



**Issues of Concern:  
Citizen Perspectives on Party Policy Solutions**

March 2015

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The focus groups were conducted as part of NDI's five year program to support the major Moroccan political parties. The program is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

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### **Focus Group Research Technique:**

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.

## **Methodology Overview**

To provide political and civic leaders in Morocco with information on issues raised, and solutions provided by citizens, NDI contracted BJ Consult to conduct a qualitative study of 24 focus groups between December 3 to 20, 2014. NDI senior staff contributed to the drafting of the discussion guide and approved the final version, used to conduct the focus groups. Four groups (two rural and two urban) were held in each of NDI's target regions: Doukkla-Abda, Fes-Boulmane, Souss-Massa-Draa, Meknes-Tafilalet, Tanger-Tetouan, and Oujda-Angad. BJ Group, at the request of NDI, recruited focus group participants who chose not to vote in the 2011 elections for the Moroccan House of Representatives. Focus groups were conducted in Arabic and NDI was provided full audio transcripts of each group. NDI staff randomly observed half of the focus groups, as an oversight measure.

## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 2011, large citizen-driven protests calling for more responsive and accountable political processes led to major constitutional revisions and a broader political reform process. Moroccans have grown increasingly frustrated by the slow pace of these reforms and the political leaders they see as disconnected from their everyday concerns. With regional and municipal elections scheduled for September 2015, and parliamentary elections the following year, Moroccan political parties are working to address this frustration with more responsive outreach and policies addressing citizens' priority concerns.

In February 2014, NDI organized a series of focus groups to identify Moroccans' priority issues and public perceptions of political parties. The focus groups revealed that citizens felt a lack of dignity and sense of powerlessness to access public services and resources. Yet, rather than complaining about vague challenges and deficiencies in the system, the focus group participants were very specific about the biggest challenges they face in their daily lives identifying employment, education, healthcare and infrastructure as their main priorities. Additionally, focus group participants do not see political parties as a viable avenue of change and their inability to deliver on promises has created a trust deficit between people and their representatives. Participants do not believe parties have their best interests in mind, and they do not believe the parties have serious, focused ideas on solving problems. They feel politicians tell them lies during an election and ignore them the rest of the time. They also feel parties advocate for policies for the privileged few and ignore the many. Whenever there is a problem in the community, the parties are nowhere to be found.

In December 2014, NDI conducted a second round of focus groups across the country<sup>1</sup> to explore how parties may succeed in changing these attitudes through the use of more responsive outreach and policy. The Institute sponsored a total of 24 focus groups, with each comprising of eight participants chosen to represent Morocco's demographic and geographic diversity. To assist parties in appealing to Moroccans who are less politically involved, NDI selected participants who did not vote in the 2011 parliamentary elections. NDI hopes political parties can use findings from the recent focus groups to broaden participation in the 2015 elections, which many expect will see low voter turnout.

To prepare for the recent focus groups, parties provided NDI with language outlining proposals concerning the four priority issues: employment, education, infrastructure and healthcare. NDI shared these proposals with focus group participants and then facilitated a discussion to gauge reactions and suggestions for improvement. To avoid any bias in the participants' responses, the Institute did not attribute positions to a particular party.

The primary objectives of this focus group research were to explore Moroccan citizens' (1) attitudes towards parties, (2) reactions to party policy positions concerning employment, healthcare, education and infrastructure, (3) policy preferences in these areas, and (4) recommendations for parties to earn their vote in the 2015 and 2016 elections.

After 24 focus groups and more than 50 hours of facilitated discussion, five key themes emerged:

1. **Citizens have limited knowledge about the role of political parties.** Citizens, especially in rural communities, were largely unfamiliar with the role of parties as advocates for their values and interests in the political process. This is due in large part to the limited interaction between citizens and politicians on policy issues. In fact, only two of 192 focus group participants had ever been approached by a politician or elected official outside of an election campaign to discuss their policy positions.
2. **Parties lack credibility among citizens for failing to deliver on past promises.** Participants expressed considerable mistrust about the willingness and ability of parties to effect positive change in their daily lives. They noted that parties' often recycled previously unfulfilled campaign promises. Participants also commented that parties with the most credibility are those that actually did what they had promised.
3. **Relatable and feasible proposals earned the most support.** Policy proposals relating to citizens' everyday needs, such as improving roads, usually

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<sup>1</sup> NDI held focus groups from December 4 to 20, 2014 in the following regions: Doukkala-Abda, Fès-Boulmane, Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaër; Meknès-Tafilalet, Tanger-Tétouan, and Oujda-Angad.

received unanimous support. Alternatively, grandiose proposals were often greeted with cynicism and suspicion. In addition, participants' support for various proposals often hinged on their perceived feasibility. Proposals that received early support were soon shot down when the group questioned its feasibility. Participants also wanted specifics related to implementation, including details about cost and enforcement mechanisms.

