**Moving Closer to Constituents**: **Citizen Perceptions of the 2015 Local and Regional Elections**

Findings from Focus Groups in Morocco
Conducted in November 2015

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**ABOUT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

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

**PREFACE**

As of 2015, Moroccan citizens have been immersed in preparations and undertakings for back-to-back elections. Moroccans went to the polls in September 2015 to vote directly for local and regional councils for the first time since the passage of the 2011 constitutional amendments. In October 2016, Moroccans will have the opportunity to vote again, this time in parliamentary elections.

The short election cycle offers parties an opportunity to quickly learn and address citizen demands. To provide political and civic leaders in Morocco with information on the perceptions of citizens related to the 2015 local and regional elections as well as information about citizens' voting plans for the upcoming elections, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted a series of focus group sessions in November 2015. On the basis of 24 focus groups that participated in over 50 hours of discussion, this report seeks to:

- Evaluate general public perceptions of the 2015 election campaign in comparison to previous election campaigns.

- Assess the commitment of political parties to engaging citizens by evaluating campaign techniques, relationships with citizens, efforts to support gender parity, and advocacy for youth priority issues.

- Develop a better understanding of Moroccan voters' decision-making process, including the reasons why they do or do not vote, how they determine whom to vote for, and their intentions to participate in the 2016 parliamentary elections.

**Staffing and Logistics**

NDI contracted the BJ Group, a group of six private and independent marketing research firms, that works in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Senegal, to carry out the 24 focus groups in six regions in Morocco. BJ Group is part of the Win/Gallup International Association, an international market research consortium composed of 75 market research and polling firms worldwide. As an oversight measure, NDI staff members observed all of the focus group sessions and obtained full audio transcripts of every session.

**Focus Group Research**

Focus groups are open-ended, moderated group interviews that follow preset guidelines. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of recruited participants. Focus groups reveal not just what people think, but also why they think that way, how they formulate opinions, and how strongly these opinions are held. Since they allow researchers to directly listen to the voices of participants, focus groups can be a valuable tool for understanding the logic and reasoning behind the numbers contained in surveys.

Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of participants, typically eight to 12 per group, although group sizes can vary. The group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas that reveals in-depth understanding of why opinions are held that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys.

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

**Methodology**

NDI conducted a qualitative study of 24 focus groups between November 12 and December 3, 2015, with four focus groups (two rural and two urban) in each of the six following regions: Tangier-Tetouan, Fes-Meknes, Casablanca-Settat, Rabat-Sale, Draa-Tafilalet, and Marrakech-Safi. Participants were evenly split between those who voted in the 2015 elections and those who did not, in order to create a sample consistent with voter turnout.

Prior to participating in the focus group discussions, participants completed a survey identifying their level of participation in the political process where they indicated whether they had voted in the elections, which information sources they most used and their level of interaction with political parties and elected officials.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On September 4, 2015, Morocco held the first communal and regional elections since the 2011 constitutional revision, which paved the way for further decentralization and increased citizen engagement in the political process. The 2015 elections witnessed a 53 percent of registered voter turnout rate, similar to the 2009 local elections, and were generally administered soundly according to local and international election observers. Weeks later, these polls were followed by indirect elections for regional executives, as well as the Parliament's House of Councilors.[1]

In the months leading up to the local elections and during the preceding 12-day campaign period, many of the largest Moroccan political parties pledged to build better relationships with voters through more inclusive campaign practices, such as using party offices as meeting centers where citizens could discuss their most pressing issues; adopting inclusive platform development processes to incorporate citizen input; and implementing targeted outreach to women and youth. This report does not concern the political parties individually, but rather as general actors in the electoral process.

The main findings of the focus groups are listed below.

1. **Citizens witnessed modest improvements in the campaign environment during the September 2015 elections.** Although participants expressed frustration with political actors in Morocco, they identified many significant improvements when asked to compare this campaign period to recent ones, including increased youth and female participation, better-organized campaigns, greater public awareness of political campaigns, increased opportunity for citizens to exercise democratic rights, and a reduction in visible unethical practices such as vote-buying.

2. **Political party outreach techniques were well-received by citizens.** Participants credited political parties with using an increased amount of direct and indirect outreach techniques, including door-to-door canvassing and public meetings, which citizens cited as significant factors in strengthening their relationships with political parties. Citizens also pointed to the use of social media sites as a youth outreach tool used by political parties. Still, while the use of these outreach tools increased, the election environment remained dominated by traditional media and campaign tools. Television was overwhelmingly cited as the most important communication tool for citizens.

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[1] The House of Councillors is the upper house of the Moroccan Parliament. It comprises 120 members elected for six year terms; 72 members representing local councilors, elected in the regions of the country and 20 members elected in each region by all elected representatives of professional chambers existing in the region (chambers of agriculture, commerce, industry and services, craft, and marine fisheries). 8 members are elected in each region by elected employers' representatives of most representative professional organizations and 20 members are elected at the national level by employee representatives (labor unions).

3. **Citizens are skeptical of party efforts to support gender parity and advocate for youth priority issues.** While participants acknowledged increased female participation in the campaign, they felt the low number of elected women indicated that parties were not serious about gender parity. Participants were skeptical that women were being taken seriously as candidates and mused that women candidates were only being used to attract women voters. Although participants credited parties with prioritizing youth issues in their electoral platforms, they were dubious that candidates would follow through on their promises if elected.

4. **Citizens were more likely to vote if they felt their vote could effect positive change.** The most significant factor influencing citizens' decision to vote was whether or not they believed that their vote could generate change. While both participants who did and did not vote expressed frustration with elections and political actors, participants who voted felt they needed to cast their ballots to effect change in the process, whereas non-voters believed that significant improvement in the electoral process should precede voting.

**POLITICAL CONTEXT**

Since 2011, Morocco has pursued a cautious process of gradual democratization. While other countries in the region, such as neighboring Tunisia, have embarked on major transitions, Morocco has generally adhered to the principle of "reform under stability", with the step-by-step rollout of a series of constitutional amendments.

Leading up to the September 4, 2015 elections, Morocco passed legislation linked to regionalization and direct elections for regional councils, both of which empower local decision makers and thereby increase the significance of the polls. Elections took place as planned under peaceful conditions and without major political shifts. The country's eight largest parties, which form the parliamentary majority and opposition, remained within their prevailing parliamentary coalitions throughout the twelve-day campaign period. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) reported that Election Day turnout was fairly similar to voter numbers in the 2009 local election, with an approximate turnout of 53 percent of registered voters in 2015.

With over 40 local organizations fielding more than 4,000 election observers during the September 2015 elections, these polls were under intense scrutiny. Both domestic and international electoral observers affirmed that Morocco's electoral process was in line with international standards. The National Council for Human Rights (CNDH), a semi-official council responsible for election observer accreditation and training, reported that the elections were "free and fair" with "statistically insignificant irregularities". An EU observer delegation in Morocco welcomed these "positive preliminary findings of the observation and the important efforts made by the public administration in terms of voter education and communication" and is "confident that the recommendations made by observers including those mandated by the EU will be considered to further improve the electoral process, including on the horizon the next parliamentary elections in 2016.

Still, the elections were not entirely without controversy. Indirect elections for local and regional council presidencies, which took place after the September elections, aroused controversy since voters felt that these polls were undemocratic. In several high-profile cases, communes or regions with a majority of councilors from one coalition ultimately found themselves with a president from another coalition.

**FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS**

The majority of focus group participants demonstrated at least a modest understanding of the purpose of the elections; most were aware that the elections were for both communal and regional councils and were part of the roll-out of Morocco's regionalization process. When asked to specify how the 2015 elections compared to those past, a majority of participants identified improvements, such as better-organized party campaigns, less observable corruption, enhanced trust, higher public awareness of elections, greater freedoms, and more controls by authorities over unethical campaign practices, which gave most participants a small sense of progress.

