

Youth Perceptions in Morocco: Political Parties in the Wake of Legislative Elections

Findings from Qualitative Research in Morocco
Conducted in March and April 2012

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

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

PREFACE

On November 25, Moroccans went to the polls in early legislative elections as part of a response to nationwide protests earlier in the year that provoked a constitutional revision. At 45 percent, voter turnout was slightly higher than in the 2007 legislative elections and procedural improvements may have resulted in an outcome more reflective of Moroccans' wishes than was seen in previous elections. However, the tepid turnout, along with nationwide efforts to encourage an election day boycott, a high number of invalid and protest ballots (averaging 20 percent in stations observed by some international observers), suggested that citizens are interested in further and deeper political reform. The Justice and Development Party (PJD) won a plurality of 107 seats in the 395-member body, with the runner-up Independence Party (PI, also known as *Istiqlal*) placing well behind with 60 seats. Based on results of the elections and the new constitutional requirement that the head of government be named from the party with the most seats, King Mohammed VI named PJD Secretary General Abdelilah Benkirane as prime minister. In the days following the election, Prime Minister Benkirane formed a coalition with the PI, Popular Movement (MP), and Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS).

This focus group research took place during the new government's first three months in office. The findings point to a youth population that views the elections as a major step forward in terms of transparency and is optimistic about the prospects of a PJD-led government. While expectations of the new government remain very high, a significant number of participants demonstrated a realistic view of the challenges that such a government will face and the patience needed for progress to be made or a judgment taken. They seek more responsiveness from political parties, with ongoing engagement and more effective campaigns based on realistic promises. They provide an overarching sense that public participation in electoral politics will evaporate if they do not feel there is a real effort to try new approaches and forge profound change.

Purpose: To provide political and civic leaders in Morocco with timely and objective information on young peoples' overarching concerns and attitudes in light of the November 2011 elections and the formation of a new government guided by a revised constitution, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) led a qualitative study in towns and cities across Morocco from March 15 to April 6, 2012. This study built on similar research with youth conducted by NDI in July 2011 following the constitutional referendum.¹ The study comprised 18 focus group discussions designed to examine:

- The general mood of youth relative to recent political developments;
- Voting behavior in the 2011 legislative elections, general knowledge about elections, and attitudes toward expected municipal elections;
- Perceptions of political parties in light of recent electoral campaigns and suggestions to parties for improving public engagement and support; and
- Perceptions of the new government, opposition parties, and other movements.

¹ See <http://www.ndi.org/Report-on-youth-perceptions-in-Morocco>.

The Institute commissioned Bridgehead Consulting to organize and lead the study in nine locations around the country. Bridgehead is a research firm based in Morocco that draws together experienced and professional qualitative research experts with a range of domestic and international experiences in focus groups for concept evaluation, policy and message development, campaign testing, educational materials development, and needs assessments. Given the important place of youth and their preoccupations in last year's protest movements—but to a much lesser extent in recent political processes, despite much talk about how political actors need to better engage young people—the research was designed to provide a deeper understanding of young Moroccan's perceptions as political parties approach early municipal elections now anticipated for late 2012 or 2013.

Focus Group Research: Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following a pre-set guideline. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions and experiences of participants who are recruited for the exercise. They reveal not just *what* people think, but also *why* they think that way, *how* they formulate opinions, and *how strongly* these opinions are held. They also help researchers to better understand the various shades of gray – hesitation, enthusiasm, anger, or uncertainty. By listening directly to the voices of participants, focus groups are a valuable tool for understanding the “why” behind the numbers contained in surveys. In addition, the group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas – thus revealing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held – that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys. Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of participants, typically eight to 12 per group. However, depending on the situation, groups may be slightly smaller or larger than the ideal.

Through facilitated, open-ended discussion, focus groups allow decision makers to understand the motivations, feelings, and values behind participant opinions. Unlike a survey, whose claim to reliability is based on the representativeness of its sample, focus group results are useful because they reflect the views of typical individuals in specific social groups. In other words, the research focuses on understanding attitudes, rather than measuring them. As in a representative survey, researchers 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.

Method: From March 15 to April 6, 2012, less than four months following early legislative elections and the formation of a new government, NDI conducted 18 focus groups in nine cities across Morocco. Each location included sessions with adult male and female citizens, segregated by sex, ranging from 18 to 25 years old. At minimum, all participants had completed senior high school. Focus groups were conducted with participants from five urban centers – Agadir, Meknes, Marrakech, Oujda, and Tiznit – as well as four rural areas surrounding Beni Mellal, El Jadida, Errachidia, and Ouazzane. Each group consisted of between eight and eleven participants, who were selected and re-screened to ensure a diverse

representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores public opinion among young people in Morocco in the spring of 2012, less than four months after early legislative elections and within three months of the formation of a new government led by a historic opposition party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD). Based on 18 focus group discussions with 160 Moroccan youth aged 18 to 25 years, the report examines attitudes of average young Moroccan citizens toward the current situation in their country, major political actors, and recent and upcoming elections. Significantly, attitudes proved to be generally consistent across all focus groups, regardless of region or gender. A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from participants and key conclusions, can be found in the ensuing section of this report.

