

FRAMING THE FUTURE

CITIZEN ATTITUDES ABOUT ELECTORAL AND CONSTITUTION DRAFTING PROCESSES

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA
Conducted August 12 - 24, 2011

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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

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

PREFACE

The nationwide protest movement that led to the overthrow of the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 was a first of its kind in the Arab world. In the following months, the country has proceeded through a political transition where political parties and civil society organizations are struggling to play a role in representing citizens' interests in the political system. Elections for a constituent assembly, which will be tasked with drafting a new constitution, were originally scheduled for July, but have been postponed to October 23, 2011. This round of focus group research took place during the holy month of Ramadan, coinciding with the end of the voter registration period, and captured citizen sentiment about political leadership and expectations for the next phase of Tunisia's transition following constituent assembly elections in October. The findings point to a growing political malaise throughout the country, in which citizens are both frustrated with political elites and increasingly skeptical that the constituent assembly elections will usher in a new political phase for Tunisians.

Purpose. In order to provide political and civic leaders in Tunisia with timely and objective information about citizens' priorities for the constituent assembly elections and their attitudes toward the constitution-drafting process, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) led a qualitative study in cities across Tunisia from August 12 to 24, 2011. The study comprised 12 focus group discussions throughout the country and examined the following:

- Perceptions about how the electoral process is unfolding, including voter registration;
- The extent to which gender, age and geography affect perceptions of politics;
- Perceptions of the degree of security and civil liberties enjoyed by Tunisian citizens; and,
- Attitudes toward the role the constitution should play in shaping a future Tunisian state and the process by which it will be drafted

The findings of this study were used to inform Tunisian decision-makers—in political parties and civil society organizations—about citizens' attitudes and opinions. The Institute commissioned EMRHOD Consulting to organize the study in four cities across the country. EMRHOD is a marketing and public opinion research firm based in North Africa, with offices in Tunis and Algiers, and a member of the ESOMAR research group. While several quantitative surveys have been conducted in Tunisia since January 2011, this study marks the third round of qualitative research on political issues in Tunisia's history, as independent public opinion research was not permitted under Ben Ali. For

NDI, the study represents the third in an on-going series of public opinion research that the Institute intends to conduct to provide analysis on Tunisian citizen attitudes toward the evolving political transition.

Focus Group Research: Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following a pre-set guideline. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions and experiences of participants who are recruited for the exercise. Focus groups are particularly useful in gaining a deeper appreciation of the motivations, feelings and values behind participants' reactions. In addition, the group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas – thus revealing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held – that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys. Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of participants, typically eight-12 per group. However, depending on the situation, groups may be slightly smaller or larger than the ideal. For example, a women's group in a more isolated area may benefit from being larger because it is likely that one or more of the participants will refuse to speak at length, even if pressed. Through facilitated, open-ended discussion, focus groups allow decision-makers to understand the motivations, feelings and values behind participant opinions. Further, focus group findings are only a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. Given the dynamism of the Tunisian transition, public opinion is in constant flux as citizens respond to unfolding events. The conclusions of this report therefore only represent opinions when research was conducted in mid-late August 2011.

Method. From August 12 to 24, 2011, NDI held 12 focus groups in four cities across Tunisia with a widespread geographical representation: Tunis, Tataouine, Tozeur and Kasserine. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight and geographic location. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI designated three distinct demographic groups for each location: 1) mixed gender youth (ages 24 – 35), 2) women over age 35, and 3) men over age 35. Each group comprised between seven and 10 participants. The gender breakdown was 53 percent men and 47 percent women. Participants were selected and re-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels and professions.

Staffing and Logistics: The moderator conducting all focus groups was a Tunisian citizen trained in moderator techniques by NDI and EMRHOD. All groups were conducted in the Tunisian dialect of Arabic and transcripts were prepared in Arabic and English.

Group Locations: The 12 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in four locations throughout Tunisia – Tunis, Tataouine, Tozeur and Kasserine. (See the map in

this section). Despite the additional challenge of organizing focus groups during the holy month of Ramadan, NDI and EMRHOD succeeded in carrying out all groups as originally scheduled. Locations selected for the study were urban or peri-urban areas. In all cases, appropriate venues for focus group discussions were identified to ensure participant privacy and sufficient space for indirect observation by NDI staff.