Full findings from the 24 focus groups are listed below.

**<u>Women and Youth Political Participation</u>**

Focus group participants were cynical about political parties' commitment to increasing women and youth political participation, arguing that campaign rhetoric about inclusion merely reflected efforts to appeal to voters rather than sincere policy proposals. Although Moroccan political parties have articulated their support for gender parity initiatives and have pledged to increase women's representation on campaign lists, participants viewed these efforts as lackluster, particularly given the insufficient number of female candidates. In some cases, participants attributed women's growing visibility to societal change rather than political party initiatives. Participants were also largely skeptical about political parties' rhetoric regarding youth issues, noting that parties focused on secondary issues, such as stadiums and sports, rather than on pressing problems such as youth unemployment.

*"As a young man that represents a significant segment of unemployed young people, I think that political parties exploit youth problems to just make the electoral campaign succeed. Many programs go without implementation"*- man from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"Yes, they talked a lot about youth problems, but we did not see any application"*- woman from urban area in Marrakech

*"They didn't talk about unemployment; joblessness is a key factor of the problem, because people find themselves with nothing to do, so they take drugs, [but the parties] they talked about sport, they talked about secondary things such as building stadiums"*- man from urban area in Casablanca.

*"There is no equity because the percentage of men who won is more than the percentage of women...now, even when people vote, they vote for men"*- woman from rural area in Casablanca.

*"When we compare between the number of women candidates and the rate of their success, we find that a few of them were able to succeed in elections"*- man from rural area in Rabat.

Despite these criticisms, focus group participants largely acknowledged the increase of women and youth participating in the campaign as candidates and spokespersons. Participants also recognized that campaigns had provided short-term job opportunities for unemployed segments of the population, particularly women and youth. Additionally, although many participants found parties' support for youth candidates lacking, youth focus group participants were more likely to speak highly of their personal participation in these elections as voters. Some youth participants noticed a generation gap with regards to interest in elections, stating that while their parents refrained from voting, younger generations took ownership of and participated in these elections.

*"Now any teenager speaks without fear, they participate in political life"*- man from urban area in Casablanca.

*"We used to see only old people as candidates and now we find young people with authority. We also find women involved in elections."*- man from urban area in Casablanca

*"In the last electoral street campaigns, I noticed there were more women than men and strikingly old women with their children"*- man from urban area in Casablanca

*"Everyone is working in [the campaign]… young people, women, unemployed girls"*- woman from urban area in Ouarzazate.

*"You find a good percentage of women from all levels on the electoral list"*- woman from urban area in Casablanca.

*"[Parties] recruited young men in their election campaign[s]"*- woman from rural area in Marrakech.

Although these sentiments were shared across all demographic groups, there were some notable differences. Male groups were more likely to connect the mere presence of women in the campaign as a demonstration of parity. Female groups were more likely to cite the professional stature of women candidates and party leaders in the campaign, as well as the number of women candidates. Some female participants were not receptive to the idea of women being used solely as candidate representatives to court women voters and felt that women candidates were just as qualified as men to play a more significant role in the campaign.

Urban groups credited the parties with a greater effort at parity and cited witnessing women in more active campaign roles and seeing more qualified women running for office. Meanwhile, rural groups were skeptical, seeing the use of women more as a campaign ploy to attract women. Some rural participants also spoke negatively about parity, feeling that there were not enough qualified women. Higher-income voters were more likely to credit parties for a greater effort at parity citing more active women in the campaign, whereas lower-income voters were more dubious, citing few winners and interpreting it as a campaign tool to get women voters.


**Professionalization of Campaigns**

Participants credited parties with running more sophisticated and professional campaigns during this election cycle and noted parties' usage of advanced campaign techniques, such as door-to-door outreach to impoverished constituents or social media advertisements. In some lower-income groups, participants cited raised awareness of the election due to television advertisements and other public awareness campaigns. Participants' perceptions of the campaign were marked by references to traditional Moroccan campaign techniques, such as distributing flyers, holding rallies, and using party slogans and symbols. However, participants said that, compared to previous elections, political parties were conducting more serious, professional campaigns rather than just celebrations or parties as in years past.

Participants noted a reduction in inter-party altercations during these elections compared to years past. In contrast to lower-income groups, upper-income participants more frequently credited parties with running more peaceful campaigns than in previous elections.

*"I followed the actions of the political party I voted for from the last year. I saw a significant change in the city and in the working way of people from the political party. They operate in a professional way and there are not too many promises, they hire efficient people"*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*"In the past, we didn't have such heavy advertisings and celebrations…now, there are so many means of media"*- woman from urban area in Casablanca.

*"In the past, the candidate used to put up a tent and organize a party for voters, he convinces them to vote for him, once he wins at elections, he lets them down. Now, we don't see this, this has become forbidden"* - man from urban area in Casablanca.

*"Some candidates went to meet people at shanty towns"*- woman from urban area in Casablanca.

*"In the past, there were big fights between political parties and chaos in the area, unlike the current elections, which are organized in an atmosphere infused with security."*- man from rural area in Casablanca.


**Outreach**

Focus group participants noted that parties had extensively used traditional media (radio, television, and newspapers) to communicate with voters. 74 percent of participants identified television as the most valuable outreach technique for parties looking to raise awareness of their campaigns. Youth and urban participants also identified parties' usage of social media platforms such as Facebook to connect with young voters throughout the campaign, although they emphasized that parties had used these tools for publicity rather than persuasion. Rural voters, on the other hand, were less receptive to parties' usage of social media.

Participants observed that parties had used written publications such as party newspapers or magazines as tools for branding and name recognition, not for informational or educational purposes. They also noted that parties had staged press conferences and public events, which they identified as voter education techniques.

## Focus Group Observations:

### Top Campaign Information Sources (in descending order)

1. Traditional media, including television, radio, and newspapers

2. Public speeches from the king, Prime Minister, and parliamentary sessions

3. Word of mouth, including discussions in coffee shops, among neighbors, and with relatives

4. Communication from the Ministry of Interior and local state authorities, including advertising through official channels, voter registration, or direct visits to homes

5. Advertisements on public transportation, wall paintings, and flyers

6. Campaign activities, including gatherings, speeches, and increased presence of politicians

7. New technologies through the Internet and smartphones using social media, websites, and SMS

For a group-by-group breakdown of the sources of information for this election campaign, see Annex 2.

*"TV and radio programs [were] used by all [candidates]"*- woman from urban area in Ouarzazate

*"[I witnessed] social media as a publicity for the political party…but not to convince people"*- man from urban area in Rabat.

*"I did not have any questions, because I always watch their Facebook page, what they do…"*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*Direct Voter Contact Techniques*

Participants credited all of the largest Moroccan parties with adopting direct voter contact techniques, such as canvassing in streets and markets, convening meetings in public settings or at party offices, and conducting door-to-door outreach. While a small minority of participants found these tools intrusive and related negative experiences with candidates who had initiated direct contact, most respondents viewed these techniques as caring gestures and appreciated the convenience of a candidate approaching them directly.

They identified these outreach tactics as an effective means for candidates to initiate relationships with voters, with many participants reporting that they felt closer to parties that made an effort to learn about their respective needs through direct voter contact.

Still, although the majority of participants reported that all of the largest Moroccan political parties had used direct contact tools, only 36 percent of respondents reported having been contacted directly themselves. Of the participants who had been contacted, however, the experience was often impactful; 58 percent of participants who had been directly contacted said

that their experience with the candidate directly influenced their decision to vote. In general, rural groups were more receptive of these direct techniques than other outreach strategies.

