



“Make Our Voices Heard”: Citizens of Tunisia Express Their Views

May 2-9, 2015



Research Objectives & Context

- **Determine Tunisian citizens' attitudes on a range of issues** in order to provide political and civic leadership with timely and objective information.

Key themes include:

- The direction of the country and priorities that affect citizens' daily lives;
- The performance of the parliament and government;
- Expectations of members of parliament and preferences for engagement with citizens;
- The causes of various economic challenges and potential solutions to remedy them; and,
- The current security situation and the state's efforts to combat terrorism.



Methodology

- **Focus groups are used to understand prevalent attitudes** among various social groups and examine in-depth the reasons for those attitudes
- **Focus group research is qualitative**, not quantitative
- **Attitudes identified can be attributed only to the participants**; samples are not representative
- **Discussion guide developed by NDI**, in consultation with ELKA Consulting
- **Steering committee meeting with political parties**



Methodology

- **Fieldwork** conducted from May 2-9
- **4 cities selected:** Greater Tunis, Sfax, Kasserine, Bizerte
- **Participants recruited at 5 sample points** across each city
- **ELKA recruiters selected participants** by engaging pedestrians on the street
- **Selection criteria:**
 - Three groups per city: 1) mixed youth 25-34; 2) women 35+; 3) men 35+
 - Equal distribution was a goal from each sample point



Participant Profiles

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

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

Overview of Presentation

- I. Direction of the Country (National and Local)
- II. Parliament
- III. Government
- IV. Economy
- V. Security
- VI. Additional Citizen Priorities
- VII. Youth

National Direction

Participants worry that Tunisia is moving in the wrong direction. They feel that new politicians have failed to revitalize the economy or to address the key problems of rising prices and enduring unemployment. Some are also fearful about rising insecurity and perceived restrictions on freedoms won in the revolution.

“The cost of living is going in the wrong direction. Everything has become expensive. There are strikes everywhere. Teachers’ salaries are 1,000 dinars but they are organizing strikes and getting pay rises. When someone goes on strike, he should be fired. Many people find the cost of living too high.” Female, 26, Bizerte, employed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

National Direction (cont'd)

The freedoms gained in the 2011 revolution continue to be viewed as a step in the right direction. Some participants argue that the security situation began to improve after the March 18 attack at the Bardo Museum in Tunis.

“Let’s not be pessimistic. There are some advantages that resulted from the revolution, such as the freedom of expression. There are many facts that the media uncovered and that were hidden to us before. We used to live in a world of fiction which depicted Tunisia as the country of tomorrow; the country of welfare and progress. What we’re living now is the outcome of the previous regimes which used to lie to us. The revolution revealed the truth: the infrastructure is not as strong and developed as they used to claim.” Female, 51, Tunis, employed

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

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

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

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

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

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

Local Direction - Sfax

Participants in Sfax place a high priority on the economic situation, particularly employment and prices. They harbor concerns about infrastructure, pollution, and centralization of public administration. Most perceive the city to be safe.

“If businessmen from Sfax wanted to they could have turned Sfax into the Dubai of Tunisia but all the investments are in the capital....In the past, they used to say that Sfax was the economic capital but now it’s no longer an economic capital.” Male, 31, Sfax, employed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Local Direction - Kasserine

Kasserine participants resent what they view as the results of the long-term marginalization of their region, with recent terrorism as the latest in a history of injustices affecting the area. Political leaders are seen as unwilling to address the deteriorating economic and security situations in the governorate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Local Direction - Tunis

In the capital, participants believe that the country is on a negative path, particularly on economic issues. There is debate about whether Tunis is secure.