Outside Influence: In all cases, every effort was made to ensure there was no undue influence exerted on the participants in the groups. The focus group guideline was not shared with local authorities prior to the group, however in one instance, NDI and EMRHOD did receive questions from police and local community groups organizing security on the nature of the research. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from findings in the groups overall, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

MAP OF TUNISIA



One World Nations Online. August, 2011.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores public opinion in Tunisia in the late spring of 2011. Based on 12 focus group discussions with 113 Tunisian participants, the report examines attitudes and concerns of Tunisian citizens about the constituent assembly electoral process and the next phase of Tunisia's fragile political transition, which will focus on drafting a new constitution. As with all NDI public opinion studies, participants were asked about their views on political party and governing institution performance, security, and related issues. A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from participants, can be found in the Principal Findings section of this report.

I. Jobs, Security and Corruption

Participants cite lack of jobs, instability throughout the country and endemic corruption as principal issues of concern and cause for growing political malaise. Participants note growing frustration in the political transition, and the concern that political elites are debating issues which do not relate to the average citizen's daily concerns. The sense of political, economic and social disenfranchisement is particularly acute in areas outside Tunis.

Most groups expect ongoing instability to increase as elections approach and blame elements of the former regime as the primary cause. Localized instability is expected to become more organized and widespread as October 23 draws nearer, in an attempt to intimidate voters and reduce confidence in the elections.

Participants exhibit a high degree of concern over access to basic services and cited corruption by public officials as the main barrier to access. Participants are focused on the petty corruption they encounter in everyday life – the need to pay bribes simply to receive basic services, to be hired for a job, and more insidiously, to obtain justice from the police or through the courts. Not only is the Ben Ali-era corruption seen to persist through the transition, but the lack of a credible government has allowed the practice to flourish.

II. The General Direction of the Transition

Most groups express measured expectations for the political transition, based on growing frustration with political leaders, and indicated the potential for increased civil disobedience. Patience for political jockeying in Tunis is dwindling outside the capitol as little to no progress is made to promote local-level development. The majority of

participants, including Tunis residents, believe the country is not on track to achieve the goals of the revolution, and in extreme cases, consider the political process entirely hijacked by self-serving politicians.

Cooperation and coalition-building by political actors is the most frequently cited solution to participants' concern that the goals of the revolution are not being achieved. Cynicism about the political process is growing, as citizens can only point to a limited number of cases where parties and elites focused on improving the situation for all Tunisians. Many participants are hungry for leadership to promote unity.

Increased cost of living and ongoing strikes fuel unemployment and further economic hardship. Price hikes for basic staples, in part driven by rising demand resulting from the crisis in neighboring Libya, are intensifying economic hardship brought on by the drop in tourism following the revolution.

Participants in Tataouine, Tozeur and Kasserine believe the political process does not take regional diversity and interests into account. In each location, participants voiced the perception of being more marginalized than any other part of the country.

III. Voter Awareness and Confidence

Participants exhibited mixed opinions on the voter registration process, noting **confidence in the process and concern about low turn-out.** Each group, at least through a collective effort, was able to name the *Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections* (High Independent Authority for Elections or ISIE) and the main procedures of the voter registration process. Only about half of the groups express firm support for the ISIE.

Most groups express ambivalence about the ISIE's ability to successfully manage the constituent assembly elections. Many participants admonish the ISIE for not faithfully adhering to a policy of neutrality. They question the body's ability to ensure the voting is conducted in secret and to put in place transparent counting procedures to safeguard citizen choices.

The presence of observers – both Tunisian and international – is mentioned as one of the main indicators participants will use to judge whether the election and results are credible. The role of observers, sometimes misunderstood to be election managers, is widely considered a key addition to the Tunisian electoral process. Those who cite the importance of observers do not indicate any personal commitment to playing this role.

Participants exhibit little personal responsibility for safeguarding the elections beyond fulfilling their duty to vote. While participants consistently express their intention to vote, there is limited recognition of additional roles individual citizens may play in overseeing the electoral process.