4. **Moroccan citizens are well-informed and open to new ideas.** Participants, including from lower-income and illiterate areas, were well informed about contemporary issues at both the local and national levels and were curious about new policy proposals. Instead of dismissing proposals out of hand, participants regularly weighed their costs and benefits. Even when the groups rejected proposals, they acknowledged their merits and recommended areas for improvement.
5. **Moroccan citizens are skeptical of any policy proposal that does not integrate checks on corruption, abuse and ineffectiveness in the public sector.** Participants associated political parties with the broader nepotism, corruption and ineffectiveness they perceived in the public sector. Participants showed considerable mistrust and frustration concerning public officials and services of all kinds. They frequently cited the need to establish "controls" to "guarantee" that teachers, doctors, elected officials and parties fulfilled their responsibilities to the public.

The overarching challenge facing political parties is to **build credibility with citizens** by improving public awareness about their role in the political process, demonstrating genuine interest in citizens' concerns, and emphasizing the ability to effect meaningful improvements in citizens' everyday lives. To do this, political parties should:

1. **Describe *how* they will address citizens' everyday problems with specific but accessible plans for implementation;**
2. **Demonstrate interest in citizens' concerns by engaging in visible outreach activities such as town hall meetings, public market visits or door-to-door canvassing;**
3. **Showcase their willingness to work directly with citizens to address their needs at the local level by organizing 'days of action' for community service projects;**
4. **Enhance the credibility of their policy proposals by involving experts in their development and promotion;**

- 5. Frame new party platforms to emphasize their accountability to citizens for implementation, for example by calling it a ‘commitment to citizens’ ; and**
- 6. Acknowledge citizens’ concerns about corruption and unfairness within the system, by promoting policies that increase transparency and aggressively combat nepotism and corruption.**

## **II. POLITICAL CONTEXT**

After extended debate in parliament, regional and municipal elections were finally scheduled for September 2015. Ahead of the polls, political parties have begun reflecting on new messages to attract voters. Many observers see the regional and municipal elections this year as a trial run for the 2016 parliamentary elections.

Political parties have struggled to generate much excitement, as voters see them as largely absent from their communities and disconnected from their everyday concerns<sup>2</sup>. Echoing public dissatisfaction with political parties, King Mohammed VI challenged them to directly engage with citizens and propose concrete programs to address their priorities. The king also stressed the interactive nature of politics, reminding elected officials to remain in dialogue with their constituents and advocate for their concerns even outside of election periods. He also exhorted opposition parties to offer alternative solutions to citizens’ needs instead of merely blocking and criticizing the governing majority.

The upcoming elections are an opportunity for political parties to answer this call with responsive and realistic policy proposals. By contrast, campaign appeals to identity and personality-driven politics do little to engage citizens in the debates shaping their future and can undermine the consolidation of democratic political processes by reinforcing social gaps. The successes and challenges of the current government, led by the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), provide a wealth of examples that both majority and opposition parties can draw on to develop such policy-oriented campaign messages.

In that spirit, Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane of PJD has touted the government’s achievements across the country, stressing its “undeniable efforts” to reduce the price of hundreds of prescription drugs, promote private investment, support small business and strengthen the country’s medium-term finances by reforming popular energy subsidies, reducing public sector pensions and increasing their retirement age to 65. Benkirane has also been candid about the government’s challenges in other areas; he recently admitted that the government “was not able to overcome corruption” but exhorted opposition parties to “join the fight.” As of March 2015, Benkirane and the PJD enjoyed better ratings from prospective voters than any other party.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I for a summary findings from NDI’s July 2004 focus group research.

<sup>3</sup> “Sondage : 62% des Marocains sont satisfaits de Benkirane.” March 12, 2015.

<http://www.h24info.ma/maroc/politique/sondage-62-des-marocains-sont-satisfaits-de-benkirane/31420>;

The governing majority has had its challenges, providing opposition parties with opportunities to develop their own policy-specific campaign messages. For example, the Union of Socialist Progressive Forces (USFP) and Party Istiqlal (PI) sharply criticized the government's subsidy reform, arguing it needlessly reduced citizens' spending power when alternative revenue sources existed to alleviate the country's fiscal strain.

With the 2015 elections approaching, parties have an opportunity to engage in these debates by promoting realistic policy solutions that respond directly to citizens' concerns and priority issues.

### **III. ATTITUDES AND PRIORITIES**

As in the first round of focus groups, participants confirmed that employment, education, healthcare and infrastructure remain priority issues.

Throughout discussions, participants repeatedly wished that politicians would offer policies that could be realistically implemented and provide immediate benefits to their everyday lives. Participants did not expect government to solve all of their problems, but rather for politicians to demonstrate an understanding of their concerns, propose feasible solutions, and follow-up with prompt implementation.

