



**SEEKING “TANGIBLE CHANGE”:
TUNISIANS EXPRESS VIEWS ON THE TRANSITION AND EXPECTATIONS
FOR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES**

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA
Conducted February 19-26, 2017

By:

Rick Nadeau, President, Quorus Consulting Group Inc., and,
Assil Kedissi, NDI

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NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Washington, DC

455 Massachusetts Ave, NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20001-2621
Telephone: (+1) 202-728-5500
Fax: (+1) 202-728-5520
Website: www.ndi.org

Tunis, Tunisia

Email: nditunisie@ndi.org
Telephone: (+216)71-844-264



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Questions about the content of the document should be directed to Jerry Hartz, NDI Director of Government Relations and Communications, (202) 728-5535, jhartz@ndi.org.

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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 96 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies. The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens. For more information about NDI, please visit www.ndi.org.

PREFACE

Six years after Tunisia's historic revolution, which was triggered by significant economic problems, restrictions on citizens' freedoms, and an authoritarian system, the first elected legislative body, the Assembly of People's Representatives (parliament or ARP), the government, and the president are striving to make the newfound democracy work. Despite the noteworthy gains of the revolution, including freedom of expression, the nonviolence of the transition, and multiple rounds of credible and transparent elections, many Tunisians continue to wait for tangible reforms at the economic and social levels.

As the transition progresses, local elections are Tunisia's next step towards elected, representative governance at all levels – especially as an upcoming decentralization process is expected to grant new prerogatives to the local leaders who will be seated. As a result, for the first time in their history, Tunisians will democratically elect the municipal councilors whose decisions directly impact their daily lives. On January 31, 2017, shortly before fieldwork began, the ARP passed a long-debated electoral law—the major hurdle for organizing municipal elections. On April 3, one month after the fieldwork for this report was conducted, a press conference was held by the High Independent Authority for Elections (ISIE), following a series of consultations with stakeholders from government, parliament, civil society, and political parties. At this press conference, the president of the ISIE, Chafik Sarsar, announced that municipal elections will be held on December 17, 2017. The ISIE president presented a timeline for fulfilling all crucial steps leading to the polls and called on the parliament to discuss and vote on the “*Code des collectivités locales*” (the legal framework for decentralization) before the end of August 2017.

Purpose. NDI organized this round of focus groups in February 2017. Since March 2011, NDI has conducted regular [qualitative research](#) in Tunisia to provide political and civic leaders with objective information about citizens' attitudes. This 17th round of research—the sixth organized by NDI since the 2014 elections—sought to gauge the public's evaluation of the performance of the government, parliament and members of parliament (MPs), views on some of the more pressing matters facing the country, and awareness of and expectations for the upcoming decentralization process and local elections.

February 19

Citizens participated in 12 focus group discussions between February 19 and 26, sharing their views on the following topics:

- The direction of the country and priorities that affect citizens' daily lives;

- The performance of the government, parliament and the extent to which the ARP is fulfilling its key roles;
- Prioritization of draft laws under consideration by the parliament and how information about these draft laws impacts perceptions on its performance;
- Awareness of and expectations for the decentralization process and its anticipated impacts on the country, regions, and citizens' daily lives;
- Intentions to vote in municipal elections and motivations for or barriers to voting;
- Awareness and impact of a new measure requiring documentation reflecting the citizen's actual physical address to register to vote or to update registration;
- Views on the economy and potential measures to improve it; and,
- Attitudes on corruption and thoughts on how civil society and citizens can address it.
- Perspectives on the return of foreign fighters and the most appropriate ways to deal with them.

The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting—a marketing and public opinion research firm based in Tunisia—to organize the study in four Tunisian governorates. NDI also commissioned Quorus Consulting Group Inc.—a Canadian public opinion research firm—to assist in the development of the moderation guide and in the analysis and reporting of the research findings.

Focus Group Research: Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following pre-set guidelines. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of respondents who are recruited for the exercise. Focus groups are particularly useful in gaining a deeper appreciation of the motivations, feelings, and values behind respondents' reactions. In addition, the group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas—thus providing 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 respondents, typically eight to 12 per group. Depending on the situation, however, groups may be slightly smaller or larger. For example, a women's group in a more isolated area may benefit from a larger guest list because it is likely that one or more of the respondents will refuse to speak at length, even if pressed. Focus group findings are only a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. The conclusions of this report therefore only represent opinions held when research was conducted in late February 2017.