I. General Mood

- **Many young Moroccans are quite positive about the current political direction of the country.** Constitutional reforms, elections perceived as more transparent, and the victory of the PJD are mentioned by most focus groups participants as positive indicators.
- **Some remain circumspect as to the actual outcome of the elections and the likelihood that it will precipitate significant change.** These participants believe the PJD's victory was engineered to calm the streets and question whether the government actually has the power to effect change.
- **Unemployment continues to be identified as the most pressing issue facing the country.** There is a sense that the government could lose credibility if it proves unable to reduce the high unemployment rate.
- **A significant number of moderate voices in the focus groups note that the government needs to be given time to address major issues before its performance can be judged.** Action on endemic corruption, which many see as a major impediment to reform and economic development, is considered a positive sign that participants want to see continued.

II. Perspectives on Elections

- **The overwhelming majority of focus group participants characterize the recent legislative elections as a step forward.** The fact that a historic opposition party won the largest number of seats in the parliament and formed the first government following a constitutional revision is seen as a significant and positive development.
- **A large majority of the participants believe that the elections were conducted in a fair and transparent manner.** According to most participants, the results were both expected and credible.

- **Despite this positive view, young citizens' knowledge about elections in general and the role of elected officials in particular is generally low.** Participants acknowledge their own ignorance and cannot articulate how elections directly or indirectly affect their lives.
- **Moroccan youth indicate that they accessed information on the elections from a variety of sources,** most notably television (both domestic and foreign), the Internet, and in casual discussion with friends. They do not rely on any single source for all of their information and value social interactions with friends and family for debate and discussion. The Internet and foreign television are generally considered more credible sources.
- **Although most participants indicate that they themselves did not vote in the November election, a majority of participants suggest that they have a greater intention to vote in upcoming communal elections.** A large number remain undecided, linking their willingness to vote to tangible change, particularly relative to more meaningful interaction with political parties and the presence of new and younger candidates.

III. Attitudes Toward Political Parties

- **Overall, almost all participants characterize the general performance of political parties as extremely unsatisfactory.** They note that parties continued to follow the same patterns in the November legislative elections as in previous elections.
- Despite recent elections and a general knowledge of larger political parties by name and symbol, **participants continue to have a very superficial knowledge of party ideologies or platforms.**
- **However, a number of participants have slightly more positive attitudes about the performance of political parties since the November elections.** They note that “serious” parties are more visible in the media, they appreciate early efforts on issues such as corruption and health care, and they sense more effort by elected officials at the local level.
- To instill support prior to upcoming election, **there is unanimous consensus among participants about the need for political parties to keep the promises they give to constituents during election campaigns.** Most suggest that they simply want realistic and manageable promises that can be acted upon.
- **Participants link their intention to vote in upcoming communal elections to the degree of responsiveness they feel from political parties in listening to and acting on the needs of citizens.** Examples of action on the part of political parties included active engagement with average citizens, providing young people a chance to participate in political party decision making and action, opening more regional offices, and maintaining a year-round presence.

- **Participants strongly suggest that parties rethink the style of campaigning in Morocco and improve their approach to communicating with citizens.** They suggest more direct contact with party leaders, the use of simple language and local dialects, more concise platforms with realistic promises, concrete assessments of past party success, and less dependence on posters, flyers, and other written material.

IV. Perceptions of the New Government

- **For the most part, participants maintain a positive attitude toward the new government and associate it with a sense of transparency and energy.** They applaud the fact that new faces are in government and cite concrete examples as proof that things are going in the right direction under the new government.
- **A great majority of the participants are comfortable with the party in leadership, and feel happy, satisfied, and optimistic about the future of the country.** Many find the PJD's Islamic reference as meaningful, while others point to its effectiveness in relating to the public, as a credible opposition party, and in fighting corruption as praiseworthy and signs of hopefulness.
- **The positions of different political parties as members of the government or the opposition are often confused by participants.** A number of participants either believe the PJD is alone in government or cannot name other coalition partners; governing coalition members are sometimes cited as members of the opposition and vice versa.
- **Universally, however, participants point to the importance of an effective and constructive opposition.** They wish to see the opposition parties playing a positive role in offering alternative solutions and working with the government rather than simply criticizing for opposition's sake.
- **Participants readily refer to the positive impact of the February 20 Movement on reforms that have taken place to date, but have mixed opinions about the role it should play moving forward.** Many suggest that the Movement should continue as a pressure group outside of formal politics, while many others suggest the Movement become more involved in politics, including joining with political parties. All note that neither the Movement nor government should resort to violence.

GENERAL MOOD

While greatly concerned with issues that affect their daily lives, such as jobs and education, many young Moroccans are quite positive about the current direction of the country. Constitutional reforms, legislative elections perceived as more transparent, the victory of the PJD, and the opportunity for a historic opposition party to form a new government are mentioned by most focus groups participants as positive indicators of a country making steady progress in the right direction.

