student

A strong majority of participants raise concerns that the draft law to protect security forces could be wielded to restrict civil liberties. Participants in each group suggest that if the law is adopted, a parallel law 'to protect citizens' would become necessary. For many, the draft law is excessive; as examples, participants point to what they view as lengthy prison sentences for those convicted of insulting policemen. Some worry that the draft law will lead to more aggressive police behavior that will engender resentment and contribute to additional terrorism. A minority of participants support the law as a necessary response to the security situation.

More broadly, in comparison to past rounds of focus groups, participants have become more worried about whether it is possible to combat terrorism without sacrificing civil

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liberties. Although participants are not willing to trade newfound liberties for greater security, some are fearful that the country is beginning to move in this direction.

“The country left us to choose between the hammer and the anvil so we have to choose between terrorism or intimidation.” Female, 36, Kasserine, employed

“It is possible in the fight against terrorism that the personal liberties of citizens will be interfered with instead of those of terrorists. This is what we fear.” Male, 58, Kasserine, employed

“Suppose my son is playing in the street and he hits a police car with a stone. Will he be sentenced to five years in jail?” Male, 32, Sfax, employed

“There should be a law that also protects the citizen too.” Female, 26, Bizerte, employed

“I suggest that the law be specifically designed to protect the lives of military and police forces against terrorist attacks....It should state that they should not use their arms against common citizens when their lives are not threatened.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“Oppression is a type of terrorism isn't it? How can we fight terrorism with terrorism? Some people become terrorists as a reaction against security forces.” Male, 29, Sfax, employed

“[The bill] would isolate the security forces isolated from the rest of the people and not create harmony with them, which is dangerous because it would create problems.” Male, 60, Tunis, employed

“We must not bargain or compromise freedoms for the sake of security....As citizens we are going to try and help in controlling terrorism and God willing we will succeed but we should not return to the rule of the policemen's stick and their old practices like accusing honest people just because they do not comply with a policeman.” Male, 47, Tunis, employed

“I am for this bill because the prestige of the police and the Ministry of the Interior contributes to the prestige of the government... The police and the military are dying every day without anyone or anything to protect them.” Female, 63, Tunis, retired

VI. Other Citizen Priorities

There is growing alarm among participants over weaknesses in the education sector, which is seen to be in decline. Participants call for broad educational reforms that would better prepare students for the demands of the labor market through more practical, hands-on training. They also identify a need to engage students through more cultural and extracurricular activities. Deficiencies in public education are seen as root causes of current economic challenges and insecurity. There is a sharp frustration with strikes and little sympathy for striking teachers.

“Education is going in the wrong direction. Our children did not sit for the exams during the second term. They are no longer motivated to study and learn. Why should teachers go on strike during the exams period? This is a real catastrophe for our students who found themselves out in the streets during the teachers' strike.” Female, 43, Sfax, homemaker

“I taught five years in Jendouba and two years in Manouba....the high school pupils that I taught in Jendouba had never had a music teacher before me.... You just hear swear words and see violence in high schools because our kids have nowhere to go to entertain themselves either at school or after school.” Male, 33, Tunis, employed

“We generally don't feel that children are being well taken care of and well educated. Teachers don't care whether children understand or not.” Female, 50, Tunis, employed

“My children are good at school, but they need private courses, especially because education is very weak in Tunisia. Private courses require a special budget, so I suggest making these small loans available for the sake of our future. Our children's education is the future of our country.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“Our universities don't take into consideration the demands of the labor market. Some people get diplomas in disciplines that are not needed in the job market. The education system should be revised.” Male, 34, Kasserine, employed

“In the past, there was a branch in secondary school called ‘professional training.’ It starts at the fifth grade, just like arts, sciences, etc. Now we don't have this.” Male, 31, Sfax, employed

“As a secondary school teacher, I strongly call for improving the education system.... The problem is that now we have more than 40 private primary schoolsThis is the major reason why we went on a strike.

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We demand free public education for everyone.” Male, 37, Sfax, employed

The health system, which many participants believe is rapidly deteriorating, is commonly cited as an example of disparities in development across regions. Participants point to the lack of necessary equipment at hospitals in interior regions, and condemn the recent strikes conducted by health professionals. Poor service at public hospitals is a regular source of irritation for participants and their families.

“Even if you are blindfolded, you will be able to guess that you are in the hospital of Kasserine because of how bad conditions are. We have no materials, no equipment, and the emergency service is full of germs.” Female, 25, Kasserine, employed

“There are poor people who get sick and cannot afford for their treatment. There is a huge difference between public and private hospitals. I work at a clinic, but I sometimes go to public hospitals to visit friends or relatives. Conditions there are unbelievably awful: dirt is everywhere and patients are being mistreated.” Female, 50, Tunis, employed

“Doctors do not care about their patients anymore. My daughter had a car accident last year. I was obliged to take her from the hospital to a private health clinic while she was still in a coma because of bad care. The doctor in the hospital was given the report of another patient by mistake.” Female, 43, Sfax, homemaker

“My son teaches at a school. One day, on his way home, he fainted and broke his leg. I took him to the hospital but they were on strike that day. Anyone who doesn't have the money to go to private clinics will die at home. My son who is a teacher has spent eight days now at home and they told him he can't have his surgery until next week.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