IV. The Political Landscape

When asked about the high number of political parties who will contest the constituent assembly elections, participants, especially women, note general confusion in distinguishing between party brands and platforms. Most participants feel that parties' plans are unclear, or in some cases non-existent. For a minority of participants, the existence of numerous political parties confirms increased freedoms since the revolution, and a diverse party landscape is seen as an important contributor to the democratic transition.

Concerns about party behavior can be traced to a lack of accountability for actions and a failure to follow through on promises to citizens. Along with apprehension about the number of political parties, participants point to the need for leaders to be held accountable to campaign promises and to deliver tangible results which meet citizen expectations for political, social and economic reform.

With the exception of Ennahda, whose name and leadership are universally known, awareness of other parties remains very low, and is cited as a primary reason citizens would not go out to vote. The prospect of so many political parties competing in the election makes many participants nervous. Participants fear this competition could widen social divisions and possibly lead to conflict, especially prior to the election. Some believe the vast number of parties will make it impossible for citizens to have the information needed to make an informed choice on election day. However, a significant minority of participants see immediate benefits to having multiple parties competing against each other because competition will spur more responsive and accountable government.

There is no consensus on how parties should be allowed to fundraise, however there was consistent concern about foreign financing and the potential for vote-buying. Participants display uneven awareness about legislation on political party financing and fundraising. Men in particular are anxious about the potential for parties attempting to buy favor as the elections approach.

V. Constitutional Questions

Participants express discord over the need for a new constitution versus revision of certain articles of the current text, particularly those pertaining to the role of the presidency. When asked about the next phase of Tunisia's transition, which will include consideration of the nation's constitution, many participants feel strongly that the previous version should be entirely disregarded in order to break definitively from the former regime. A sizable minority prefer to amend the current constitution, noting that under Ben Ali specific revisions had been made as well, which could be reversed or reconsidered. There is unanimous support for term limits for a future president.

The role of religion in the constitution, and specifically Qu'ranic texts, remains divisive. Each group mentioned the Qu'ran when referencing Tunisia's constitution – in some instances as a guiding force, in others as a source which should be quoted directly. When asked if specific articles relating to women should be included, the majority of participants state that the Qu'ran and the Personal Status Code already provide detailed guidance on the rights and duties of women.

Participants have limited expectations about the drafting process, how it may proceed, or the potential role that individual citizens or civil society will play as part of a consultative process. Participants' responses to a number of discussion questions suggest that they expect to have limited influence over the constitution drafting process, often remarking that their only responsibility in the process is to elect a constituent assembly member who will have ultimate decision-making responsibilities. A significant minority think civil society organizations and political parties should represent citizen interests during the drafting process.

In terms of the time needed to finalize the new constitution, participants feel most comfortable with a range of six months to one year, but little more. There is widespread recognition that the constitution drafting process will feature a complex series of negotiations, which may include a national referendum. The majority of participants are willing to grant politicians up to one year to finalize the document; however they are equally adamant that future political landmarks in the transition need to be quickly established. Presidential or parliamentary elections are the most commonly cited milestones.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

This study is both a continuation of previous research that explored citizens' opinions of the political transition since the revolution in January 2011, and a first look at attitudes about one of the most important milestones, the constitution drafting process which will follow constituent assembly elections. The two are integrally connected; citizens' views on the past and their life today colors their expectations for what the constitution should mean and how it should impact their future. Further, the upcoming elections are seen by many as a first marker of progress toward achieving the goals set forth during the popular uprising. The stakes could hardly be higher as stability may depend on ordinary citizens' assessment of whether the election has been fair and whether the outcome will be of benefit or harm. To determine what factors will influence that assessment, NDI conducted 12 focus groups with 113 participants throughout Tunisia. The findings, drawn from participants' comments, are below.

I. Jobs, Security and Corruption

The most acute concern for Tunisians remains the lack of jobs, and financial instability since the January revolution. Unemployment remains the most frequently cited concern of all age and geographical groups, as it was in NDI's most recent study conducted three months prior in May 2011. Women often cite the employment needs of their children rather than their own.