“Things are the same everywhere. Expensive prices and hardships and unemployment are even getting to the North.” Male, 32, Tunis, employed

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

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

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

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

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

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

Local Direction - Bizerte

In Bizerte, most participants assess the current situation negatively, focusing on the local economy, which is seen as deteriorating due to lack of investment and attention from the capital.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parliament – Expectations

Participants aspire for an effective parliament whose members are hard-working, transparent, and communicative. MPs would represent and defend the interests of their district's constituents, and would take bold decisions to resolve priority issues.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parliament – Successes

A small number of participants are satisfied with how members of the new parliament have begun their work.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parliament – Failures

A strong majority of participants rate the parliament's performance to date as poor. They maintain that the parliament has achieved nothing and criticize the institution for its slow pace of work. Many participants say that they feel disconnected from the parliament and that they have lost trust in the institution.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parliament – MPs

Participants attribute a wide range of negative characteristics to MPs. The most common include: absenteeism, self- or partisan interest, failure to fulfill promises, and fighting or otherwise divisive behavior.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“There is no harmony between the MPs and they haven’t kept their promises.... I think they are just playing a role.” Female, 25, Sfax, employed

“There are some MPs that who are sincere and reliable but there are also those who are preventing others from making any progress.” Female, 40, Sfax, homemaker

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

Parliament – Representation

Participants do not believe that the current parliament represents them. Politicians are seen to be unaware of the everyday problems that citizens face and are instead viewed as working toward their self-interest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parliament – District MPs

Participants demonstrate a low to moderate awareness of their district’s MPs. Many participants feel that their district’s MPs do not yet represent them; instead they believe their representatives are putting personal and partisan interests before the needs of their constituents.

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

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

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

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

“Even the MP that we elected and who is supposed to do something for us is idle.... He has to be active not just sitting and watching the other representatives dealing with development and investment of their regions.” Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

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

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

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

Parliament – Means of Engagement

Despite their acute disappointment with the parliament, participants are open to more engagement from MPs and are able to imagine settings for such outreach. They long for the opportunity to speak directly with MPs. To facilitate engagement with citizens, participants propose that MPs assign district-based staff or form advisory committees of constituents.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parliament – Information

Although participants are generally open to consuming information about the parliament, they indicate that their interest is waning in comparison to the NCA period. They voice doubts about the accuracy of reporting on the parliament's work, particularly in the media.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parliament – Role of Majority

For participants, the role of the parliamentary majority is to form the government, pass laws, and enact reforms.

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

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

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

Parliament – Role of Opposition

Participants expect the opposition to balance the majority, conduct credible oversight, and constructively suggest alternative ideas. There is little tolerance for an obstructive opposition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Government – Successes

Participants view the government’s proactive efforts on security as its most important accomplishment in its first 100 days. A smaller number of participants commend members of the government for undertaking site visits across the country. Some call on fellow citizens to be patient before judging the government’s performance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Government – Failures

More participants assert that the government has not produced any concrete achievements to date. They claim that the government has been passive on major issues, notably the economy, and has failed to coordinate effectively across ministries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Economy – General Views

Most participants perceive the economy to be in decline at both the national and local level. Their main priorities are to reduce unemployment and inflation. They are also highly concerned with corruption, strikes, and underdevelopment. There is widespread agreement that the government should do more to address these issues.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Economy – Unemployment

The primary cause of unemployment according to participants is the substandard education system, which is criticized for failing to match the needs of the labor market. Other participants attribute unemployment to Tunisia's overreliance on public sector jobs and investors' diminishing confidence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Economy – Inflation

Participants believe inflation is caused by smuggling, monopolization, and increases in production costs. There is a strong demand for the state to play a greater role in overseeing prices and intervening to reduce them when necessary.

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

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

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

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

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

“When a can of tomatoes goes from 1.7 dinars to 2.5 dinars, all the citizens of the country can agree, if they are united, not to buy tomatoes for a whole week. This way the government could make tomatoes cheaper.” Female, 34, Bizerte, unemployed

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

Economy – Lack of Investment

Both Tunisian and foreign investors are seen to be deterred by insecurity, political instability, and strikes. Participants call on the government to improve conditions to attract investors.

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

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

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

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

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

“The state plays a major role in providing investments and it has to supervise them. The fact that there is terrorism is not a justification for letting people die....The state has to assume its responsibility especially in the internal regions which are forgotten and marginalized.” Male, 36, Kasserine, employed

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

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

⁷ The UGTT.