Participants exhibited little faith that elected officials understood their everyday concerns or could deliver on campaign promises. Many participants angrily cited instances of broken promises, corruption and clientelism to explain why parties have failed to earn their trust. Other participants cited systemic inequality as evidence that the political system privileged elite interests. Reflecting this mistrust, participants often insisted that there should be mechanisms in place to "guarantee" that parties honor their promises. This closely matched the sentiments expressed in the previous round of focus groups.

Participants also emphasized that they do not feel connected with elected officials, which is the result of both poor outreach and a broader lack of understanding among many citizens about the role of political parties and elected officials in the political process. Weak or absent civic education in Morocco contributes to this widespread misunderstanding.

The sections below elaborate on participants' attitudes concerning their four policy priorities: employment, education, healthcare and employment.

#### **Employment**

Jobs emerged as the top priority for focus group participants. Specifically, they cited the lack of employment opportunities, inadequate training for available jobs, hiring decisions

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"Le cote de confiance en Benkirane se stabilise globalement." InfoMaroc.  
<http://www.infomarc.net/economie/116802.html>.

driven by corruption and nepotism, poor working conditions, and weak employee protections. They also noted poor investment in rural regions, which has left many reliant on temporary or seasonal employment. Contracts for periods of just six months to one year prevent workers from obtaining unemployment insurance, leaving them highly vulnerable to the whims of employers. Women were especially emphatic about the need to provide them with more training to qualify for regular, better-paying jobs.

***“We are in rural areas; you have to give our children opportunities to get jobs just like in the city. We need vocational training centers and schools and doctors and factories, everything.”*** – man from village near Tanger.

***“You get your degree and you don’t find a job. In order to have a job, you need to bribe the right people.”*** – woman from Tanger.

***“We can sacrifice so many things so our children will be educated but the state should be able to find them jobs I can’t do much for my child when he’s graduated.”*** – man from village near Doukkala-Abda.

***“They should create a club for illiterate girls that will offer them trainings in different crafts like sewing and handicrafts...which will make it easy for them to integrate into the labour market.”*** - woman from village near Meknes.

***“People spend their lives studying, and after they graduate, they don’t find a job. Some of them lose themselves to drugs. Vocational training qualifies people to integrate professional life quickly.”*** – man from a village near Oujda.

***“They need to develop a solution that creates job opportunities for those who don’t have certificates and diplomas”*** - man from village near- Rabat

## **Education**

Participants cited teacher absenteeism, general “corruption and abuse”, poor transportation and infrastructure for students, and poor oversight of curriculum that is too often disconnected from the needs of the labor market. According to participants, teachers are under trained, absent and often abusive toward students – especially in rural regions. According to participants, teachers often insist that parents hire them as extra-curricular tutors to ensure their kids keep up with the material. They saw this practice as corrupt and exploitative. Participants also stated that a lack of bussing to and from schools, combined with generally poor infrastructure, make it difficult for students to attend schools and therefore increase the number of dropouts. This disproportionately affects girls, whose parents would often keep them at home in the absence of viable and safe transportation options to and from school. Participants also criticized school curriculum as outdated, inconsistent across regions, and disconnected from the needs of the job market. Specifically, they cited schools’ failure to provide



students with a strong command of French, which participants saw as necessary for expanding their professional opportunities.

***“Our children suffer from constant [teacher] strikes.”*** – woman from Tanger.

***“The solution is to teach fields that exist in the labor market. They also need to adopt the same curriculum in all cities; if you take a diploma in some region and you decide to go looking for a job in another you will not find an appropriate job because they teach other specialties in that region.”*** – woman from Doukkala-Abda.

***“You hear all the time that people have children who graduated and didn’t find a job and you tell yourself that it’s not worthy to send my son to school.”*** – man from Doukkala-Abda.

***“Who’s going to control teachers and supervise them, the principal? But the principal needs to be controlled, too. He is absent all the time! There should be surprised visits for the inspector to determine whether the teacher is doing his job or not. If not, he must punish the teacher.”*** – man from a village near Oujda.

***“Schools should help orientation by helping the student to choose a career that fits with his skills, his ambitions and his social circumstances.”*** - woman from a village near Rabat.

***“Who’s going to control teachers and supervise them? The principal of course. The principal needs to be controlled, too. He is absent all the time. There should be surprise visits for the inspector wherein he asks students some questions to determine whether the teacher is doing his job or not.”*** - man from village near Oujda.

## **Healthcare**

Focus group participants were critical about the state of healthcare in Morocco. In particular, they noted that medical facilities were often inaccessible and in states of disrepair. Furthermore, the quality and performance of doctors and healthcare providers was not consistently regulated. As with education, participants expressed anger that there were no controls to fight abuse and ensure a minimum standard of quality. They added that many citizens lack insurance and are expected to bribe doctors, ambulance drivers, administrators and pharmacists for basic access and services. A recent study confirmed that 30 percent of patients in Morocco admitted to participating in a corrupt practice.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Transparency Maroc: <http://transparencymaroc.ma/TM/>.