"Do you still feel safe when you walk on the street? No. What difference does it make to have a piece of paper that says I can vote? Most people think about their everyday lives, about the seven or eight people they have at home and how to feed them, not about who is going to be president." Woman, Tunis, 26 years old

"Many people are unemployed and looking for work. Others have work, but don't have permanent positions – we need more security in the country." Man, Kasserine, 28 years old

"Employment is the most important point. Manipulation from above – there is only movement from the top. Revolution of the youth – support should be for them as well as for people supporting families." Woman, Tunis, 60 years old

Security and corruption are secondary concerns for most groups, as they impact access to basic services. Access to unemployment assistance, healthcare and other administrative services is hindered, according to participants, by volatile security linked to strikes, as well as widespread nepotism and corruption.

"Security must be addressed. Then everything else will get into place."
Woman, Tunis, 55 years old

"Security is the main concern above anything else, and then comes justice and less corruption. Corruption and connections have destroyed us in Kasserine." Woman, Kasserine, 66 years old

"I've seen no improvements. Corruption is still there – in fact it's going backwards, not forwards. If you go to a hospital and want to see a nurse, they will just say, go sue the hospital if you want." Man, Tunis, 37 years old

Recent court rulings including former regime members foment concerns about large-scale corruption, in addition to the daily instances of petty corruption.

"The first thing is justice. Security, corruption will be addressed systematically if justice is applied. If there is justice there will be honesty, security, transparency." Woman, Kasserine, 34 years old

"One of the goals was to judge those people who are corrupt, but nothing has happened. There is no independent judiciary; the media is not following social issues." Male, Tunis, 26 years old

II. The General Direction of the Transition

The majority of participants agree that Tunisia is headed in the wrong direction. The proliferation of political parties which are viewed as self-serving and too numerous, coupled with lack of information on the next phases of the political transition, are the most frequently cited reasons for why the situation will not improve in the short- and medium-term.

"Things are not going well. We are like a prisoner who sees a window opening and gets very happy but all he can see is the light, so he can't see things clearly. We are walking out, still dazzled by the light. It's not something we have lived before. Everything seems blurred and fuzzy, but I have high hopes that things will clear up very soon." Woman, Tunis, 60 years old

"Strikes. People should go back to work. The time for protest is over. Rebuild their country and its politics." Man, Tataouine, 48 years old

"The government should try to work faster to improve the situation. There are so many problems that require immediate action, but the people

can't wait. How can they wait when they can't feed their families? Social justice is needed." Man, Tozeur, 34 years old

Those who are able to identify positive changes since the revolution cite increased freedoms, including the ability to speak and gather in public without reservation. However, these examples are immediately qualified with the caveat that such freedoms are not sufficient.

"Two goals have been reached, before we couldn't speak, now we can. We also have freedom in religious beliefs." Woman, Tozeur, 30 years old

"The interim government is imposing things they shouldn't. The way the government is dealing with the press is wrong. Aid is not distributed properly and the poor continue to suffer." Man, Tataouine, 46 years old

"Freedom of expression – you don't have to be afraid anymore. This is an improvement, but is very slow." Woman, Tunis, 55 years old

A vocal minority believe there has been back-sliding since the revolution and that the goals of the revolution are in danger. Leadership within the interim government and the rising influence of former members of the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), the ruling party under Ben Ali, are of greatest concern to participants.

"Old and new forces are fighting for power, and not considering the priorities of the people. Old forces are still getting the best of the country without any control." Woman, Tunis, 38 years old

"No one wants to take full responsibility. The Ministry of Interior can't even take a decision, this is because of fear, people are still afraid of one another." Man, Tozeur, 37 years old

"What happened to the goals of the revolution? To create a free country, to set up a free judiciary...Unemployment is rising, the government is doing nothing, those in power before are still there, and we have no progress on a constitution." Woman, Tunis, 26 years old

"[Progress] is very slow, for many reasons. Twenty-three years of the old system, the process of destroying something is much easier than building something new. This is what we are trying to do now." Man, Kasserine, 43 years old

Many participants complain about regional discrimination which favors the capital, and perceive the situation in their governorate to be worse than that of any other in the

country. Many participants lament a corrupt central government which has historically favored the coastal region, where those without power do not receive justice and where bribery is commonplace. They also point to cases of economic deprivation and lack of basic services, coupled with additional hardships since the revolution, including a steep decline in tourism.