“There were lots of speeches and elections were given more importance than before. People are conscious and wanted to call into account those officials and MPs who were in the government for years and did nothing. Nobody could do that before. Now with democracy and freedom of speech, it’s possible.” (*Man, urban, Tiznit*)

“Elections are more credible this year than before.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“Elections this year showed what each political party really deserves. Elections were based on merit this year.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“This party has been in the opposition ever since its creation. [...] Moroccans are feeling at ease with this party leading. Elections showed democracy and transparency.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“I think the winning party gave us some hope about the future of the country.” (*Woman, urban, Tiznit*)

“Since independence there is a routine in elections and nothing is new; except this year.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“I think it’s the first time political parties consider the viewpoints of people, mainly youth. It’s the first time a political leader, without mentioning names, uses language that we young people understand. Years before when someone talked about politics people didn’t understand anything.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“The new government summarizes the whole thing, elections and everything.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

At the same time, a number of participants are circumspect about the actual outcome and impact of the recent legislative elections. Lingering disaffection with electoral politics and institutions pervades many participant comments. Many in this minority question whether the results will precipitate significant change, and in some cases raise deep concerns about the impact if change doesn’t come.

“You know that the Arab world witnessed lots of revolutions, so decision makers in Morocco gave the PJD a chance not to show transparency but to cool the anger of people and likely revolution. I think it’s a well-structured and planned policy from the high authorities.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“Elections, as my friend said, aren’t credible. Nothing changes. When they win politicians disappear and that’s a reason for abstinence.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“I think the arrival of the PJD in the government was meant by the state. It was done on purpose to cool down the anger of the population with regard to what was happening in Arab countries. So for fear of revolution the state selected the PJD so that people would get back their confidence in the government.” (*Male, urban, Meknes*)

“For me these elections are just like other elections before. No elections have ever brought any structural change.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“The PJD is the last card Moroccans have played. So in five years’ time, if the party can’t prove itself and make a difference, maybe no one will ever vote again.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“If things don’t change, people won’t vote anymore.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

Throughout the discussions, the same key concerns that first prompted social unrest in early 2011 emerge as priorities that participants still want to see tackled. Unemployment, in particular, is identified as the most pressing issue and referred to as the main challenge facing the new government. There is a sense that the government will lose credibility if it proves unable to act quickly and reduce the high unemployment rate. Addressing corruption and improving the public education system are also themes broadly highlighted by focus group participants. Some participants describe these as sources of shame for the country. A number question whether any government would be able to put an end to the corruption that they see as highly entrenched within Morocco’s administrative bureaucracy.

“The problem of unemployment is pervasive and students feel desperate about their future.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“The most important topic is unemployment. I experienced that and for me it’s a ghost threatening every graduate.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“It’s a shame. If you go the United States or France and look for a job, they check and ask about the things you can do; but in Morocco, they ask, ‘Who sent you here,’ if you understand what I mean.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“I think the most important topic is administrative corruption. We find it too difficult to get the simplest documents.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“The decline in the educational system and joblessness [are the most important topics to me].” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

Even with these concerns and the preoccupation with job creation, more moderate voices in the groups acknowledge that the newly formed government and other political actors will need some time before their performance can be judged, particularly given the significance of the issues that they face.

“The government has just been formed and there were lots of problems before, so they can’t react on the spot.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“Democracy is not only about having transparent elections. Democracy is a practice.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“The new constitution includes lots of amendments, but we need some time to see if they will be put into practice or not.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“It’s a step forward. The party has never been given a chance. [...] We just need some time to see its fruits.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“We can’t evaluate now because it’s just the beginning, so we have to all give the government time to tackle lots of files and solve lots of problems.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“For me, so far I can’t evaluate the work of political parties. What’s important now is to give them a chance and allow them enough time. Maybe in a year’s time we can evaluate. But still, there’s some change and some hope.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTIONS

When asked to characterize the recent elections, the overwhelming majority of focus group participants refer to the November legislative elections as a step forward. The fact that a historic opposition party won the largest number of seats in the parliament and formed the first government following a constitutional revision is seen as a significant and positive development in the modern political history of the country. Notably, very few characterize the elections as a victory, generally noting that while the potential exists for meaningful change, it will take time before such a positive assessment can be made. A small number of participants characterize the elections as a step backward or a failure, pointing to the inability of any party to make significant change in such a highly restrained system and noting that little has changed since election day.

“Elections reflected the real will and desire of people for change.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“It’s a step forward. The new government will satisfy lots of needs and solve lots of problems.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“There is a respect for the principle of democracy in the elections and voting. There is a respect of people’s opinions in terms of voting.” (*Man, urban, Tiznit*)

“I see that citizens now are willing to exercise their political rights. People are now more interested in politics than before. A step forward because the elections were fair and transparent.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“It’s a step forward, but the officials of the leading party should be quick in the decision making and responding to people’s needs.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“There’s no change at all. Corruption is still here and transparency is not here.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

Of equal importance is the fact that a large majority of the participants believes that the elections were conducted in a fair and transparent manner. According to most participants, the results were both quite expected and credible. Some participants argue that the PJD was the obvious winner, as citizens had lost faith in other parties and it conducted a more effective campaign. Others reference personal experiences that demonstrate a cleaner process, such as witnessing first-hand acts of corruption by parties and candidates that did not win seats; for these individuals, experiences such as this prove that the elections were procedurally sound and honest. In the few instances where questions of credibility are raised by participants, these generally relate to the reported level of turnout and the suggestion that this number was inflated.