One bright spot in the focus groups was the RAMEd program, which subsidizes 75 percent of medical expenses for low-income Moroccans. Focus group participants largely praised the program, but noted that it was exceedingly difficult to enroll. They also explain how cost savings from RAMEd are more than offset by increased demand for bribes to obtain access and treatment. Participants recommended building larger hospitals and medical centers, processing equipment to improve their efficiency, providing incentives for doctors to practice in rural areas, and training more specialists and doctors to improve Moroccans' access to health care.

***“They don’t even care about people who lay in front of the hospital’s entrance. The hospitals are crowded and dirty and there’s no order; it’s a mess.”*** – man from village near Doukkala-Abda.

***“People are afraid to get sick because the healthcare sector is so bad in this country.”*** – man from Fes.

***“Sometimes we have to carry our dead in a chariot – have you ever seen that in your life, it’s incredible! You can call for an ambulance, but you’ll never get it.”*** – man from village near Doukkala-Abda.

***“You need to bribe personnel to get what you want. We don’t have the minimum conditions of healthcare: lack of hospitals, staff, drugs, ambulances all [put] our lives at risk especially pregnant women and children. We only have one midwife. I was going to die if they didn’t rush me to the hospital.”*** – woman from Tanger.

***“Doctors are interested only in rich people. Poor persons have no protection.”*** – woman from Tanger.

***“We need doctors from developed countries.... they have more experience. For example, we have doctors who are not specialized in a particular field of medicine, they can’t diagnose simple diseases.”*** - woman from Meknes

***“We should have well equipped ambulances that are available to answer our calls.”*** - Man from village near Oujda.

***“Hospitals should be closer to home. I shouldn’t travel hundreds of kilometers to be taken care of. Hospitals must be built in small cities as well, not just big ones with all specialties.”*** - woman from Rabat

## **Infrastructure**

In discussions concerning the previous three subjects, participants often raised weak infrastructure as an underlying problem. In particular, they explained how poor roads and bridges make it harder for them to get to work, school or medical facilities. Furthermore, poor infrastructure damages their vehicles and reduces fuel efficiency, leading to increased out-of-pocket expenses for repairs and petroleum.

Again, participants raised corruption as a leading cause of poor infrastructure. They recited anecdotes of local infrastructure initiatives where just half of allocated funds actually went to the project. With less funding, they argued, companies implementing the project save costs by reducing quality or leaving them incomplete. Heavy floods in December 2014 caused many of these poorly constructed roads and bridges to collapse, leaving many rural communities isolated and profoundly frustrated at the national infrastructure's general state of disrepair.

***“In winter, school transportation becomes a very serious problem for people who live far from schools. That’s the primary reason why students drop out of school, increasing illiteracy. [Providing transportation] helps overcome the problem of school transportation and enables young girls to pursue their studies.”*** – woman from village near Tanger.

***“Sometimes they build things we do not need they don’t pay much attention to what we think. Control [mechanisms] are what we need [in order] to know if the budget was really spent on doing whatever was done.”*** – man from village near Doukkala-Abda.

***“Without roads, how can we go to the school or hospital? The roads are ruined, especially when it rains.”*** – woman from a village near Fes.

***“Two thirds of the population in the region don’t have access to drinking water.”*** - woman from village near Rabat.

## **Other concerns**

The flexible format the focus groups allowed participants to raise other concerns. In addition to the four priority issues discussed above, participants also expressed concerns of increased drug use, poverty, crime, increased prices on basic goods, and air pollution. Several noted that they feel less physically secure in their communities, and others raised concerns about the growing inequality in Moroccan society. In focus group discussions, participants regularly linked these concerns to the four priority issues discussed above. For example, increased pollution exacerbates health problems, and sparse opportunities for employment and education lead to increased criminal behavior and drug use. Poor worker rights and low wages make rising prices of fuel, food and healthcare harder for citizens to bear, leading many to cut back and save less.

## IV. FINDINGS

### Reactions to Party Policies

Before convening the focus groups, several leading political parties shared written statements describing policy proposals on the four priority areas: employment, education, healthcare and infrastructure. Parties sought to receive feedback on these ideas through the focus groups. To that end, NDI shared these policy statements with participants without attributing them to a particular party.

Participants' reactions are summarized below:

#### Participants prioritized feasibility.

Support for proposals often hinged on their perceived feasibility. Participants regularly cited examples of earlier party promises that went unfulfilled and rejected ideas seen as empty campaign promises. For example, an older women from Meknes withheld support from a proposal that she initially agreed with because “[parties] don’t do what they say; they should guarantee that the solution will be applied. There should be some sort of guarantee.” Participants frequently discounted initially promising ideas when they questioned its feasibility. Participants were most open to proposals that had been previously implemented, as they seemed more relatable and feasible. Even in these cases, however, participants doubted whether corruption and incompetent management would ultimately undermine the value of these proposals.