*"They knocked the doors and promised to fix our problems, so you vote for them with hope of change"*- woman from rural area in Marrakech.

*"Yes, they knocked [on doors;] this technique is included in street campaign"*- woman from rural area in Tangier.

*"All of [the parties] knocked on doors"*- woman from urban area in Fez.
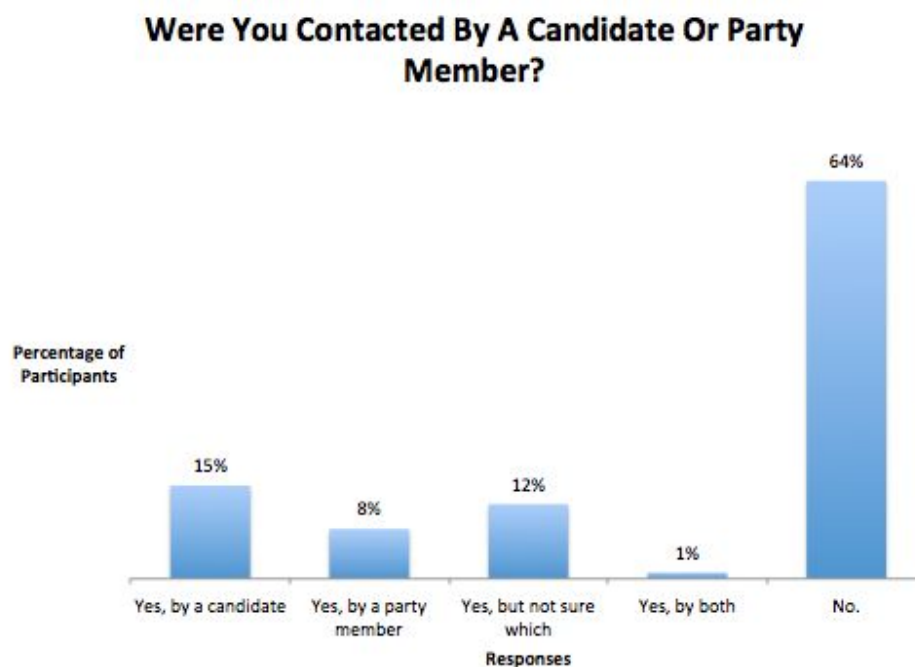


In some cases, participants noted that candidate delegates, rather than the candidate himself, were initiating this direct contact. The deployment of candidate representatives, or *validators,* is a common practice in numerous countries for political parties looking to maximize direct voter contact; the technique focuses on the messenger, rather than the message, to build voters' trust. To increase their campaign's credibility among voters, parties typically select subject matter experts, family members, people of similar demographics, or popular community members as candidate delegates since voters can more easily identify with them and place more stock in their recommendations. Many participants cited the influence of friends and family as the main catalyst to vote in the Moroccan elections, underlining the impact that engaging these contacts as validators could have.

While focus group participants acknowledged that deploying family members and popular figures had helped to provide publicity to some campaigns, they were skeptical of the use of demographic representatives as validators. Many participants argued that parties had selected women and youth validators to rally votes. Lower-income participants in particular felt that parties using this technique exploited the poor and vulnerable populations.

*"They use their families to introduce their political party during the electoral campaign"*- man from rural area in Marrakech.

*"One party, came to people, speaking directly to them asking about their demands. In other political parties, the candidate doesn't come to you, it is only their assistants"*- woman from rural area in Casablanca.

## Where Did Candidates Contact You?
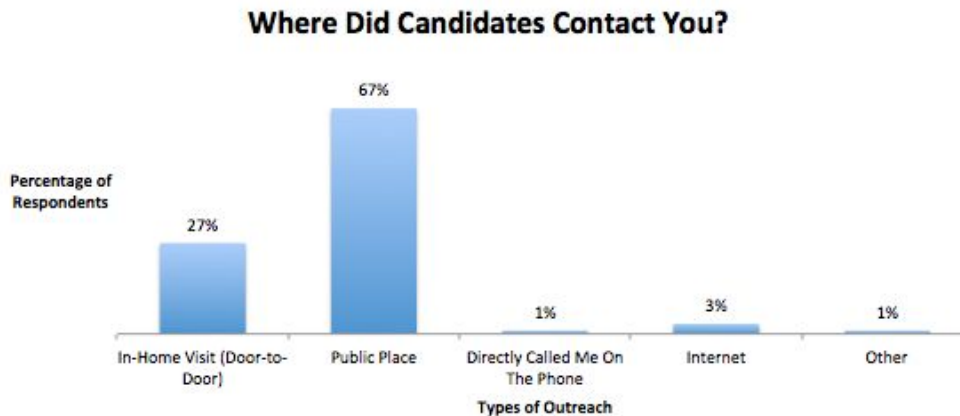


*"When a woman is working for a political party, it asks her to gather a number of women, they gather in that house, eat and when going out they get 200 dirhams each to convince other women and so on"*- woman from rural area in Tangier.

*"[I saw parties] using known and popular people during the campaign"*- man from urban area in Rabat.

*"The candidate sends someone he trusts to find out which political party citizens will vote for to be able to know who will vote for him"*- woman from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"My neighbor came to me and asked me to vote [for a candidate], she told me they are good, and there will be some reforms"*- woman from urban area in Casablanca.

*Indirect Voter Contact Techniques*

Although participants noted parties' usage of direct contact techniques, they stated that traditional, indirect voter contact techniques that focus on reaching larger numbers of voters, such as rallies and flyer distribution, remained the dominant campaign outreach method. Participants viewed these techniques as a typical aspect of Moroccan campaigns, recognizing that parties were deploying these tools to elevate public awareness. Some participants also credited these strategies with creating a lively, "fun" atmosphere. Still, while participants enjoyed the festive atmosphere and understood the necessity of these techniques, many did not

appreciate the associated loud noise and excessive litter and praised parties who refrained from these practices.

Female participants were generally more receptive to these traditional campaign techniques than their male counterparts. Both male and urban groups often complained about noise and litter from campaign events. Higher-income participants felt traditional techniques did a good job of raising awareness about the elections. Older groups appreciated parties using techniques to target families, including organizing celebrations and setting up activities for children.

*"Through the march, people are convinced of voting for him because they see other people supporting him"*- man from rural area in Marrakech.

*"People [were] cheering slogans in the streets"*- woman from urban area in Marrakech.

*"[Parties were] distributing pictures and slogans in the street"*- woman from urban area in Tangier.

*"One party was good, they didn't [leave] flyers in the street"; "Their rallies were more respectful"*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*"Parties used slogans and banners"*- woman from rural area in Ouarzazate.

## Ethics and Integrity

*Corruption and Transparency*

Although focus group participants said that the majority of political parties had used unethical practices throughout the campaign, they reported a general reduction in visible corrupt practices this year compared to previous campaigns. Specifically, participants noted witnessing practices such as voter fraud, vote-buying, or bribery less than in previous elections. They partially ascribed this change to the implementation of increased oversight and fraud-elimination mechanisms, such as requiring voters to use their fingerprints and mandating legal punishments for bribery. Compared to their rural counterparts, participants from urban areas more frequently noted this decline in corruption.

In general, perceptions of corruption played a strong role in fostering feelings of connection between focus group participants and political parties. Many participants cited feeling closer to parties that ran clean and ethical campaign, both in terms of less corrupt practices and in terms of environmentally-friendly techniques. Participants also pointed to increased popular empowerment to fight corruption through elections.

*"The thing I liked in this year's elections is when the citizen gave his fingerprint after the voting process so that he will not vote more than once, which makes the electoral process more transparent and credible"*- woman from urban area in Marrakech.