“I think people expected the results and they expected the PJD to be the leader of the government.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“[...] it was a kind of a vindictive voting toward the other political parties which did not keep their promises after they won in the previous elections. So, the Moroccan people want to see whether this Islamic-oriented political party would make any changes. Its members look good and trustworthy [...]” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“Some parties tried to corrupt people with money and yet those parties couldn’t succeed, which means the results were consistent.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“I expected the PJD because it’s the only hope for Moroccans. It’s always been the same story, but this year is an exception.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“Yes, the results were consistent. The party gave people promises that let them vote for this party. So, I expected the PJD to win.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“The results were expected. Moroccans are now aware and conscious that the Justice and Development Party is the only party that can do something.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

Despite the positive view of the November parliamentary elections, it is noteworthy that young citizens’ knowledge about elections in general and the role of elected officials in particular is fairly low. Descriptions of the role of members of parliament, for example, are generally vague or mischaracterize the position. Similarly, participants convey conflicting understandings about electoral procedures, such as the voting process or manner in which local municipal mayors are elected. Participants acknowledge their own ignorance and cannot articulate how elections directly or indirectly affect their lives. More significantly, they convey a concern that electoral procedures such as voting are hampered by high illiteracy rates, and they are concerned those fellow citizens who are illiterate are not able to participate effectively or are more susceptible to manipulation.

“The importance of elections is not clear enough for people.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“A bad knowledge. I only hear about [elections] once every two or five years. So, I don’t know much about elections.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“I’m not aware of the importance of local elections. We don’t read about that.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“I don’t know much [about local elections]. I think the person elected has the same role of an MP but at the level of the region.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“Local elections are mini-parliamentary elections except that local elections are limited to a given region.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“The local elections are more valuable than the parliamentary ones, because they seek the development of the region.” (*Man, rural, Ouarzazane*)

“I abstain. So, I don’t know anything [about the voting system].” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“My knowledge [about the voting system] is limited to what I hear from the media.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“I think the media and political parties should sensitize people about the way of voting. Many people don’t know anything about it.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“An MP has no role for me. They have never supervised or controlled the finance laws and budgets.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“An MP makes a list of people’s needs and problems and submits it to the government for discussion and solutions.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“I don’t know much about the role of an MP.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“My knowledge is good. I know that an MP is the representative of people in the government. He’s there to talk about people’s problems and needs and works to meet them.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“I personally don’t know anything about the role of an MP.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“Bad knowledge about [MP] roles. We haven’t even studied that in school. We studied the history of, say, Britain and France, but never Morocco.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“I don’t know what’s going on in the parliament. There are green chairs and red ones in the parliament, but who uses what?” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

Role of Associations

Although holding civic associations in higher regard than political parties, participants demonstrate a surprisingly negative view of associations, regardless of the focus group location, and many respondents indicate that they are not a member of an association, they are not familiar with such civic groups, and, like political parties, associations are removed from people’s daily life. When associations are seen in a positive light, it is generally relative to those groups focusing on economic development and addressing social and human rights issues. However, most respondents hold negative views of civil society associations relative to their role in elections. Such groups are not perceived as effective or credible sources of information.

Most participants are very suspicious of associations, which they often characterize as either having unclear or ideologically motivated agendas or a focus on self-interests such as collecting donors' money or benefiting the association leadership. A small minority suggests that associations could play a more significant role in sensitizing the public to the importance of elections and voting processes.

“Associations do not have an effective echo in society.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“Associations are rare and far from citizens. They don't play any role and if some associations are active, it's because they're expecting self-interests in return.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“For me associations don't play the role they have to play, as they don't lead any campaigns to sensitize people about the importance of elections and voting.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“There are many associations run or supported by the government to work in favor of a given political ideology.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“I agree that associations defend certain rights, but they have no relation to political topics.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

Sources of Information

Moroccan youth indicate that they accessed information on the elections from a variety of sources, most notably television (both domestic and foreign), the Internet, and in casual discussion with friends. Newspapers are less commonly referenced but still noted by a significant number of participants, as is radio to a lesser degree. Posters, government institutions, political parties, and associations are rarely cited as sources. Rural participants note a lower rate of Internet and foreign television use because of access problems in their communities. In all focus groups, participants demonstrate that they do not rely on any single source for all of their information, and highlight social interactions with friends and family – often in front of the television – as an important venue for debate and discussion. While all focus group discussions note the limitations of each source, the Internet is perceived as being the most credible because of the ability to access a wider range of opinions, different formats (such as video, audio, and print), and more current information. Foreign television is often cited as the second most credible source given its independence from Moroccan political actors, though the depth and timeliness are noted as inherent limitations. Other sources receive mixed opinions in terms of credibility, timeliness, and depth of coverage. However, participants express an appreciation for local television programming before and immediately after the elections, noting the amount of coverage and debate provided.