"There should be no regionalism, no difference between the coastal regions and Sahel. We have suffered a lot of discrimination in Tataouine."
Man, Tataouine, 36 years old

"With my respect to all regions, Sidi Bouzid is quite wealthy because it has agriculture. Here, we can only rely on tourism, everything is dead here now. At the same time, there is no interest by the government to address the problem. Tozeur is the most affected area compared to the north."
Woman, Tozeur, 30 years old

"Kasserine is the last governorate in terms of health, water, sanitation and employment." Man, Kasserine, 32 years old

"Tataouine has many resources but no one is benefitting from this in terms of employment. We have no parks – kids in the summer have nowhere to go. There are so many things to talk about that do not exist here. We feel alienated. We are all Tunisians. We were part of the resistance, but Tataouine is totally forgotten." Woman, Tataouine, 40 years old

III. Voter Awareness and Confidence

About two-thirds of participants took part in voter registration and have a positive assessment of the process. Participants were asked for their reactions to the voter registration process organized by the ISIE. Naturally, their responses are linked to their overall thoughts about the process to-date: those who believe the process was generally conducted in a proper manner tend to support the ISIE and registered, while those who were unsatisfied with the process are critical of the ISIE and did not register.

"The elections have to succeed. People are ambitious and even if anyone wants to return to a dictatorship they better think twice. We have seen people volunteer to take others to register. But people are hesitant because they don't know the political parties." Man, Tunis, 47 years old

"I am going to vote and encourage those who don't want to go, to go and vote." Woman, Tozeur, 41 years old

"For us in Kasserine, I have trust in the procedure and in the members. I know the members who are part of the ISIE here, but I don't have trust in the government, so they need to keep out of the process." Man, Kasserine, 32 years old

"I am going to vote on the basis that my voice does mean something. Each person has a weight within the society." Man, Kasserine, 34 years old

When asked about their expectations for the upcoming constituent assembly elections, participants are hopeful that vote will mark a positive milestone, but are fearful about the process and outcomes. **Those who express primarily negative views point to potential occurrences of violence and intimidation.**

"There may be a few disagreements, but I do hope they succeed. People are not used to being part of politics. We all lack political culture, and we are all learning. We need a lot of time." Male, Tunis, 51 years old

"I hope there won't be violent clashes between the partisans of the different parties." Male, Tataouine, 57 years old

"We are nearing elections and we still know nothing about how they will be managed and what we should do. I don't trust the authorities anymore." Man, Tozeur, 40 years old

"I imagine elections to be a new beginning, or the start of a new revolution. But those who have registered are only one-third of the population and we are afraid of the reactions of the former RCD. People who didn't register must have a reason. The former RCD members will have a reaction." Woman, Tataouine, 25 years old

Some also fault the ISIE for its perceived lack of objectivity and lack of preparedness despite the postponement of the election date from July to October.

"We have no tradition in elections. You take the lists and just go vote, but we still don't have any idea about voting and the process." Man, Tataouine, 34 years old

"I need someone to explain to me how the elections are going to be, before I can say whether they will be fair or not. I need to understand who is who." Man, Tozeur, 46 years old

Participants identified three key criteria which will help them judge whether the constituent elections are conducted fairly – the absence of external influence on voter choices, the sanctity of the voting booth, and transparent counting procedures.

“Elections are a big question mark. No one knows what’s going to happen – if the elections are democratic and transparent, we will achieve something. But if we get into personal interests or forging elections, people will continue to have no interest in the government. Tunisians have no more trust.” Man, Tataouine, 28 years old

“The awareness of the people is important. There are people who are spending money to obtain your voice. They shouldn’t be buying votes.” Man, Tunis, 35 years old

“They have to respect the main conditions for voting. Secrecy. Transparency. Observation.” Man, Tunis, 41 years old

“We want a fair president, not as we had before. We want things to be democratic, no one telling us to pick a red card or a green card or a purple card...I expect elections to be honest.” Woman, Tataouine, 47 years old

A vocal minority also note the presence of Tunisian and international observers as an important indicator which will influence voter confidence.