#### Participants wanted details.

Parties' policy statements left many focus group participants with more questions than answers. Participants often asked for clarifications about whom proposals targeted and how they would be funded and supervised.

#### Participants preferred direct and practical proposals.

Participants preferred policies with simple solutions addressing their everyday challenges. For example, proposals to build or improve local roads usually received unanimous support. Alternatively, grand proposals were often greeted with cynicism. For example, in response to a proposal to dramatically expand vocational training, an older man from Doukkala-Abda stated that he preferred quality over quantity and that such massive proposals were “exaggerated”.

#### Participants were willing to pay for social justice programs.

Participants generally embraced programs to support those in need, even if it came at their expense. Urban participants, for example, supported redirecting resources from their communities to support development in lower-income, rural regions. When a proposal was shared to increase spending on rural infrastructure, a group of young men from Rabat argued it was “necessary” and would promote “solidarity” and “social equality.”

Participants were well-informed about current issues and open to new proposals.

Participants were reasonably well-informed about both local and national issues and grasped parties' proposals with little explanation from the focus group moderator. This held true even for participants in rural areas with higher rates of poverty and illiteracy. For example, a group of young women from a rural community outside Rabat noted the relative trade-offs of subsidy reform: *"For me, reducing the subsidies in the compensation fund will help the country in maintaining its financial balance, avoiding the rise of the deficit rate and reducing taxes."* Participants were open to proposals from all parties, and even when they disagreed, made an effort to offer constructive recommendations for improvement. Criticism usually related to whether an idea was practical or failed to address the underlying issue. When asked for feedback about a party's plan to direct more health care funding to rural areas, one young woman commented that building roads should be a priority, because without them, no one could access the improved facilities.

### **Attitudes Toward Parties**

The study revealed that participants **did not understand the role of parties** and elected officials as advocates for their interests within the political system. As a result, many were confused by suggestions that elected officials are responsible for understanding their everyday concerns and proposing longer-term policy solutions to address them. In fact, several participants argued that it was the role of "the state" to provide these services, reflecting the great disconnect between citizens and parties, along with the widespread public misunderstanding about the latter's role in representing their interests. Participants with a better understanding about the political process argued that parties did not calibrate their promises according to their actual power to effect change.

This mistrust and misunderstanding are partially explained by participants' almost universal view that **parties were disconnected** from their communities and daily lives. Just two out of 192 total participants could remember parties approaching them outside of an election to discuss their policy proposals. In even these two cases, nothing came of the meeting. The overwhelming number of participants could not identify their elected representatives nor explain their basic duties. Capturing this sentiment, an older woman from Oujda recalled how she *"met with some [political party members] in a center. They talked about lots of things they have never done; yes we know them, but we don't bother talking to them about our issues, because they listen, but they do nothing."*

Most troublingly, participants often **associated parties with the corruption and abuse of power** they perceive as rampant in the broader political system. This perception tainted their evaluation of parties and their proposals, leading participants to seriously question both their credibility and capacity. An older woman from Oujda captured this sentiment when she described how one party candidate promised to *"find us graduate*

*jobs,” but after he won, “forgot about his promise and asked us to give him money [to cover his campaign expenses].”*

***“All the elected people let us down in the end. In Moroccan society, the powerful citizen dominates.”*** – woman from Doukkala-Abda.

***“We don’t know where [the elected official’s office] is. We elected him, he should come ask us about our problems.”*** – man from Fes.

***“I called our representative one day and he said he’s busy. We can’t even find him. We don’t trust them anymore.”*** – man from village near Doukkala-Abda.

***“They [our representatives] use us to get our votes in the elections. They just want to have power and the position, nothing more. They [politicians] promise us lots of things they don’t keep. After he gets what he wants, he changes his phones number. We don’t know them and we’ve never met them.”*** – woman from village near Tanger.

***“There is no order. The people responsible should force it; we vote for them for that exact purpose. Our representatives must act in our favor. They see this but they choose to look the other way nothing changes.”*** – man from village near Doukkala-Abda.

***“We see [our elected official] only in the election period. In the election period they come and make promises but they do nothing. When it is a new election season, they show up again and ask the same thing. If you go to see him at his house he calls the police.”*** – man from Tanger.

### **Recommendations for Parties**

In the focus groups, participants offered parties a wide range of policy-related recommendations to better appeal to voters ahead of the 2015 and 2016 elections. Their recommendations focused on the four priority areas of employment, education, healthcare and infrastructure. See Appendix II for a sample of these recommendations.