“I think you can use all sources of information, but credibility is proportional.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“[Local TV] is close and always in contact with citizens. You can watch it at meal time, lunch, dinner, and breakfast.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“Local television is the easiest means and the most available one, and when I go out I usually have discussions with friends about elections.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“On the Internet you can go into details about a given event, whereas local television presents no more than headlines.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“Local TV gave us the results of elections step by step and in details.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“Foreign television channels transmit the news as it is in reality without any restriction; however, local television channels interpret the news subjectively.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“I have chosen local TV first because elections are held in our country, so local TV did a detailed coverage of the event.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“I think the Internet is the most active way to get information and news. It includes all other sources, like television and newspapers.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“When you meet friends they tell you what they heard or read on the Internet or in newspapers and then you debate with them. Friends allow you to get lots of information and news about a given issue.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“I trust foreign TV. Let me tell you why. Lots of manifestations happened in Morocco and lots of people were killed and they never tell us about that on local TV. Lots of other things happened but not told on local TV. Our local TV selects the news they want to diffuse.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“Foreign television covers both positive and negative aspects of things. Local TV diffuses the events and news they want. It’s under control.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

Future Voting Intention

Most focus groups reveal a general awareness among participants that the voter turnout in the November election was relatively higher than in similar elections held in 2007. A number point to this as a sign of the validity of the results. However, the majority of participants indicate that they themselves did not vote in the parliamentary elections. Despite their voting behavior in November, a majority of participants from both urban and rural areas also indicate that they have a greater intention to vote in upcoming communal elections. A large number of participants remain undecided, linking their willingness to vote to tangible change in terms of government responsiveness, more meaningful interaction with political parties, and, significantly, new and younger faces as candidates. Most participants also point out that they have very little information about upcoming local elections despite their interest in participating.

“I voted thanks to the reform of the constitution which now guarantees lots of rights.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“The first time I vote. It’s a duty. I hope there will be a change.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“I voted because this year there’s a change, so I myself felt it’s time we changed our view.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“All I heard is that there will be communal elections after parliamentary ones.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“I heard that there will be communal elections but I don’t know when.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“If some young people appear who have new conceptions and new ideas, we will vote. Otherwise, no.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“Actually, I don’t have a voting card. But if there is a change, I think I will try.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“One thing which would motivate me to vote is to see new faces, new people being elected and not the same people again and again. And change at the level of Moroccan administrations and services.” (*Man, urban, Tiznit*)

ATTITUDES TOWARD POLITICAL PARTIES

Despite Morocco's long history with political parties and the considerable attention given to the November election, participants generally do not know much about political parties and they hold an overwhelmingly negative view of parties. Overall, almost all participants characterize the performance of political parties as extremely unsatisfactory. They note that parties continued to follow the same patterns in the November elections as in previous elections: showing up just before the election, making empty promises, and then disappearing from the scene. A point raised by at least one participant in each focus group no matter the location is the problem of having too many political parties in Morocco, which diminishes competition in some participants' minds. Pointing to corruption and nepotism as common characteristics in party life, a number of participants seem resigned to believe that parties will never change this approach.

"I wasn't satisfied with the performance of parties before the elections." (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

"[...] [Political parties] are always seeking self-interest. They promise people lots of things but never act when they win." (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

"Political parties are on one side and reality is on another side." (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

"[Political parties] wake up only when elections start. They use traditional ways before the elections, the same techniques, same speech, and same advertisement." (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

"There is nothing bad to say about political parties before elections. They are good 'actors.'" (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

"There is no communication between political parties and citizens, and there is no interaction between parties themselves. We don't see, for example, two parties face-to-face on a television talk show evaluating or criticizing each other." (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

However, a number of participants have slightly more positive attitudes about the general performance of political parties since the November elections. While noting that this improvement is largely associated with a few "serious" parties, they indicate that parties are more visible in the media, they appreciate early action on issues such as corruption and health care, and they sense more effort by elected officials at the local level. These individuals suggest that the success of parties in the ruling coalition is prompting others to adopt new approaches and compete more meaningfully. While other participants point to continued economic stagnation, ongoing unrest over social issues, and the closing of local party campaign offices

immediately after the election, the more positive individuals note that time is needed to objectively judge party performance in the new context.

“Political parties, I can say, are willing to work hard now.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“I can’t judge now. We have to wait and see. People are not satisfied yet.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“I think there’s some change and some officials in the previous government are called into account.” (*Woman, urban, Tiznit*)

“Political parties are here to change things. [...] People are now conscious of their rights and political parties are under pressure to respond.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“For me, political parties are present more than before. Parties are trying to get confidence back” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“Not satisfied. Corruption is still prevailing. So what do you expect?” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

When prompted, participants are able to list a large number of political parties by name and associated symbols. However, when asked to provide details on the parties, their knowledge is relatively limited and often associated with key individuals within the party and special interests that the party is perceived to favor. The PJD is the significant exception, being readily identified by virtually all participants and being universally characterized as a political party that has historically been in the opposition, maintains an Islamic reference, is more connected to the people, and is a source of hope for citizens. The party’s previous position in the opposition is viewed in a positive light, and the party’s shift from the opposition to leading the government is seen as explicit proof of the party’s strong political position. While some focus groups participants identify the party’s Islamic reference as the basis for its success, others point to its platform and realistic campaign promises, its proximity to average citizens, and qualified and credible individuals involved in the party’s leadership. The other universally recognized party is the Independence Party, also known as *Istiqlal*. While the party generates mixed opinions, participants readily identify that it is one of the oldest political parties in Morocco and is directly linked to the independence of the country.