“I won’t vote if I don’t find observers.” Man, Tunis, 35 years old

“First I want to check the observers, if I see there are faces of the old system, I will raise my concerns.” Man, Tozeur, 30 years old

“International observation is vital.” Woman, Kasserine, 37 years old

IV. The Political Landscape

NDI conducted focus groups during the month of Ramadan, just prior to the candidate registration period which began on September 1. Participants were asked to identify all political parties with which they were familiar. **There is very low awareness of political leaders and parties, with the exception of Ennahda, which was identified first in all focus groups.**

“Apart from Ennahda, no other party is now ready. The presidents of these parties did not set platforms from which you can choose the party you will

vote for. No party has well introduced itself and presented its platform in a clear way.” Man, Tataouine, 46 years old

“I expect [Ennahda] to obtain the majority of votes in the south. Members of this party in this area are very unlikely to change their minds and adhere to other parties because they have suffered a lot. The party went through a lot under the old regime, and this has gained them a lot of ground.” Man, Tozeur, 37 years old

Almost all respondents show concern about the large number of parties and the lack of information available about their leaders, member and platforms. Participants also struggle to differentiate between parties, often referencing ‘the left,’ ‘the democrats,’ or ‘the capitalists’ in lieu of specific party information.

“The number of parties shows freedom and diversity, but political plans are quite similar so it is difficult to differentiate and know who to choose.” Woman, Tunis, 28 years old

“There are too many political parties to the point that the average citizen no longer understands what each party is going to present.” Woman, Tataouine, 28 years old

“We can only name seven parties. We don’t know the leaders and their plans. Can you imagine with the rest of them?” Woman, Tunis, 60 years old

“Someone gave me a leaflet containing information that is similar to any other party. I read it, but I still don’t know anything yet. When I read the names, they are not from the south; they are all from the coast.” Woman, Tozeur, 30 years old

Participants exhibit a strong desire for, and yet a deep level of skepticism about, fulfillment of candidates’ campaign promises. Participants express their fervent hopes that campaign promises will be realized. Yet even many of those with overall positive views of the campaign period express a high degree of skepticism that these promises will indeed come to fruition.

“They promise things but don’t keep their promises. Political parties are doing some kind of camouflage just to attract people.” Man, Tozeur, 55 years old

"They should work for the entire country, in the interests of the people, by focusing on development projects. Being truthful." Woman, Kasserine, 28 years old

Participants are divided on what they consider reasonable sources of funding for parties to access, and confusion over legislation governing party finances. The majority of participants feel parties' finances require strict oversight.

"Why fund political parties? Wouldn't it be better to create projects for the people? I think it's a waste of money." Woman, Tozeur, 41 years old

"Funding shouldn't come from abroad. And it should be declared. I don't think businessmen should finance parties. For me, the sources of funding are unclear. People don't have money, but political parties do." Man, Kasserine, 32 years old

"Funding should not be from private or external sources." Man, Tunis, 35 years old

"Funding is necessary but they have to be supervised. We are afraid that the amounts of funding parties get will exceed the limits. There should be supervision over the funding." Man, Tataouine, 34 years old

Participants primarily receive information from TV and the Internet. Many people mentioned that seeing video footage on TV news reports adds to its credibility. Participants in each group turn to multiple sources to gather information, also noting that friends and neighbors are important sources of information.

Among available TV channels, participants note *Al Jazeera* and France 24 most often, followed by the Tunisian national stations, and then Nessma TV and Hannibal TV. When mentioned, regional radio stations were considered a reliable source of news. Facebook is universal among young participants; even those who do not use the site mention it as a credible source of information.

V. Constitutional Questions

Constituent assembly elections on October 23 will allow Tunisian citizens to elect representatives who will be tasked with overseeing the drafting of a new constitution for the nation. When asked about their opinion on the purpose of a constitution, participants focus on the need for a new set of articles to frame political and social life in Tunisia. **Participants disagree over the need for adopting new constitution versus revising certain articles, particularly those pertaining to the role of the presidency.**

"We need a new constitution because the old one was tailored to the needs of those who were in power." Man, Tunis, 35 years old

"The old constitution didn't really give good results. The whole revolution was done to refute all the old vestiges of the system." Woman, Tataouine, 29 years old

"The problem is not having a new constitution. It is about applying what is in it." Woman, Tunis, 62 years old

Participants prioritize enshrining basic freedoms, and the role of religion in the constitution, although the nature of its role remains divisive.