*"Previously, you could vote many times because they didn't oversee the process. Now, you cannot because the monitoring is too high"*- woman from rural area in Marrakech.

*"Recently, there is a tight control about bribery, where it became punishable by law, unlike the past years where the bribery existed in a very significant way"*- man from rural area in Marrakech.

*"Through talking to people in a good way without buying votes or bribery, it was a clean campaign"*- man from rural area in Rabat.

*"Old and young people, women, men were out for the campaign to fight corruption. Because our area has a former president who did not serve us, he did not give anything. And we wanted to replace him through these elections and thank God the right person was chosen"*- man from rural area in Fez.

Older participants who expressed more sanguine outlooks about corruption typically cited the introduction of a greater number of oversight mechanisms as the primary factor in their optimism. However, not all participants shared this positive perspective, with a significant minority contending that the level of corruption had either remained stable or increased in this election. While this minority also witnessed fewer corrupt practices than in previous elections, they interpreted this trend as a result of actors becoming more skilled at concealing their corruption rather than abandoning it altogether.

Participants were largely suspicious of processes that lacked transparency. Focus group participants expressed confusion over the indirect House of Councilors elections, contending that they were not properly informed about this process and that the results often contradicted their votes. Focus group participants also criticized the post-election formation of regional coalitions as an element of the elections that seemed out of the control of voters. Throughout the discussions, these two issues initiated the most negative participant responses, to the extent that participants who did not intend to vote in the 2016 parliamentary elections most frequently cited one of these issues as their reason for abstaining.

*"Before bribery was public; now they are afraid, they do it secretly"*- man from urban area in Ouarzazate

*"Even the mentality of people, the majority are selling their votes. Votes equal money...personally; a woman came to me and told me to go see someone and that he will give me an amount of money to vote for him"*- woman from urban area in Ouarzazate.

*Accountability and Credibility*

Many participants noted that elected officials and parties had begun to deliver public services during the campaign period to connect with citizens ahead of elections. Participants joked that they knew elections were imminent when their elected officials began to respond to community

needs. Many participants stated that once the campaign period started, some candidates who were already elected representatives, either at the local level or in parliament, began delivering services or taking actions to address community issues, such as fixing roads, bridges and performing administrative services for citizens. Female group participants were typically more receptive to these actions, crediting the parties with being more attentive to sick and needy people and performing good deeds in the community.

While the actions were received positively, participants felt they should have taken place throughout the elected officials' entire mandate, not just during the campaign period. In general, participants reported feeling closer with parties whose candidates provided services through government action and charities, who were perceived to have honored their campaign promises throughout their tenure in elected office, and had a consistent community presence outside of the election period. Party and individual candidate achievements were perceived to provide credibility, which participants said increased their feeling of a close relationship with the party.

*"After the disaster in the area and the bridge collapsing, a person fought for our rights and protested in front of officials, which made people trust him and elect him in the elections this year. I wondered too and found that the person deserves to be encouraged and he is a fighter, he wants the interest of the area, so I voted for him"*- man from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"That's why there is credibility [for the party] among citizens, for instance one party made promises, which we witnessed being put into action, for instance clearing funds, social security funds, retirement funds"*- man from rural area in Ouarzazate*.*

*"This party is always present, they don't just wait until elections."*- woman from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"You feel that he wants to help you, if you need a document from the local authorities, or the province they told us 'I will take care of it for you…'"-* woman from rural area in Casablanca.

Appreciation for accountability extended to participants' voting behavior and perceptions of "closeness" to parties as well; parties that were identified as making realistic promises that met citizens' needs were perceived as close to citizens, since participants felt these promises reflected an understanding of their most pressing issues.

*"This party did not overpromise"*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*"I saw the electoral program of a political party online and decided I would vote for it, according to its effect in the past years, to increase their actions to create job opportunities for young people and increase the development of the country"*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*" … No one knows that political party, but [people voted for the candidate] for the love of the person, who was a college professor on a national level and has a status in the community"*- man from rural area in Fez.

*"This political party defends the area and its inhabitants"*- man from rural area in Fez.

*"We know him well and we trust him and we judge him through the actions he did before. We give him our votes because he deserves that"*- woman from urban area in Marrakech.

*"I voted for the first time, and I voted for that young man, because he deserves the chance to prove his abilities and I know him well, because he is from the area. And I know his ethics and I trust him"*- woman from rural area in Tangier.


## Elections

*Preconceived Perceptions of Elections*

In order to differentiate between participants' feelings about the 2015 elections and their general attitudes toward elections as a whole in Morocco, focus group participants were asked to supply their general perceptions of elections. This exercise exposed participants' existing general biases toward elections, which could influence their perspective on the 2015 polls. Additionally, the exercise gave participants an opportunity to view the campaign through a comparative lens. With regards to unethical practices, for example, participants could think in terms of the shifts in the frequency of these practices as opposed to whether or not they took place at all.

Although participants identified positive developments during the 2015 electoral period, they still expressed a great deal of frustration with the campaign and voiced significant mistrust of political actors. Many participants expressed disillusionment due to what they recounted as years of broken promises, corrupt electoral practices, and lack of interaction with political actors. For some participants, however, thinking about elections in general evoked positive expectations about the future and hope for improvements in Moroccan citizens' quality of life.

Ultimately, the focus group findings revealed that participants' preconceived notions strongly influenced their perceptions of the 2015 campaign. Many participants who initially expressed a general sense of disillusionment with regards to elections said that they had perceived positive changes in the 2015 campaign. Conversely, participants who articulated positive expectations from elections often perceived this election more negatively.

Preconceived notions were also one of the main factors differentiating demographic groups. Male participants more often cited positive improvements in the campaign, including the quality of political actors, authorities' control over unethical practices, and more positive attitudes of citizens. Female participants expressed greater disappointment, more often citing corruption, bribery and cheating. The most likely reason for this discrepancy was a matter of expectations. When asked about their thoughts on elections more broadly, females were more optimistic about elections as a means of improving the country and making the government more responsive to citizens' needs. In contrast, their male counterparts viewed elections more as a technical struggle

for power between different actors. It is likely that, since they expected better, the higher expectations among female participants resulted in their disappointment.

Although rural groups were more likely to witness corruption and exploitation than their urban counterparts, they were generally more positive since they had lower expectations. When asked about their feelings on elections more broadly, rural respondents were much more pessimistic than urban groups, citing exploitation, corruption, and harassment as reactions to elections. While rural participants still observed these practices in these elections, most stated that it was a lower level.

Previous experience was also a differentiating factor for young and old groups. While younger participants were more optimist, older focus group participants cited a history of being disappointed by elections. Even those who had witnessed modest improvements in the campaign environment were skeptical of how long these changes would last.

*"Non accountability [of elected officials], we vote for them and then we see nothing from them"*- woman from rural area in Tangier.

*"[Candidates] exploitation of conditions of misery that people live in … and then the candidate disappears once the campaign is over"*- woman from rural area in Rabat.


*Participant Voting Behavior in 2015 Elections*

Participants offered insight on why they voted or chose to abstain and on their decision-making process with regards to which candidate/party to support in the regional and local elections. They also discussed their intentions to vote in 2016, comparing their inclination prior to the discussion with their decision afterwards. In total, there was a modest increase of those planning to vote after the discussions, although a small minority of participants who had been planning to vote decided to abstain after the discussion. The most common reason for this shift was the lack of transparency in the creation of regional coalitions. Annex 6 breaks down participants' perception of regional coalitions and indirect elections.