Qualitative research seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively projectable measures. Due to the sample size, the special recruitment methods used, and the study objectives themselves, the work under discussion is exploratory in nature. The findings are not, nor were they intended to be, statistically projectable to a larger population. This kind of projection is strictly the prerogative of quantitative research.

Method: Before conducting the research, NDI developed a moderation guide that reflected the themes and questions proposed by MPs and CSO representatives. These themes and questions were compiled using an electronic form that NDI shared with stakeholders to understand their priorities in order to design a moderation guide as relevant as possible to their concerns. From February 19 to 26, 2017, NDI held 12 focus groups with a total of 123 respondents in four cities across Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Kasserine, Gabès, and Siliana. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI divided respondents at each location into three distinct demographic groups:

- 1) mixed gender youth (ages 24–35);
- 2) women over the age of 35; and,
- 3) men over the age of 35.

Each group comprised between nine and 12 respondents. The final gender breakdown was 51 percent men and 49 percent women. Respondents were selected and pre-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions. Additional detail on respondents' demographic profiles can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Staffing and Logistics: The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in four regions across the country. A Tunisian citizen trained in focus group moderation techniques by NDI and ELKA served as the moderator for all focus groups in the series. All groups were conducted in the Tunisian dialect of Arabic.

Group Locations: The 12 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in four locations throughout Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Kasserine, Gabès, and Siliana (see the map in this section). Locations selected for the study were urban or semi-urban areas. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location, and voting patterns in the 2014 elections. Greater Tunis was selected because it encompasses the capital and largest city of Tunis, and is the national center for public administration and commerce. Kasserine is located in the western central part of the country, near the highest mountain in Tunisia, “Al Chammbi”. It was historically marginalized by previous regimes, which helps explain its current aggravated economic

and social problems. After the revolution, Kasserine became known as the city most affected by terrorism. Gabès, located on the coast of the Gulf of Gabès, is known for its fishing and agriculture sectors. Gabès is also an industrial center that has a high concentration of chemical industries. Siliana is a landlocked city in the north of Tunisia. Despite its agricultural wealth, this city faces economic and social problems that have prompted many residents, especially youth, to leave the region.

In all locations, appropriate venues for focus group discussions were identified to ensure participant privacy and sufficient space for indirect observation by NDI staff.

Outside Influence: Every effort was made to ensure there was no undue influence exerted on the respondents in the groups. Focus group discussion guides were not shared with local authorities prior to the sessions. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from overall findings, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

MAP OF TUNISIA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings of this report provide insights into public opinion in Tunisia in late February 2017. Based on 12 focus group discussions, with 123 Tunisian respondents, the report summarizes the public's evaluation of the performance of the parliament and members of parliament (MPs), views on some of the more pressing matters facing the country, and awareness of and expectations for the upcoming decentralization process and municipal elections. A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from respondents, are detailed in the Principal Findings section of this report.

Tunisians are not satisfied with the direction in which their country is going, and few would agree that they see the situation changing anytime soon. Among the few improvements, respondents expressed that they are now able to have and voice an opinion, that the basic pieces of democracy are in place, and that there have been improvements in overall public security against terrorism.

In terms of what is going wrong, nearly all respondents agreed that corruption is a significant challenge, that it is widespread and, for some, it is completely irremediable. Public institutions continue to be at the epicenter of many concerns. Compared to the last round, there seems to be more concern with corruption in the areas of education, health care, and the judicial system, as well as in the form of favoritism with regards to employment in both the private and public sectors. The economy was another area that respondents generally agreed was a major issue in Tunisia. Attention was mostly on unemployment, especially youth unemployment, and on inflation.

For many, discussing corruption and the state of the economy invariably led to a discussion of the government, parliament and how they feel about their MPs. Confidence is weak and falling, suggesting a significant gap in trust between respondents and their MPs. Until they see an improvement in their personal situation, participants' perception of parliament is not likely to change. This crisis of confidence is also fueled by a sense that MPs are inactive, that they are passing the wrong kinds of laws, and that they are just focused on serving their own ends.

Although they are frustrated with parliament, most Tunisians remain engaged with their political surroundings and remain connected to what the ARP is doing through mass media channels such as television, radio and newspapers. In fact, the gap in trust has led to two general forms of behavior: complete or partial disconnect on the one hand and heightened engagement on the other. Both groups believe MPs should prioritize greater direct contact with citizens and make greater use of mass media channels (e.g.

television, radio, and newspapers) to keep them informed and to engage them. Some emphasized a need to simplify media coverage of parliamentary deliberations, decisions and issues in such a way “for the average citizen” to understand.