“[Other parties] kept on promising us things but they don’t do anything. With the new party, I think things will change.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“I think it’s a serious party that can bring some change.” (*Woman, urban, Tiznit*)

“It’s a promising party. The party has Islamic views and visions.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“The party has credible objectives.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“It’s an Islamic party. It was always in the opposition. [...] I think they are credible. They have Islamic references and lots of lies were told about the party.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“[The Justice and Development Party] has religious principles and orientations.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“It is the political party which has succeeded in the elections this year and we wish it will lead the country to make a step forward and we are optimistic about it.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“The party is a credible party. When they promise something they fulfill it.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“It has qualified people.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“Members of the party are intellectuals and qualified, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, and others.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

Focus group participants express clear and consistent views of what they want from political parties in general, and their elected representatives in particular, to instill support prior to upcoming elections. There is unanimous consensus among participants about the need for political parties to keep the promises they give to constituents during election campaigns. While a few participants point to specific sectoral areas that should be addressed, such as health care and infrastructure development, most suggest that they simply want realistic and manageable promises that could be acted upon. Similarly, participants link their intention to vote in upcoming communal elections to the degree of responsiveness they feel from political parties in listening to and acting on the needs of citizens. Collectively, participants want to see action on the part of political parties, which they often identify as active engagement with average citizens and the start of tangible projects. A large number of participants also note that parties need to give young people a chance to participate in political party decision making and action. Several express a desire to see political parties open more regional offices and maintain a year-round presence.

“Political parties should be faithful to what they promise citizens.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“[Political parties] have to keep their promises.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“First of all, political parties should satisfy what they promise people during campaigns.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“Political parties should be faithful to their programs and promises.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“If they keep their promises, we will support them. They have to apply what they have written on paper, and that’s all.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“No political party ever tries to organize a communicative day with citizens to see what they need [...] People’s opinions are never taken into account.” (*Man, urban, Tiznit*)

“We want them to help us build us roads, install water, and find us jobs. This is what we want, and we want to vote for them.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“There should be branches of political party offices in all regions.” (*Woman, urban, Tiznit*)

In line with their views on party behavior before elections, focus groups participants also have strong opinions on how political parties should campaign in the next elections. Participants show a readiness to vote if their suggestions are taken into consideration. A significant concern that all focus groups demonstrate is with vote buying and voter influencing (such as hosting meals or sponsoring baptisms); most participants express a desire to see parties and candidates behave with more integrity and without resorting to corrupt practices, suggesting that such behavior will actually reduce voter participation and damage those parties’ chances of winning.

More specifically, participants strongly suggest that parties rethink the style of campaigning in Morocco and improve their approach to communicating with citizens. Participants emphasize, in particular, that party leaders should make more personal contact with constituents rather than relying on proxy campaigners or printed material, and a number encourage parties to use more simplistic language and local dialects. In the same spirit, participants suggest that parties focus on more concise campaign platforms with a limited number of promises that are realistic and achievable, as well as highlighting concrete party successes in the past. Most groups display an aversion to traditional tactics of distributing flyers and posters, which they characterize as a waste of money and uniformly denigrate as unfriendly to the environment and the cleanliness of their towns and cities. As an alternative, they emphasize events with candidates, one-on-one contact, and more use of media such as television and the Internet.

“Political parties should work more on communication with citizens. There’s no communication between people and parties.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“In campaigns, political parties should first evaluate what they achieved.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“I think electoral campaigns during a month aren’t enough to convince people to vote. Political parties should be present all year long.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“They should campaign in a transparent way and people will vote for the party they think is closer to them.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“[Political parties] should give people their program; not money, not food.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“[...] If we witness that [political parties] have made an effort, we may vote for them.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“Campaigns through mass media are better than having millions of papers trash on earth. Campaigns should be clean and environment friendly.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“My suggestion is to have campaigns just on TV. We don’t want millions of papers thrown on the ground and spoiling the beauty of the city.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

“We need another way of campaigning. People don’t read the papers they receive from parties. We end up having millions of papers on earth and rubbish everywhere.” (*Woman, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“We want those political leaders to come and talk to us in person. We don’t want mediators.” (*Woman, rural, El Jadida*)

“The leaders of political parties themselves should talk to people in public. [...] We need to see a leader giving a speech in public.” (*Man, urban, Marrakech*)

“We want to hear from political leaders about their visions and programs for elections. We don’t want to read it in the papers.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT

For the most part, participants maintain a positive attitude toward the new government and associate it with a sense of transparency and energy. They applaud the fact that new faces are in government and bringing new approaches to governing, despite some skeptics who note that corruption and favoritism are so institutional that no government could cure it. Participants cite concrete examples of recent corruption trials, improved local administration, and public disclosure of information as proof that things are going in the right direction under the new government. Many participants acknowledge that time is still necessary to see if significant change will really take root, but they suggest overwhelmingly that they are more hopeful than before. The absence of female figures in the government, however, is seen by many participants, particularly women, as a major drawback in the current government that needs to be addressed for the government to be better balanced.