Economy – Corruption

Participants blame both public servants and citizens for taking part in corruption, and believe that a solution to the problem would require all Tunisians to change their mentalities. There are frequent demands for greater oversight, transparency, and accountability.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Economy – Parallel Economy

The parallel economy is closely associated with cross-border smuggling, which participants believe is enabled by corruption at borders and customs. For many participants, however, the parallel economy plays an essential role by offering the only means for some citizens to earn a living and for consumers to avoid high prices.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Security – General Views

Participants generally see the government as being proactive on security, particularly after the Bardo attack. While some believe that these efforts are having an initial effect, others are less confident about their personal safety.

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

“Despite the fact that there are many terrorist attacks taking place, we feel more secure. Security improved and is increasing, maybe because citizens are more collaborative with the police.” Male, 32, Tunis, employed

“The government takes an action whenever a catastrophe happens but nothing apart from that.” Female, 26, Bizerte, employed

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

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

“We are constantly terrified; when we go shopping, our handbags are frequently checked, and we feel that everybody is suspicious. We feel that we are ourselves under surveillance. There is fear in people’s eyes everywhere. Terrorism is a great harm to us.” Female, 63, Tunis, homemaker

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

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

Security – Causes of Terrorism

Recruitment for terrorism is seen to be driven by offers of money, resentment toward police, and misinterpretation of religious ideology. Participants differ on whether poverty and lack of economic opportunities makes Tunisians more susceptible to religious extremism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ A detention center in Tunis.

Security – Solutions for Terrorism

Participants support the security forces in confronting terrorism in the short-term, as long as civil liberties are not restricted. They identify long-term solutions involving security sector reform, development, education, and moderate religion. Responsibility for combatting terrorism resides with the government, but citizens also have a role.

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

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

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

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

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

“We’re all responsible for fighting terrorism.” Female, 25, Kasserine, student

“I think that the Ministry of Religious Affairs should supervise imams in the mosques because some of them give wrong information about religion.” Male, 35, Kasserine, unemployed

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

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

Security – Draft Law to Protect Security Forces

A strong majority of participants voice concerns that the draft law to protect security forces could be wielded to restrict civil liberties and may be counter-productive. A few believe the law is a necessary response to the security situation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Citizen Priorities – Education

There is growing alarm over weaknesses in the education sector, which are seen to be intensifying in recent years. Participants view these deficiencies as causes of current economic challenges and insecurity. There is little sympathy for striking teachers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“As a secondary school teacher, I strongly call for improving the education system.... The problem is that now we have more than 40 private primary schoolsThis is the major reason why we went on a strike. We demand free public education for everyone.” Male, 37, Sfax, employed

Citizen Priorities – Health

The health system, which many participants believe is rapidly deteriorating, is commonly cited as an example of disparities in development across regions. Poor service at public hospitals is a regular irritation for participants and their families.

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

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

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

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

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

“If someone in a rural area is sick, he has to come to the city of Kasserine because we only have one hospital. It’s very hard to find means of transport in order to come to the hospital. The person dies before reaching the hospital. I don’t understand why they don’t open new hospitals in the rural areas so that people can get healthcare services easily. Indeed, this would create new job opportunities. They could hire cleaners for example.” Male, 33, Kasserine, employed

Youth – Challenges

For participants, the high rate of youth unemployment is the fundamental challenge facing young Tunisians today. Without opportunities to establish themselves through economic independence, youth turn to other outlets for entertainment and validation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Youth – Solutions

For some participants, empowering youth begins with systemic educational and economic reforms. Others call on youth to be more willing to take initial steps to establish livelihoods.

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

Female, 51, Tunis, employed

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

Female, 52, Sfax, employed

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

Female, 25, Kasserine, student

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

Male, 26, Tunis, student

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

Female, 36, Kasserine, homemaker

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

Female, 58, Bizerte, homemaker

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

Male, 59, Bizerte, employed

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

Female, 58, Bizerte, employed