In discussing each of these four issues, participants repeatedly raised the need for **“control mechanisms”** to guarantee that those entrusted with public responsibilities, whether doctors, teachers, contractors or elected officials, do not abuse their authority, follow through with their commitments, and maintain a minimum level of quality.

This revealed a broader mistrust among participants toward those entrusted with providing public services, from education and healthcare to utilities and roads. Their desire for “controls” to “guarantee” quality and accountability spoke to a level of frustration and powerlessness they feel about improving essential services in their daily

lives. They recommended surprise inspections of hospitals and schools, performance monitoring for teachers and doctors, and stricter penalties for corrupt officials.

Participants were very suspicious about the reliability of public officials at all levels of government. Parties with credible proposals to improve the quality, transparency and accountability of public services such as education, healthcare and infrastructure would find eager support.

## **Demographic Differences**

### **Gender**

Not surprisingly, female participants regularly raised issues that particularly affected women. Concerning employment, they recommended more vocational training opportunities targeting women, such as establishing factories in rural areas for sewing and tailoring. A young rural woman from Meknes suggested *“creating a club for illiterate girls that will offer them trainings in different crafts like sewing and handicrafts...which will make it easy for them to integrate into the labor market. Girls stay at home after they leave school waiting for a husband and then they work in agriculture.”*

Regarding education, women participants noted that young girls face particular challenges such as gender stereotyping from conservative teachers, sexual harassment, and heightened security concerns when traveling to and from school in the absence of safe public transportation. This was particularly concerning to women participants from rural areas, many of whom suggest “surprise inspections” to monitor teacher quality and behavior. With respect to transportation, parents often keep their children, especially daughters, home from school when the commute is long and dangerous. An older woman from a village near Tanger commented, *“In the winter, school transportation becomes a very serious problem for people who live far from schools. That’s the primary reason why students drop out and there is an increase in illiteracy.”* By contrast, young women from urban areas were more interested in advanced professional development opportunities, such as foreign language training and studying abroad.

On healthcare, female participants often raised the need for more specialists and facilities for women, such as increased maternity wards in hospitals. Many also complained about long wait times at healthcare facilities. In addition, women responded more positively to policies that focused on improving the health of families as opposed to individuals.

Regarding infrastructure, women in rural regions were primarily concerned with improving regular access to potable water. Many women in these areas reported having to travel to wells in distant villages, which requires a considerable investment of time and energy they could otherwise spend earning an income.

## Geography

In discussing various party proposals, rural participants were more likely to focus on the immediate benefits at the individual and family levels. Alternatively, urban participants were more likely to also discuss a policy's systemic-level impact. For example, an older woman from Fes commented how a vocational training program would "reduce crime by providing youngsters with jobs."

Both urban and rural participants appreciated how their different circumstances required different policy approaches. Furthermore, participants often supported policies even if it did not directly benefit their community and would even come at its expense. Directing more government spending on healthcare and infrastructure to rural areas, for example, often earned support from urban participants. Alternatively, rural participants argued that improving healthcare in their communities would reduce overcrowding in urban hospitals. This is not surprising given that many participants have family in both urban and rural communities, due in part to growing migration to cities from rural areas by those in search of jobs.

## Age

There were no significant differences in policy priorities and attitudes between older and younger participants in the focus groups. Unsurprisingly, younger participants tended to emphasize education and employment opportunities more than older ones. Elder participants were also more inclined to raise corruption, security, and worker's rights. They were also more likely to recommend "controls" to combat abuse of power and improve quality in the four priority areas of employment, education, healthcare and infrastructure. Again, this is unsurprising given that older participants have had greater experience in the workforce and interacting with government officials.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

The focus groups revealed that parties have a significant credibility problem with myriad causes and consequences.

Many citizens do not understand the role of parties or elected representatives in the political system, which makes it harder for them to understand why parties should even concern themselves with proposing policy solutions that address their priorities. As a result, citizens are often skeptical of party initiatives. Inadequate civic education and public outreach by political actors contributes to this widespread lack of awareness and lack of trust.

The perception that parties and their elected officials are unable to fulfill campaign promises undermines their credibility among citizens. This makes it harder for parties to leverage new policies to gain voter support, even if those policies are credible. Reforms following the 2011 constitutional amendments are designed to expand the capacity of



elected officials to act on their promises, offering an unprecedented opportunity for parties to build new relationships with voters and address those negative perceptions.

The credibility of parties is also tainted by the public's widespread perception of rampant corruption at all levels of politics and the public sector. Their experience paying bribes to doctors and teachers, perceived misallocation of funds for local projects, and reading about political scandals at the highest levels, have all contributed to the popular impression that those in public service just serve themselves. This view seriously undercuts parties' attempts to demonstrate their commitment to the public interest.