Voters

Voters offered a wide variety of reasons for deciding to vote, including idealistic motives, such as wanting change and improvement for the country; personal motives, such as wanting to help a friend or neighbor; and political reasons, such as wanting to support or oppose a specific party and fulfilling a national duty. Below is a graph breaking down participants' motives for voting, based on the results of the pre-discussion survey.

## Why Did You Vote?
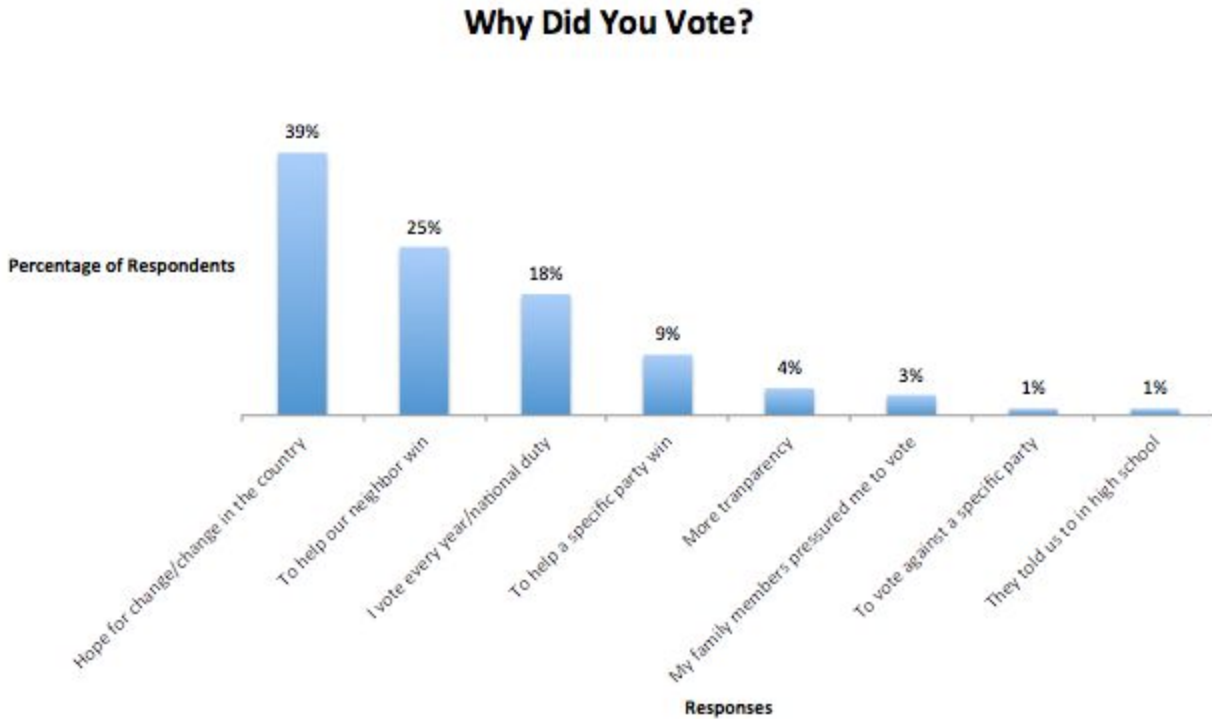


During the discussion segment, these participants also provided the main factors that determined for whom they would vote. They reported being motivated by a variety of different factors including the quality of the candidate, and the credibility of a party and its campaign. The most commonly cited reason for selecting whom to vote for was candidate quality, defined as both candidate's qualifications and character. Participants responded positively to candidates they viewed as experienced, of high moral fiber, and who were well-known. Candidates or parties who had strong ties to the community were also popular with voters, with participants noting that they felt close to candidates who were well-known community figures.

Some participants, mainly those in upper-income groups or from urban areas, identified party's electoral platforms as the main factor that influenced their vote. Many identified party credibility as a decisive factor in their decision to vote, which they based on how realistic campaign promises were, whether they could identify party achievements, and the overall reputation of the party and its candidates.

*"At first I back down, but then I seriously thought about it and told myself: I should give the candidate the chance to complete what he started because he deserves credit because of the reforms he did in the past years"*- woman from rural area in Fez.

*"I heard good things about that political party and I looked for information about it through social media, and people were saying nice things about it, which convinced me to vote for them"*- man from urban area in Rabat.

Non-Voters

As stated earlier, half of the focus group participants had not voted in the 2015 elections, which they attributed to a lack of trust in political actors and the electoral process. Participants said that the trust deficit was a result of broken campaign promises; the lack of transparency in campaigns and the electoral process; authorities' lack of control over the campaigns; candidates who demonstrated their wealth and whom participants viewed as corrupt; their perception that there was no value in the act of voting; and administrative issues, such as problems with identification and voter registration.

While non-voters cited fewer explanations than voters for their decision, they were more fervent in their responses. When asked what would change their minds and convince them to vote in the next election, there was a near consensus on the response: non-voters wanted to see results. They wanted to see elected officials accomplish actions before considering casting their vote. The reasons cited by non-voters are consistent with the results of the pre-discussion survey. The chart below breaks down their responses.
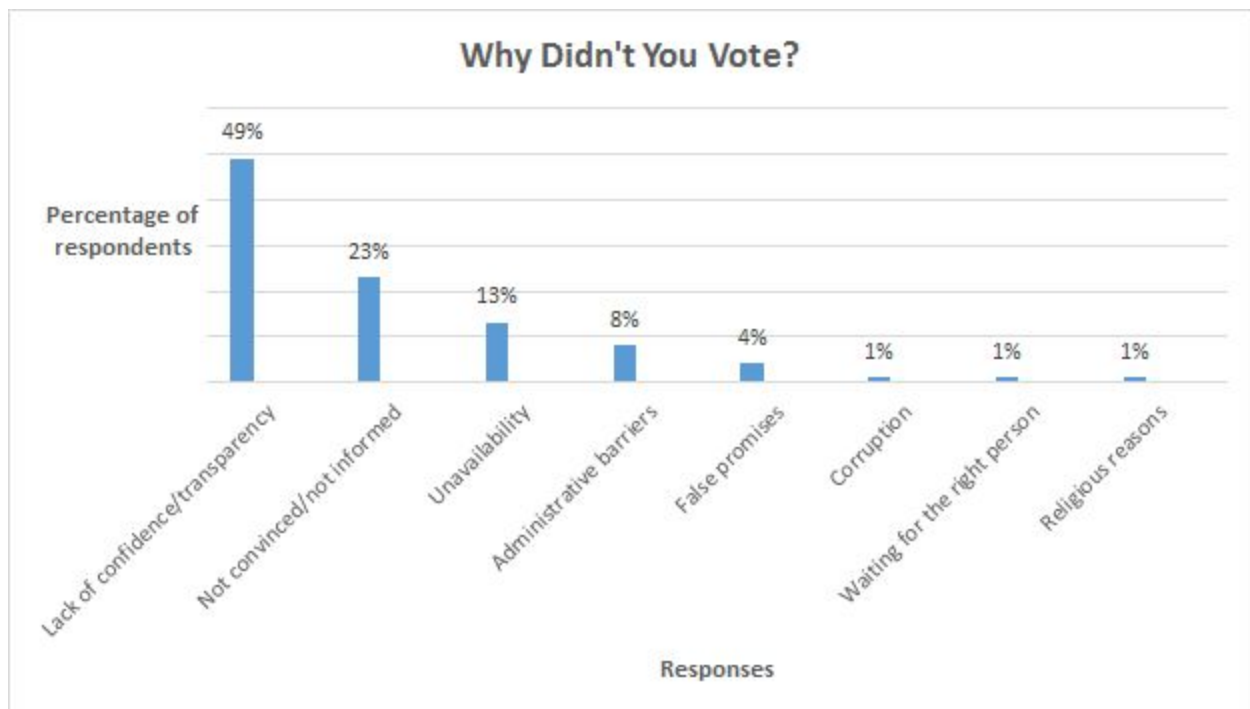
*2016 Election Plans*

In their pre-discussion survey, two-thirds of participants affirmed that they planned to vote in the 2016 elections. Of the six regions in the study, Fez, followed by Rabat, were the two regions with the highest populations of intended voters.