"Freedom is the most important thing to regulate the political life." Man, Tunis, 28 years old

"The constitution will have to reconcile between religion and political power." Man, Tunis, 40 years old

"Religion has to do with our beliefs, the constitution should be separate." Man, Tunis, 51 years old

When asked whether women should have specific rights outlined in the constitution, groups consistently think incorporating such language into the text should be a low priority, stressing instead the need for equality for all citizens under the law.

"Why specific rights? Why not general rights for women and for men? People are looking at the whole situation backwards – women should work, but they can still behave according to religion." Woman, Tunis, 31 years old

"I don't think we need any new clarifications or additions. Women already have their rights stated...like the right to employment. If you compare women in Saudi Arabia, for example, they don't even have the right to drive, or preside over companies." Man, Tozeur, 37 years old

"Women's rights are determined by the personal status code, not the constitution." Man, Kasserine, 33 years old

Those who do voice an interest in seeing women specifically mentioned in the constitution focus on access to education and employment. A minority also invoke the right for women to stay home.

"Equality in salaries between men and women. Women's right to participate in politics should be applied." Woman, Tunis, 62 years old

"They should give women rights to access political life, in elections, just like men." Woman, Tozeur, 41 years old

"Our place is at home. Men don't have their full rights either. If men get their rights, women could stay home. She won't be able to do everything – take care of kids, work, etc." Woman, Tunis, 37 years old

Participants have limited expectations about the drafting process, how it may proceed, or the potential role of individual citizens or civic associations as part of a consultative process.

"They should ask the people if they agree or disagree with the laws." Man, Tunis, 26 years old

"They would ask the judges and lawyers to prepare a draft and then share it with all the people." Man, Tunis, 26 years old

"Associations working in different areas such as human rights, women's rights, should all give suggestions." Man, Tunis, 26 years old

"I don't understand what my role is." Woman, Tunis, 41 years old

"Political parties have a very important role in writing the constitution. Their role is the application of the laws. They have a supervisory role as well. They need to draw attention to gaps." Man, Tozeur, 30 years old

When asked what would be considered a reasonable amount of time to draft a new constitution, participants feel most comfortable with six months to one year, but little more.

"We should expect the constitution will take a few months. There is no point in rushing. We want a solid constitution." Man, Tunis, 41 years old

"I expect it to be ready six months after the elections." Woman, Tataouine, 31 years old

"Maybe toward the end of the year everything will be done. The constitution is important, but we need to move on and work on issues that affect our daily lives." Woman, Tataouine, 35 years old

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The scheduled 2011 constituent assembly election presents opportunities but also significant risks. There is an incredible hunger for democratic governance. Participants in this study are anxiously awaiting the day when they will be able to cast their votes for parties and candidates who will be accountable to them, however they have pessimistic views about politicians and government officials alike. At the same time, many feel that the transition to democracy could be derailed, with youth being particularly vocal about their concerns that the goals of the revolution have been hijacked and they have few avenues for genuine engagement in politics. Cheating in the election is a major concern and political violence is widely feared. In addition, if the elections and the ensuing phase of the transition, including drafting the constitution, do not bring significant change, Tunisians will be bitterly disappointed, thus providing fertile ground for future unrest. The basic task for those who wish to see a peaceful and successful election will be to promote democratic values within a population largely unfamiliar with them, to manage expectations and to ensure that citizens will have faith in any fair election outcome. Participants' responses in this study provide some guidance for how best to accomplish these objectives.

Building Knowledge of and Support for the Political Process

The upcoming election will be the first genuine multi-party, democratic experience in Tunisian history. Participants are eager to participate in the election, but they know little about the mechanics of voting, assume there will be mismanagement or fraud and harbor many misperceptions about who will be involved in the election. Civic and voter education efforts will need to be multi-faceted to increase not only knowledge of voting, but also faith in the election process. Since it is responsible for managing the polling process, the ISIE must play a lead role on voter information and education, particularly on issues surrounding voting, counting procedures and the role of international and domestic observers.