“New faces appeared and a new party won.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“The most important result for me is that a new government is here. It’s from a party that has always been in the opposition.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“Parties which always dominated before have failed this year.” (*Man, urban, Tiznit*)

“For me, I don’t see any change.” (*Man, urban, Meknes*)

“Lots of officials in the previous governments were arrested, and many are called into account, which is a good thing for fighting corruption.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“We feel that there’s democracy and transparency in the elections and the citizens contributed to that. People contributed to the making of the new government.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“A step forward given some changes we can feel but a failure in not involving women in politics. One woman in the government is unfair, and you know that women can give more and work harder than men.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“One thing I don’t like is that while Morocco has been struggling for women’s rights, the party chose only one lady for the new government, which is not fair.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

A direct question to the focus group participants to explore their feelings about the PJD leading the government reveals that the vast majority of the participants is comfortable with the party in leadership and feels happy, satisfied, and optimistic about the future of the country. Even if some participants are skeptical of the ability of the political system to change

given entrenched interests, they maintain a positive view of the PJD itself. Many participants find the party's Islamic reference as meaningful, while others point to its effectiveness in relating to the public, in acting as a credible opposition party, and in fighting corruption as praiseworthy and signs of hopefulness. Many cite the party's decisions to disclose the personal holdings of ministers and encourage public dialogue as early signs of greater transparency and responsiveness to public concerns over corruption. However, a number of voices note their fear that the party will be stymied by the challenge of addressing large issues inherited from the previous government or manipulated by corrupt interests beyond the government's control.

"People feel at ease. The PJD, being Islamic, will bring change. The party is very close to people and it's the real representative of the citizens in the government."
(Woman, urban, Marrakech)

"The party is a religious party, thus people feel at ease."
(Woman, urban, Agadir)

"I heard that it's a good party fighting corruption."
(Woman, urban, Oujda)

"I personally feel confidence back."
(Man, rural, El Jadida)

"We are optimistic about it. Since they believe in God, they will know the problem which people are enduring and the poverty in which they live."
(Woman, rural, Ouazzane)

"[...] They know how to talk to people, saying things like, 'We will try to change this and that,' unlike the previous government [that] said, 'We will change this and that,' but never changed anything."
(Woman, rural, El Jadida)

"We shouldn't feel too optimistic. You know that the previous government left lots of 'black cases' this government should work on, like unemployment and loans. [...] The current government doesn't have magic."
(Man, rural, Beni Mellal)

Aside from their feelings about the PJD, focus group participants are divided into clear categories: one that already feels a change is happening, especially relative to the fight against corruption and efforts to provide jobs for the unemployed, and another with a wait-and-see attitude given the numerous social, economic, and political challenges faced by the government. Though limited in numbers, this latter category suggests that the fact that many are still protesting and demanding jobs demonstrates that little has changed.

"Well, now that corruption is being fought and lots of corrupted big heads are arrested, there is change."
(Man, urban, Oujda)

"Of course there's change. Corruption is being fought."
(Woman, rural, Errachidia)

"We need time to judge. It's a bit early to do it."
(Woman, urban, Tiznit)

"There isn't enough [change]. We need time to judge."
(Woman, rural, El Jadida)

“I think we need more time to see change. It comes through steps.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“There’s no change. The unemployment rate is still high.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“I don’t recognize any change. We see on TV that the party is working, however, I don’t recognize any change. They did nothing, roads remain unpaved, there is absence of water and electricity; some villages still don’t have water and electricity. [...] Poverty and unemployment are still there.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

Participants demonstrate a very limited knowledge of which parties are involved in the coalition government with the PJD. While many acknowledge that a coalition is required, few are able to name other parties involved, and a number believe that the PJD is alone in running the government. In a similar vein, while some individuals can name parties in the opposition, many do not know what role other parties are playing. In a number of cases, governing coalition members are cited as members of the opposition and vice versa. Universally, however, participants point to the importance of an effective opposition, and the desire to see it playing a positive and constructive role in monitoring and offering alternative solutions rather than simply criticizing government action.

“Other parties are involved but not effectively.” (*Woman, rural, Errachidia*)

“Lots of parties are in the opposition [...] because there’s only one party in the government.” (*Woman, urban, Tiznit*)

“I don’t know much about politics, but I think there are some parties involved.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“I have no idea except for this political party which we see in the media and newspaper. We recognize that one political party is heading the government. We have no idea concerning the other participating political parties.” (*Woman, rural, Ouazzane*)

“There should be a constructive opposition encouraging the government to work harder, not just criticizing it.” (*Woman, urban, Agadir*)

“The opposition should urge the government to work hard. There should be a program to keep an eye on the government.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“Opposition shouldn’t have a negative role. They shouldn’t oppose just for the sake of opposing.” (*Woman, urban, Marrakech*)

“The opposition should unveil the mistakes made by the government and work together for the common good. But I think the opposition in Morocco is a sterile opposition; they oppose just for the sake of opposing.” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“The opposition will push the government to do the best. Criticism is a good thing. They should suggest and propose solutions with the government to some problems.” (*Man, rural, El Jadida*)

“The opposition must be positive, and the most important objective is serving the interests of the country.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

In a similar vein to attitudes toward the opposition parties, participants also note an important role played by social movements such as the February 20 Movement. Participants readily refer to the positive impact of the Movement on the depth and speed of reforms that have taken place to date. While generally supportive of the Movement’s right to protest, participants are of mixed opinions about the role it should play moving forward. While many suggest that the Movement should continue as a pressure group outside of formal politics, a significant number suggest the Movement become more involved in politics by engaging the government in dialogue, becoming a political party, or joining with other political parties. Regardless of the approach, participants unanimously agree that the Movement should not resort to violence and that they should not face oppressive responses from the government.