In some regions, the group discussions led to participants becoming more reluctant to vote, but in other areas, such as Casablanca and Marrakech, participants acquired greater conviction to vote. While Casablanca participants were motivated to vote in order to prevent a particular party's victory, participants in the Marrakech focus group changed their views after becoming more aware that the 2016 elections would be about government change.

At the end of each focus group session, both voters and nonvoters were asked to debate whether they should vote in the upcoming election. Voters and nonvoters generally agreed on the main problems of the political system, such as unethical practices of political actors and lack of responsiveness of parties and elected officials, but disagreed on the impact of voting. While voters believed that more people need to go to the polls in order to elect the right candidates that could create needed change, non-voters felt that it did not matter for whom they voted since they perceived all actors as corrupt and believed that the system was rigged. Whereas voters argued that voting is necessary to fight corruption and create change, non-voters contended that there needed to be changes prior to the elections for voting to be meaningful.

In terms of demographics, there were some significant differences between participants. Female participants were less likely to change their decisions on whether or not to vote and more difficult to influence than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, young non-voters were more likely to change their voting intention after the discussion than their peers who were already committed to vote; lower-income non-voter participants were easier to convince to vote than those with higher incomes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The differences between participants who voted and those who did not provides significant insight for parties on how to attract more popular support. The focus group discussions revealed that a key factor to winning support in the elections was making voters and their issues a central campaign focus. Both during the campaign period and during elected officials' mandates, participants responded most favorably to actions that they felt met their immediate needs and reflected their personal values. Participants who voted identified campaigns and outreach that targeted citizens' day-to-day needs, focused on relevant issues, listened to citizen concerns, and performance by elected officials perceived to benefit ordinary citizens as motivating factors that earned their respective votes. These participants also identified candidates that demonstrate moral character, parties that are perceived to be credible, and campaigns that are ethical and respectful of citizens as qualities that reflect their respective values and earned their vote.

Conversely, non-voting participants identified the inability of parties to represent citizen needs and values as their reason for abstaining. Perceived unethical practices, lack of knowledge about party promises, and minimal access to candidates and elected officials led non-voters to mistrust parties' intentions to and capabilities of addressing citizen priorities.

To build strong alliances with citizens between elections, political parties must undertake concrete actions to convey that they understand citizens' needs and priorities. The key to improving the party's short-term electoral success and long-term sustainability lies in hosting activities focused on listening to citizens and reflecting their core values in party platforms and public communications.

**Enhance Direct Voter Contact Techniques**
Focus group participants across all demographic categories valued direct voter contact techniques above all others. To avoid disturbing voters or clashing with other parties, direct voter contact activities should be carried out by trained campaign workers or candidates. A successful direct voter contact effort would thus necessitate recruiting and training a sizeable campaign team capable of conducting large-scale voter outreach. Importantly, all voter outreach efforts should respect communities in which they are implemented, taking care to limit clean-up or noise.

**Use Targeted Outreach Techniques**
Parties should leverage targeted outreach techniques to reach voters who are often marginalized from the political process, such as youth or rural groups. For instance, to recruit young volunteers and reach out to youth voters, parties should consider using social media platforms to promote initiatives to address youth priority issues. Parties could also look at innovative ways of reaching out and promoting relevant policy initiatives to rural voters, who often lack basic knowledge of the political process, including accurate information about political parties.

**Increase Party Transparency**
Parties often have opaque internal processes that make them seem inaccessible to voters or volunteers. To ameliorate this, parties can implement democratic, transparent selection processes where they establish and publicize clear criteria for all accredited candidates. Similarly, parties should take steps to establish transparent volunteer or employee recruitment processes. Parties should also take care to clearly communicate the nature of and logic behind their relationships with other Moroccan parties to voters. For example, ahead of the legislative elections, parties should be prepared to respond to questions about the 2015 local and regional indirect elections. Additionally, to address voter concerns about unethical practices, such as vote buying or intimidation, party leaders and candidates should consider signing a code of conduct that condemns unethical practices and promotes clean elections.

**Develop Feasible, Responsive Campaign Promises and Implementation Mechanisms**
Given citizens' frustrations with inadequate service delivery, candidates should include feasible promises in their electoral platforms. Parties should also develop party platforms that respond to citizens' demands. For instance, to win the support of young voters and demonstrate that their vote is taken seriously, parties should focus on unemployment and job training, the most pressing youth issues, rather than on recreational facilities or entertainment. To assist candidates in implementing these promises, partie should create a support system that guides elected officials through the policy implementation process and informs citizens of the progress being made on relevant issues.

**Maintain a Consistent Community Presence and Engage in Regular Dialogue**
Participants were wary of elected representatives who delivered services or conducted government business only when seeking re-election. To avoid the appearance of misuse of government funds and to continue building trust with voters, elected officials should maintain a constant public presence through their mandate, including regular dialogue with citizens on their priority issues through public events and door-to-door canvassing. Parties should develop a participatory policy development process process that allows citizens to provide input on the party's electoral platform. This will provide the party with critical information about citizens' priorities, while reinforcing the image that the party is listening and being responsive to voters.

**Enhance the Profiles of Women and Youth Campaign Participants**.
Parties should place more women and youth in prominent positions in in the campaign, both as candidates and campaign managers, as well as in leadership positions in the party. Parties could create public biographical pieces about these candidates and prominent members of the party that highlight their credentials and capabilities to ensure that these candidates are presented for their abilities, and not as a campaign ploy to attract women and youth voters. These candidates should be promoted both as individuals, as well as a collection of talented members representing these demographics. Parties could demonstrate their commitment by nominating qualified women candidates to winnable positions on local party lists and providing them with opportunities to increase visibility to voters.

**ANNEXES**

## Annex 1. SAMPLE

The sample used for this study is as follows in the below grid:

| FG | Region | Sex | Age[2] | SEC[3] | Urban / Rural | City |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FG 1 | Tangier Tetouan | Male | Young | SEC - | Urban | Tangier |
| FG 2 | | Female | Old | SEC + | Urban | Tangier |
| FG 3 | | Male | Old | SEC + | Rural | Guaret |
| FG 4 | | Female | Young | SEC - | Rural | Guaret |
| FG 5 | Rabat-Salé Kénitra | Male | Young | SEC + | Urban | Rabat |
| FG 6 | | Female | Old | SEC + | Urban | Rabat |
| FG 7 | | Male | Old | SEC - | Rural | Sidi Taibi |
| FG 8 | | Female | Young | SEC - | Rural | Sidi Taibi |
| FG 9 | Fes Meknes | Male | Young | SEC - | Urban | Fes |
| FG 10 | | Female | Old | SEC + | Urban | Fes |
| FG 11 | | Male | Old | SEC + | Rural | Ain Mediouna |
| FG 12 | | Female | Young | SEC - | Rural | Ain Mediouna |
| FG 13 | Casa -Settat | Male | Young | SEC + | Urban | Casablanca |
| FG 14 | | Female | Old | SEC + | Urban | Casablanca |
| FG 15 | | Male | Old | SEC - | Rural | Sidi Rahal |
| FG 16 | | Female | Young | SEC - | Rural | Sidi Rahal |
| FG 17 | Drâa Tafilalelt | Male | Young | SEC - | Urban | Ouarzazate |
| FG 18 | | Female | Old | SEC + | Urban | Ouarzazate |