“Establishing a new hospital in Sfax is useless. We already have two hospitals in Sfax in addition to the private clinics. Why didn't [the Minister of Health] think of reconstructing hospitals in Gabès, Kasserine, or Sidi Bouzid?” Male, 48, Sfax, employed

“If someone in a rural area is sick, he has to come to the city of Kasserine because we only have one hospital. It's very hard to find means of transport in order to come to the hospital. The person dies before reaching the hospital. I don't understand why they don't open new

hospitals in the rural areas so that people can get healthcare services easily. Indeed, this would create new job opportunities. They could hire cleaners for example.” Male, 33, Kasserine, employed

VII. Youth

There is a sense among participants that Tunisian society has failed to guarantee a positive future for its youth. For participants, the high rate of youth unemployment represents the fundamental challenge facing young Tunisians today. Without opportunities to establish themselves through economic independence, youth turn to other outlets for entertainment and validation. Young people have a greater tendency to focus on the causes of these challenges, pointing in particular to the gap between their education and employment opportunities. They describe the paradox of being unable to gain the professional experience demanded by employers for entry-level positions.

While older participants recognize these same challenges, they are more likely to discuss the symptoms of these problems. When young people lack opportunities, according to these participants, they resort to idle time in cafés or begin abusing drugs. Some criticize youth for lacking work ethic or maturity, but acknowledge that these mentalities are the result of the dysfunctional educational system and inadequate parenting. All participants agree that young people need to assure their basic well-being before becoming interested in politics or public life.

“One of the drawbacks of the old regime is that many public and private universities were created and many youth obtained their degrees without any employment opportunities being available for them.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

“We have nearly 800,000 unemployed graduates. They are suffering from economic hardships. Their cultural life is also empty.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“If you go to the capital you’ll notice the difference between young people there and here. It’s as if they are 100 years away from us. They have associations, they have motivation. Here young people are dead. They were killed by poverty and drugs.” Male, 25, Kasserine, employed

“There are some youth that do not want to work even if they are offered a good job, because they are not satisfied with the pay and they are too lazy to work. They also do not want to work except in their area of specialty.” Female, 60, Tunis, homemaker

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“I personally prepared an application to be a substitute teacher but they rejected me because I don’t have experience. How can I have experience while being at home? Who will enable me to get experience?” Male, 30, Bizerte, employed

“[The youth] are victims of poverty, violence and terrorism. They are victims of this reality. They don’t have any opportunities whether on the cultural or social levels. This reality leads the youth to consider illegal immigration and to die at sea. This reality leads youth to be violent and to use drugs.” Male, 29, Sfax, employed

“Youth are now busy with social networks, smoking, addictions, and other bad habits. That’s why they seem to be so distant from social existence.” Male, 62, Sfax, employed

Some participants think that the government's top priority should be to improve the prospects for Tunisia's youth. When identifying solutions for youth, some participants call for systemic educational reforms to create pathways for students to pursue their interests and link them to employers' demands. Another commonly cited solution involves government-led programs such as microcredit that would encourage small-scale entrepreneurship that would draw on young peoples' creativity and provide them with a basic foundation. Others, more commonly older participants, believe that youth themselves should be more willing to take initial steps to establish livelihoods, suggesting for example that they be more open to lower-level jobs as an initial step.

“I advise youth to join a charitable organization, and to devote their free time to useful activities. They should engage in society and accept work even with low salaries so that they can earn experience.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

“There must be reforms in education to allow more students to go into vocational training. There are some who are brilliant and who can become teachers or something like that, and there are those who would become plumbers who are really well-paid.” Female, 52, Sfax, employed

“The government should encourage young graduates to create their own projects. They should facilitate the procedures of taking loans so that a young graduate can create employment for themselves.” Female, 25, Kasserine, student

“If we could participate in taking big decisions with political parties for example, it would be of major significance to us. But that is not really what is happening.” Male, 26, Tunis, student

“I advise young people not to be desperate and to be optimistic. If they don't find a job in their specialties they can look for any other job. They are still young.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

“For youth to escape delinquency and other problems, entertaining and cultural events and spaces should be designed for them, not only in Bizerte but in all the regions.” Female, 58, Bizerte, homemaker

“Our youth must be aware, work and plan for their future.... The problem of our youth is that they want to get quick results.” Male, 59, Bizerte, employed

“I helped my son to become an apprentice to our neighboring blacksmith. Now he is a professional in the field where he received the training. He is receiving schooling at the same time. In the future, when he graduates and may not find a job related to his degrees, he could start his own project in the field in which he was trained and which he also likes.” Female, 58, Bizerte, employed

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- **140 total participants** from Greater Tunis, Sfax, Kasserine, Bizerte
- **Nine to twelve participants** per group
- **Diversity** of ages, professions and neighborhoods within each group

Gender	Count
Female	69
Male	71
Age	Count
25-34	43
+35	97
Profession	Count
Employed	80
Unemployed	17
Retired	12
Homemaker	25
Student	6
Education	Count
University	54
Secondary	57
Primary	24
None	5