Recommendations:

- Communicate the purpose and process of the election to eliminate any confusion.
- Engage in a large-scale effort to provide details about the voting process, and political parties or coalitions who will be competing on election day.
- Address concerns about the voting and counting procedures, including fears that there will be rigging, and reassure the population of their ability to cast a ballot in secret.

- Inform the public about voting and counting safeguards and the role of monitors and observers to build confidence in the process and the results.
- Promote the benefits of multi-party competition and the rights of all parties to campaign, including through Government of Tunisia pronouncements sanctioning the activity.
- Instruct the population about appropriate behavior for party/candidate supporters in the election and the dangers of election-related conflict.
- Inform the population of the importance of respecting freedom of speech and the rights of citizens to support any party/list of their choosing to reduce the likelihood of violence.
- Involve civil society in voter education to leverage their close connection with communities.
- Explain that winners and losers are a natural part of the democratic process and emphasize that elected officials are to behave objectively and in the interest of all the people.
- Share information that will help citizens develop more realistic expectations of election outcomes.

Setting Expectations for More Representative and Responsive Governance

Tunisian participants in this study from areas outside the Tunis-coastal corridor express a limited degree of tolerance with the political leadership's shortcomings, citing the lack of consultation and genuine interest in national representation. There are signs they increasingly blame the government for their problems and are developing a view that it is unresponsive to their needs, in the same way previous governments have been. The patience Tunisians have demonstrated thus far is likely to dissipate quickly after the election as they look to a newly elected constituent assembly to deliver political, economic and social improvements and to fully resolve lingering insecurity problems. If citizens continue to perceive that government and political leadership are failing to take action on the highest priority issues, public dissatisfaction may further increase, potentially in dramatic fashion after the election.

Recommendations:

- Discuss the problem of perceived 'regionalism' openly with the public and communicate plans for addressing it.
- Promote and enforce merit-based hiring rules in civil service employment.
- Conduct an audit of employment in government, address any imbalances caused by nepotism and make the results public.
- Demonstrate a strong commitment to anti-corruption efforts through the creation of robust investigative and enforcement mechanisms.

- Increase communication about political decision-making including coalition-building in the to-be-elected constituent assembly, descriptions of how the mandate for the constituent assembly will be determined, and explanations of reasons for any delays.
- Manage expectations on economic development with communication of realistic timeframes and honest assessments of what can be accomplished within budget constraints.
- Place training and deployment of police on a fast track and prioritize deployments to particularly unstable areas.
- Expand efforts to engage in dialogue with citizens including traditional and new media, as well as through regular travel by constituent assembly members to their constituencies.

Framing an Inclusive Constitutional Process

The current constitution of Tunisia, adopted in 1959, was amended multiple times to benefit the interests of former president Ben Ali. Most of the people interviewed expressed the need to revise the constitution and bring a sense of a return to normalcy for the country. Still, many who support this strategy also question whether the constituent assembly has the capacity to engage in broad constitutional revision, as their mandate remains unclear more than seven months after the decree to elect the body.

The basic issue of distribution of power between future executive and legislative branches remains unresolved. It is unclear to what extent political decentralization will be encouraged, the presidency's power reduced and the parliamentary system strengthened. Furthermore, constitutional discussions offer an opportunity to settle the differences between the parties in the aftermath of a divisive campaign period in the run-up to constituent assembly elections. The constitutional discussion should therefore result in a framework for power-sharing, a reconciliation process among political parties and civil society actors, as well as genuine entrées for Tunisian citizens to comment on the process.

Recommendations:

- Newly elected constituent assembly members should take immediate steps to ensure broad societal representation in the constitution drafting process, set clear timelines for review, and resolve outstanding questions about distribution of power and the role of religion in Tunisia's political system.
- The constituent assembly and political parties should ensure the representation of civil society in the constitutional reform process, including the potential for

taking decision-making to the Tunisian citizens through a referendum on a draft constitution.

- Civil society organizations, political parties and the media should: be held responsible for their interventions in the political process; ensure that they participate positively in the constitutional reform process; monitor the reform process; and provide civic education to Tunisian citizens on a new constitution in advance of a potential referendum.
- A consultative process on constitution drafting should be framed as a broad reconciliation effort to confront societal cleavages and address questions of transitional justice.