[2] "Young" refers to participants between 18-30 years old. "Old" refers to participants between 30-55 years old.
[3] "SEC-" refers to lower income participants; "SEC+" refers to upper income participants.

| FG 19 | | Male | Old | SEC + | Rural | To be defined |
|-------|-------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|
| FG 20 | | Female | Young | SEC - | Rural | Cities |
| FG 21 | Marrakech - Safi | Male | Young | SEC + | Urban | Marrakech |
| FG 22 | | Female | Old | SEC + | Urban | Marrakech |
| FG 23 | | Male | Old | SEC - | Rural | Tahanouat |
| FG 24 | | Female | Young | SEC - | Rural | Tahanouat |

**Annex 2: Sources of Citizen Information about the 2015 Elections**

| Group | Urban | | Rural | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | **Male** | **Female** | **Male** | **Female** |
| **Casablanca** | TV<br>Internet and social websites<br>radio<br>Newspapers<br>Discussion between people | TV<br>Radio<br>Newspaper<br>SMS<br>Door to door campaign | TV<br>Conversations in cafés<br>Radio<br>Authority agent<br>Internet | TV<br>Internet<br>Campaigns (approaching candidates on the street, door to door)<br>Word of Mouth<br>Newspaper |
| **Marrakech** | TV<br>Internet<br>Awareness campaigns<br>Posters<br>Graffiti on public walls | TV<br>Radio<br>Authority agents<br>Newspaper<br>Internet | TV<br>Campaign events<br>Word of mouth<br>Radio<br>Improvement in the candidate's behavior | TV<br>Radio<br>Flyers<br>Internet<br>Word of Mouth |
| **Ouarzazate** | TV<br>Radio<br>Internet<br>Invitation to register in electoral lists | Advertising<br>Word of mouth:<br>Ads in public transportation<br>Newspaper<br>Registering in electoral lists | TV<br>Radio<br>Authority agents<br>Registration in electoral lists<br>Parliamentarian discussions | TV<br>Radio<br>Newspaper<br>Internet |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Advertising campaigns | | | |
| **Fez** | The royal speech TV Registration in electoral lists Word of mouth Radio | TV Social media Officials facilitating administrative work Candidate Outreach Radio | TV Internet Increased candidate visits Improvement in the candidate's behavior Newspapers | TV radio Elected officials facilitating administrative paperwork for citizens, Nice behavior from elected officials Internet |
| **Rabat** | TV people's' talk social media targeting influential personalities songs radio parliament sessions street posters | TV Radio People's talk Newspaper Internet Counties (public administrations) Posters | TV Social media Radio People's talk Posters Newspaper Street reforms Registration in electoral lists | TV Radio People's talk Facebook Newspaper The candidate of the area Authority agents |
| **Tangier** | Candidates getting close to people. TV advertisements social media authority agents | TV registration in electoral list advertisements in the street radio Previous knowledge of the election date | TV Radio Newspaper Word of Mouth Social media | TV Word of Mouth Radio Internet Candidate outreach |

**Annex 3 - Summary of February 2014 Focus Group Research**

Between February 28 and March 4, 2014, NDI held 24 focus groups across six target regions in Morocco.[4] The focus groups used the same methodology as the round described in this report.

Participants were asked to rank the most challenging issues in their communities. Almost 70 percent of participants cited employment, education, healthcare and infrastructure as their four priority issues.

In the focus groups, participants also expressed a lack of dignity and sense of powerlessness to address the most important challenges to their daily lives and fix a public sector they perceive as corrupt and ineffective. Most participants felt that the system only benefited those with money and connections.

Participants felt all public servants have failed them, from teachers and doctors, to local officials and political parties. In their eyes, all seemed unwilling or uninterested in fulfilling their responsibilities. As a result, they see management and quality in public services, such as healthcare, education and infrastructure, as weak and inefficient.

Participants wanted evidence of parties' achievements and do not expect them to magically solve their problems or provide financial or social services. Instead, they wanted greater accountability, improved rule of law and concrete and feasible solutions to their everyday problems.

**Annex 4 - Summary of December 2014 Focus Group Research**

In December 2014, NDI conducted a second round of focus groups across the country to explore how parties may succeed in changing these attitudes through the use of more responsive outreach and policy. The Institute sponsored a total of 24 focus groups, with each comprising of eight participants chosen to represent Morocco's demographic and geographic diversity. The primary objectives of this focus group research were to explore Moroccan citizens' (1) attitudes towards parties, (2) reactions to party policy positions concerning employment, healthcare, education and infrastructure, (3) policy preferences in these areas, and (4) recommendations for parties to earn their vote in the 2015 and 2016 elections. After 24 focus groups and more than 50 hours of facilitated discussion, five key themes emerged:

**Citizens have limited knowledge about the role of political parties**. Citizens, especially in rural communities, were largely unfamiliar with the role of parties as advocates for their values and interests in the political process. This is due in large part to the limited interaction between citizens and politicians on policy issues. In fact, only two of 192 focus group participants had ever been approached by a politician or elected official outside of an election campaign to

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[4] NDI held focus groups from December 4 to 20, 2014 in the following regions: Doukkala-Abda, Fès-Boulmane, Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaër; Meknès-Tafilalet, Tanger-Tétouan, and Oujda-Angad.

discuss their policy positions.

**Parties lack credibility among citizens for failing to deliver on past promises**. Participants expressed considerable mistrust about the willingness and ability of parties to effect positive change in their daily lives. They noted that parties' often recycled previously unfulfilled campaign promises. Participants also commented that parties with the most credibility are those that actually did what they had promised.

**Relatable and feasible proposals earned the most support**. Policy proposals relating to citizens' everyday needs, such as improving roads, usually received unanimous support. Alternatively, grandiose proposals were often greeted with cynicism and suspicion. In addition, participants' support for various proposals often hinged on their perceived feasibility. Proposals that received early support were soon shot down when the group questioned its feasibility. Participants also wanted specifics related to implementation, including details about cost and enforcement mechanisms.

**Moroccan citizens are well-informed and open to new ideas**. Participants, including from lower-income and illiterate areas, were well informed about contemporary issues at both the local and national levels and were curious about new policy proposals. Instead of dismissing proposals out of hand, participants regularly weighed their costs and benefits. Even when the groups rejected proposals, they acknowledged their merits and recommended areas for improvement.

**Moroccan citizens are skeptical of any policy proposal that does not integrate checks on corruption, abuse and ineffectiveness in the public sector.** Participants associated political parties with the broader nepotism, corruption and ineffectiveness they perceived in the public sector. Participants showed considerable mistrust and frustration concerning public officials and services of all kinds. They frequently cited the need to establish "controls" to "guarantee" that teachers, doctors, elected officials and parties fulfilled their responsibilities to the public.

### Annex 5 - Participants' Understanding of the 2015 Elections

At the start of the 2015 electoral period, political parties from the opposition and governing coalitions publicly reaffirmed their commitment to their respective coalitions. Following the September 4 direct elections for regional and communal councillors, indirect elections were held to select executive officials for both council levels. The results of those indirect elections, where the councillors themselves voted for the positions of president and two vice presidents, were, in some cases, inconsistent with the direct election results. Participants expressed a great deal of frustration with the results of these indirect elections. They stated that their vote was nullified when the governing coalitions created did not reflect the results of the vote. Participants also stated that these executive positions lacked accountability to the voters. These two practices combined contributed to suspicions about the election by making participants feel decisions were being made by a small group of people behind closed doors. This was the most repeated reason for participants to not vote in the 2016 parliamentary elections.