The focus groups also showed that inadequate outreach from parties and elected officials has led participants to feel that politicians did not care about their concerns. Only two out of 192 total participants could recall parties or elected officials approaching them about their policy proposals outside of a campaign. The perception that parties and elected officials are not only removed from, but disinterested in citizens' everyday lives, fuels this broader mistrust. Furthermore, this lack of connection with voters makes it harder for parties to develop responsive policies, which in turn complicates their efforts to gain public trust.

While this credibility challenge made citizens far more skeptical of party proposals, they nonetheless evaluated them in a surprisingly open, practical and non-ideological fashion. No party proposal was rejected out of hand, instead they were given a fair hearing. This willingness to consider new policies, however skeptically, gives parties a small but essential opening to rebuild public trust.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To take advantage of this opening, parties should not simply describe *what* they will do to address citizens' everyday problems, but also *how*. The focus groups showed that participants are hungry for details on how parties would implement their various proposals; They wanted to know whom these policies would benefit and how they would be financed and enforced. Parties that match their policies with compelling implementation plans should therefore find Moroccan voters receptive. For most parties, doing this will require investing considerably in voter outreach and policy development.

The overarching challenge facing political parties is rebuilding credibility with the public. Doing this requires improving both public awareness about their role in the political process and public trust in their ability to address the priority issues of citizens.

Parties can do this by visibly demonstrating interest in citizens' concerns. In many countries, successful parties regularly take part in public outreach activities, such as public fora, town hall meetings or door-to-door canvasses, to hear firsthand from citizens about their everyday concerns, hopes and challenges. These activities also provide parties with an opportunity to better explain to citizens their role in the political system, along with their limitations and, more importantly, understand the complexities of citizen concerns. These measures help combat public misconceptions about parties,

which often result in wildly inflated expectations of what parties can deliver. Engaging citizens in the initial stages of the policy development process, provides firsthand exposure to the various stakeholders and trade-offs for a particular subject.

To help break the perception that parties speak but do not act, parties could organize ‘days of action’ where citizens are encouraged to directly volunteer in communities. Such events demonstrate to the public that parties are serious about addressing priority issues like education and healthcare and are prepared to act even when they cannot implement sweeping policy change. Showing that politicians are leaders, willing to work at the ground-level, side-by-side with the public, would help shift the popular view that parties see themselves as ‘above’ the people. Using traditional and social media to promote such events would augment the impact of such events, before and after they take place.

Parties can also draw on the credibility of policy experts to enhance their own credibility. Parties could establish policy working groups composed of respected scholars and subject-matter experts. These experts could conduct research to stay abreast of public priorities and encourage more responsive party policies. Involving such experts in the development and promotion of new policy proposals would help overcome public skepticism and instill confidence in what parties are offering. For example, when a candidate reveals a new policy initiative on public transportation she invites an engineer to stand beside her at the press conference as she presents her plan.

Parties can also package their proposals in new ways to emphasize their accountability to citizens. For example, they could frame a new series of policies as a *commitment to citizens*. A candidate or party would sign a document listing the new policies with a clear roadmap for implementation. A party could propose a “contract with youth” that includes vocational training for recent graduates, new sport and recreation facilities, and education on employee rights for new entrants to the labor force. Party candidates would publicly sign the document to demonstrate their personal accountability. This would appeal to the many focus group participants who sought guarantees from elected officials that they would follow-through on their promises. Of course, this requires parties and candidates to only develop contracts with feasible proposals.

To address persistent public concerns about corruption and abuse of public funds, parties should propose policies that increase transparency and accountability. For example, parties could propose new requirements that all government-sponsored projects be accompanied by public report cards and budget tracking systems. Initiatives in this spirit would help demonstrate to citizens that parties have heard their concerns about corruption, abuse and poor service delivery and are committed to addressing them

While the focus group findings expose considerable challenges for political parties, they also offer a valuable window of opportunity. Presenting a demonstrated commitment to perform continuous, sustained public outreach and develop practical policy solutions that respond to the priorities of voters, would be a significant step toward building trust

with voters. These well-implemented techniques will offer voters confidence that politics in Morocco is changing and that reforms are bringing a new era of true public engagement.

## APPENDIX I

### *Detailed Methodology of Focus Group Research*

NDI held four focus groups in six target regions, for a total of 24 sessions. For each region, the Institute selected four groups according to a standard combination of demographic and socioeconomic criteria to represent Morocco's diverse perspectives.

*Gender* – The Institute decided to separate men from women in the focus groups to encourage more frank discussion among participants. In NDI's 15-year experience of working in Morocco, mixing men and women often leads the latter to withhold their full views, especially on controversial political subjects. This is particularly true in rural regions. For each region, NDI therefore convened two focus groups comprised only of men, along with another two comprised only of women.

*Age* – NDI sorted participants into two age groups: 18-30 ("Young") and 30-55 ("Mature"). After separating participants by gender, the Institute further divided them into two groups according to these age categories for a total of four cohorts.