“Thanks to the Movement, lots of things have changed. I think the movement precipitated the reform of the constitution. But I don’t understand why the movement still demonstrates and protests given that lots of reforms are done.” (*Woman, urban, Oujda*)

“Thanks to this movement, people can now demonstrate and defend their rights in the street.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“I think the Movement can push the government to satisfy people’s needs” (*Man, urban, Oujda*)

“[The February 20 Movement] should stand side-by-side with political parties. The country is the priority.” (*Man, rural, Ouazzane*)

“My suggestion is that the Movement should be involved and integrated into politics to achieve its goals and contribute to change.” (*Man, rural, Errachidia*)

“[The February 20 Movement] should keep in contact with the officials of the government.” (*Man, rural, Beni Mellal*)

“They can oppose, but suggest solutions to problems.” (*Woman, urban, Tiznit*)

“The Movement shouldn’t be oppressed. The government should satisfy their needs.” (*Man, urban, Agadir*)

“The Movement should be welcomed within political institutions instead of oppressing it.” (*Woman, urban, Meknes*)

CONCLUSIONS

Focus groups conducted by NDI during March and early April 2012 point to consistent attitudes among young people across the country, whether urban or rural. Despite a very modest base of knowledge, young people's priorities continue to focus on the need for jobs, good quality education, quality health care, development of better infrastructure, and, above all else, the elimination of corruption. Given what they perceive as important constitutional revisions and the most credible and transparent Moroccan elections to date, for the moment they remain relatively optimistic about the possibilities for the new government under the leadership of the PJD to deliver results. Importantly, while maintaining a positive view of initial steps by the government and characterizing the PJD as credible and trustworthy, they recognize that a complete judgment cannot yet be made and that more time is needed to see if profound change in policy and government practice can follow.

In the wake of the legislative elections, political parties continue to face the challenging task of rebuilding faith among voters as they prepare for communal elections that are now being anticipated for late 2012 or 2013. Focus group participants widely acknowledge their limited understanding of elections, voting, and the relation of elected institutions to their lives, along with a very limited knowledge about political parties. While many noted more positive efforts by parties at the national level after the elections, they continue to be skeptical about the sincerity of parties, their openness to young people, and their willingness to adopt participatory approaches. Given the stakes, participants expressed a sense that while they will reward change, public participation in electoral politics will evaporate if they do not feel there is real effort for new approaches.

Identification of political parties, their ideologies, and their platforms remains weak. Though participants are able to name many parties, the level of information that participants know about them remains limited, even among major parties. Participants continue to suggest that they want to see competition among ideas, and seek realistic campaign promises that they can weigh against other parties. *Parties are encouraged to continue to build and communicate effective brands with more focused, realistic, and manageable platforms.*

Communication continues to be disconnected from citizens and traditional campaigning techniques are seen as ineffective. Participants overwhelmingly feel that parties continued a tradition of showing up just before elections, making unrealistic promises, and then disappearing. While acknowledging improvements since the November elections and pointing to successful parties as employing different techniques, they want to see more regular efforts by parties at the local level. Participants note that they will vote if they feel there is a change in approach. *Parties are encouraged to maintain communication outside of campaign periods, open and maintain regional and local offices, engage in direct voter outreach, and use more simplistic language and local dialects.*

Information about the electoral process and the role of elected institutions and individuals remains very limited or ill-informed. Even where participants felt they had good knowledge, they often mischaracterized roles or procedures. While they value

democratic practices, they need to understand how those practices influence their lives and feel that their involvement can encourage meaningful change. *The government, electoral authorities, and elected institutions are encouraged to communicate more regularly with the public, develop educational and public outreach initiatives, and develop more participatory mechanisms.*

A strong and constructive opposition is seen as an important need. Accountability and political competition remain consistent themes, and while participants are positive about the current government, they recognize that opposition parties should play a role in balancing the government. However, given the desire to see the country progress and overcome difficult economic conditions, and given past performance by some of the opposition parties themselves, there is a desire to see collaborative approaches to problem solving and a focus on tangible options over purely opportunistic attacks. *Parties currently in the opposition are encouraged to play a constructive role by remaining actively engaged in policy discussions, creating venues for public input, and offering alternative solutions for debate.*

More profound youth engagement is still desired. Although participants note more efforts being made, focus groups still show a consistent theme of youth disenchantment and the need by political parties and the government to show young people that they are welcomed as equal participants in political life. Fresh faces within party structures and as candidates were regularly identified as means of political parties demonstrating their sincerity. *Parties should continue to deepen efforts to engage young people, including two-way communication that includes active listening, finding roles for youth in decision making, nurturing them for leadership, and showing active efforts to identify solutions and address the issues that are most pressing to youth.*

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP LOCATION INFORMATION

Location	Type	Number of male participants	Number of female participants
Marrakech	Urban	8	8
Agadir	Urban	9	9
Meknes	Urban	9	9
Oujda	Urban	8	8
Tiznit	Urban	7	8
El Jadida	Rural	10	11
Ouazzane	Rural	10	9
Beni Mellal	Rural	8	11
Errachidia	Rural	9	9
<i>Total</i>	<i>160 young people (78 male, 82 female)</i>		