Most participants understood basic information about these elections. They were aware of the logistics including the time and date of the elections, as well as the general purpose of electing local and regional councils. Most participants understood that the elections were related to the regionalization process, which has reduced the number of regions in Morocco from 16 to 12 and has concomitantly increased regional authority through the decentralization process.

The process of electing regional presidents and members of the House of Councilors, however, caused significant confusion. Most participants expressed little knowledge of how parties formed coalitions at the regional level or of the indirect elections for the House of Councilors. The perceptions of these two practices evoked a strong emotional response, with participants reporting that they had been ill-informed and felt disenfranchised. The indirect elections and coalitions were the most repeated negative indicators for the likelihood of the participants to vote in the future.

A significant majority of participants expressed a great deal of frustration with the way governing coalitions were formed at the regional level, saying that people had been confused when the party they thought had won ended up losing control of the council. They felt that this eliminated the value of their votes and reduced the credibility of the elections.

*"Before, there was one president in the area, now Fez and Meknes are merged in one region and have one president"*- man from urban area in Fez.

*"There were 16 regions, now they have become 12 regions"*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*"The purpose is that someone from the candidates wins to become president of the region... to reform, and give people their rights and solve youth problems."*- woman from rural area in Fez.

*"Yes, I would have refrained voting because we helped a candidate and we supported him, and we voted for him, but in the end we were shocked by the result, he was shocked too."*-man rom urban area in Rabat

*"If I knew about the indirect elections, I would not have voted because through these alliances that happened, we know nothing about it."*- woman from urban area in Tangier.

*"I will not vote because when I did, I gave my vote to someone who deserves it, and I was surprised afterword by the people who won."*- woman from urban area in Fez.

*"Therefore, after indirect elections, the citizen is shocked by the results, where some political parties he is unsatisfied with wins."*- woman from urban area in Fez.

*"Since it is indirect, there is no transparency or credibility because the people do not participate in it; it is just between the members of the counselors 'chamber"*- woman from urban area in Marrakech.

*"Another thing, all political parties are like splitting a cake: give me this region and this municipality and I will give you this municipality - it means they are negotiating."*- man from urban area in Ouarzazate.

*"Everything should be clear in front of citizens. A political party that we did not know and did not want may win. And it will not do the things that the political party we voted for promised us."* - woman from rural area in Fez.

*"Personally, I believe they are selling votes through the indirect elections after alliances they have between them to elect the president of the region."*- man from urban area in Fez.

*"For instance one party in Marrakech got the majority of votes in the region and after negotiating, another party won."*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*"You vote for a political party and in the end it makes alliances with another political party, you were against. And the other political party wins, the one you did not want, because the political party you voted for gave him his vote."* -man from urban area in Ouarzazate.

*"We are surprised after alliances by the success of a political party we did not want. These alliances should be canceled."*- man from urban area in Fez.

*"When I voted for someone, I did not vote for him, so that he will vote for someone else. I voted for him to fulfill my demands."*- man from rural area in Fez.

**Perspectives on Decentralization**

A majority of participants opined that regional officials would be better poised to understand their constituents' issues because they would be closer to the problems and could make their decisions in a much timelier manner since they would not have to wait for approval from Rabat. Participants also anticipated that regional representatives would be more accountable for decisions due to their proximity to the citizens most directly affected by their actions.

In addition to increased accountability and faster turnover, participants also pointed to increased access to services as a benefit of regionalization, since they anticipated that decentralization would lower the need to travel to Rabat for government issues. Female participants were more likely than male participants to cite access to services as their reason for supporting the decentralization process, as well as a small majority of rural participants.

Male participants cited more efficient administrative practices more often than their female counterparts as the main positive point about decentralization. Younger participants were much more positive about the decentralization process than mature participants, citing more efficient management practices.

*"It is good to control each region by itself and take its own decision; it is good to be close to citizens."*- woman from rural area in Marrakech.

*"This is a good decision because the region itself can recognize its problems and it will be able to directly bandage the wound."*- man from urban area in Fez.

*"For example, in Tangier we have a water and electricity problem, the official of the region will intervene, we will wait not for the decision to come from Rabat."*- woman from urban area in Tangier.

*"When the decision is regional, each region is responsible for itself, and its president will be able to know the problems of the city or the region, because it will be from the area and knows the condition of the roads he walks in and he will recognize unsuitable and corrupted people in the municipality to remove them. It will change for the best."* - woman from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"For me it is a good decision, because if we want to penalize someone we will penalize the president of the region and not the head of government."*- man from urban area in Fez

*"The competitiveness between the regions, services will be good"*- man from urban area in Marrakech.

*"It facilitates getting one's administrative needs from the city they live in instead of going to Rabat city."*- man from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"Even if the citizen needed an administrative document he will not have to go to Rabat city, he can get it from the region he belongs to."*- man from urban area in Fez.

Participants that disapproved of the decentralization process were mainly concerned with lowered accountability stopgaps, regional rivalries and regional wealth disparities, and general inconveniences.

Participants worried about lowered accountability pointed to decreased governmental oversight and reduced popular mobilization as two key outcomes that regionalization would engender. For instance, participants contended that, since Rabat provides a check on corruption, regional officials would get away with corruption and ineptitude more easily without oversight from national authorities. A small minority of rural participants were skeptical of decentralization, fearing it would lead to corruption because local officials would not have to answer to Rabat. Lower-income groups were more suspicious of decentralization, fearing they would lose necessary protection from corruption provided by Rabat. In addition to fearing the loss of central control, some participants, especially those in higher age groups, worried that regional leaders would face less popular resistance to their actions since they would be confronting a smaller, regional constituency rather than a larger, national one.

Some participants suggested that regionalization could create regional rivalries that would undermine national unity, since elected officials would focus on regional issues at the expense of national issues. Male participants cited disunity as the main negative aspect of decentralization.

Meanwhile, some participants, especially those in higher age groups, expressed apprehension that decentralization would generate wealth disparities and inequalities between regions that could divide the country. Participants were also concerned about the inconveniences that regionalization would engender for local economies, schooling, local budgets, local laws and administrative practices. Female participants who were opposed to decentralization most often cited these types of inconveniences as the reason for their resistance to the process.

*"There will be neglect in that area, because the decision will not come from a national level, the news will not get to the major area."-* woman from rural area in Fez.

*"Before the decision was national, [Officials in Rabat] heard perspectives from all regions and made the right decision that will be applied on the whole country"* -man from urban area in Rabat.

*"We are one country and we are not divided"; "We are all Moroccans and one country."* -man from rural area in Morocco.

*"Economic disparity will happen in areas. We are one Morocco and division is not accepted, and all regions are united."-* woman from urban area in Fez.

*"Like Souss Massa Daraa, the one holding Morocco from the agriculture perspective. So the region will have an economic recession and Fez city will be needy."-* woman from urban area in Fez.

*"For instance the great Casablanca or Rabat regions have wonderful infrastructures, they have schools, institutions, colleges…unlike Errachidia city that is lacking the simplest things as hospitals."-* man from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"The allocated budget for the region is not enough for Tafilat city, so how is it supposed to be enough for Errachidia city too? Errachidia city is lacking infrastructure and needs 10 years to be developed."-* man from rural area in Ouarzazate.

*"I will give you an example about vacations that educators have, where vacations are separated and do not have them at once. Each region has a vacation in a different timing from another area, and this is not appropriate"-* woman from urban area in Fez.

*"For instance if the head of the region makes a wrong decision, it will harm the region and its inhabitants, but if the decision is national the people will defend it…if a wrong decision is issued, people [from different regions] will talk to each other and discuss the problem in order to find solutions for that decision. However, if the decision is regional the population of the*

*region will not be able to speak up for their rights, and there will be no one to defend them"* - man from rural area in Marrakech.