*Socioeconomics* – Income levels can strongly affect a voter's values and policy priorities. The Institute thus sorted participants by socioeconomic class (SEC), with one group for lower-income participants (SEC-) and another for higher-income participants (SEC+). These groups were determined by the following criteria which is the standard measure used by public research firms in Morocco.

Income (Moroccan Dirhams - Dhs)	Number of household members	Number of active household members	SEC Category	SEC + / SEC -
Between 1,500 - 3,000 Dhs	<5	Max 2	D	SEC -
Between 3,001 - 7,000 Dhs	>5	More than 2	D	
Between 3,001 - 7,000 Dhs	<4	Max 2	C2	
Between 7,001 - 15,000 Dhs	<5	More than 2	C2	

Between 7,001 - 15,000 Dhs	<5	Max 2	C1	SEC -
More than 15,000 Dhs	>5	More than 2	C1	SEC +
More than 15,000	<6	Max 2	B	

Source<sup>5</sup>

*Urban/Rural* – To explore whether residents of Moroccan cities held different attitudes than their fellow citizens in more rural communities, for each region NDI held two focus groups in the regional capital and two more in the surrounding villages.

The chart below breaks down the composition of each focus group session by all of the above-mentioned criteria:

Region	Sex	Age	SEC <sup>6</sup>	Urban / Rural
Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaër	Male	Mature <sup>7</sup>	SEC -	Urban
	Female	Young	SEC +	Urban
	Male	Young	SEC +	Rural
	Female	Mature	SEC -	Rural
Doukkala-Abda	Male	Young	SEC +	Urban
	Female	Young	SEC +	Urban
	Male	Mature	SEC -	Rural
	Female	Mature	SEC -	Rural
Tanger-Tétouan	Male	Young	SEC +	Urban
	Female	Young	SEC +	Urban
	Male	Mature	SEC -	Rural
	Female	Mature	SEC -	Rural
Meknès-Tafilalet	Male	Mature	SEC -	Urban
	Female	Young	SEC +	Urban
	Male	Young	SEC +	Rural
	Female	Mature	SEC -	Rural
Fès-Boulmane	Male	Mature	SEC +	Urban
	Female	Mature	SEC +	Urban
	Male	Young	SEC -	Rural

<sup>5</sup> Table provided courtesy of the BJ Group. The table represents the standard industry metrics for public opinion research firms in Morocco.

<sup>6</sup> “SEC-” refers to lower income participants; “SEC+” refers to upper income participants’.

<sup>7</sup> “Mature” refers to participants 30-55 years old. “Young” refers to participants between the ages of 18-30.

	Female	Young	SEC -	Rural
Oujda-Angad	Male	Mature	SEC -	Urban
	Female	Mature	SEC +	Urban
	Male	Young	SEC +	Rural
	Female	Young	SEC -	Rural

## APPENDIX II

### *Sample of Participants' Solutions to Policy Priorities*

Employment	<p><i>Provide vocational training opportunities for young girls, especially in rural regions.</i></p> <p><i>Support private and foreign investment through lower taxes.</i></p> <p><i>Support Morocco's traditional artisan community by creating cooperatives where they can sell their products.</i></p>
Education	<p><i>Improve teacher quality by providing them with specialized training</i></p> <p><i>Provide more individual attention to students.</i></p> <p><i>Modernize school curriculum to better match employer needs.</i></p> <p><i>Provide support for the physical security of students, and emotional support to students through the presence of psychologists and mental health professionals in schools.</i></p> <p><i>Random visits to schools to monitor quality of administration and instruction.</i></p>
Healthcare	<p><i>Increase the number of hospitals and healthcare centers.</i></p> <p><i>Improve access to healthcare facilities with better roads and public transportation.</i></p> <p><i>Train more medical specialists and general practitioners.</i></p> <p><i>Reduce the cost of the most common medications to improve their accessibility to those in need.</i></p> <p><i>Provide financial incentives for doctors to work in rural areas.</i></p>

Infrastructure	<p><i>Make utilities more reliable and easily accessible, specifically water and electricity.</i></p> <p><i>Restore historic sites for national pride and tourism.</i></p> <p><i>Provide transportation to and from school for students, especially in rural areas.</i></p> <p><i>Draw on local expertise to prioritize infrastructure needs.</i></p>

### APPENDIX III

#### *Summary of February 2014 Focus Group Research*

NDI held 24 focus groups between February 28 and March 4, 2014 across six target regions.<sup>8</sup> The focus groups followed the same methodology as the recent round described in this report.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>8</sup> NDI held focus groups from December 4 to 20, 2014 in the following regions: Doukkala-Abda, Fès-Boulmane, Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaër; Meknès-Tafilalet, Tanger-Tétouan, and Oujda-Angad.