Respondents generally expressed skepticism about the parliament fulfilling any of its three key roles in legislation, representation, and oversight. While they realize that parliament is passing laws, they do not believe that they are passing the right laws, and therefore the institution gets a failing grade on this specific role. Respondents are not seeing any tangible results or improvement in the country’s economic or social situation, so by extension they do not believe the government is doing its job, from which they conclude that there is no parliamentary oversight. Furthermore, questioning of ministers is considered ineffectual and insincere, further weakening how parliament is seen in its role of government oversight. Finally, respondents were particularly critical of how poorly they believe they are being represented by their elected officials, a sentiment that is amplified by their MPs’ absence in their districts and by an increasingly entrenched belief that their MPs are using their positions for their own purposes.

When shown twelve draft laws that parliament will discuss during the next parliamentary year and asked to select the one they believe should be the priority, respondents focus on the draft laws that most directly address the economy and corruption. Draft laws that focus specifically on youth employment were also popular, especially among youth, as well as women at least 35 years of age. Just finding out about the draft laws had an impact on participants. Many were pleased to see that their parliament is “doing something” and that they are focused on the right issues. Some still insisted that, in the end, what matters is execution and that the list of draft laws is really “only ink on paper.”

Local elections, in the context of a planned decentralization process, are Tunisia’s next step towards elected, representative governance at all levels. Even though there have been discussions about decentralization for many months, feedback revealed that significant efforts are still needed to educate citizens that decentralization will happen, how it will happen, and ultimately what it will mean for them. Based on the limited information at their disposal, these are the main benefits and concerns respondents identified:

Advantages	Concerns / Risks
<p>Decentralization will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ...achieve what a centralized system has not, especially more employment. 	<p>Decentralization will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ...be influenced by corruption leading to undesirable outcomes. · ...instigate regional competition.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... involve a greater focus on specific regional needs. • ...increase accountability among elected officials and more contact with constituents. • ...improve access to certain services that currently require travel to Tunis or processing in Tunis. • ...reduce regional favoritism and lead to greater equality between the regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...lead to too much regional independence, compromising national cohesiveness and sentiment. • ...stress the lack of competent or experienced individuals in the regions to assume the new responsibilities.
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Even though respondents were not familiar with or knowledgeable of the decentralization process, the majority expressed intent to vote in the elections, mostly because they believe it is their right and duty. Respondents were invited to propose priorities for local and municipal councils. Above everything else, respondents tended to mention employment and job creation.

In the new elections law, citizens wishing to register to vote or to update their existing voter registration information must present documentation verifying their address. Generally, the proposed measure seems reasonable to respondents although their reactions suggest that challenges lay ahead, especially awareness and voter education around the measure.

In terms of possible means of engagement and outreach for local councils, many propose the same tactics and approaches that they would like to see from their MP, which most often involves some form of in-person or direct interaction with the electorate.

Significant time was spent discussing the economy. Respondents identify the dire state of their economy as one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, their country is headed in the wrong direction and should be one of the top priorities for all levels of government moving forward. The overall economy is considered by most as "very weak", "catastrophic" or "deteriorated" and both national and regional economies are seen as having worsened in the past year. When describing the economic situation of the country, respondents essentially focus on two specific performance metrics: employment and inflation. Respondents believe unemployment is largely driven by a lack of "projects" and factories, arguing that it is fairly difficult to start a project and that measures need to be taken to streamline and simplify the process to obtain financing and purge it of favoritism and corruption. Other reasons for unemployment, according to respondents, include regional favoritism, corruption in employment, and an education system that is not aligned with the job market.

Respondents were asked to explain why the parallel economy exists in Tunisia. Some feel that those who work in the parallel economy do so because they need to work to feed their families and to survive. Some also feel that inflation – with which wages have not kept pace – and widespread unemployment are all forcing many citizens to seek low-price products, often from the parallel economy. Finally, many feel corruption is allowing the parallel economy to survive. In order to reduce or weaken the parallel economy, respondents believe the country simply needs to address these root causes, especially unemployment. The creation of foreign trade zones (*zones franches*) was also proposed as a solution.

Corruption was the last major theme discussed in each session. Many seem to feel that it is present in all sectors and that the situation is getting worse. Participants in this round of focus groups seemed especially concerned with the impact that corruption is having on how positions in both the public and private sectors are being filled. In terms of how civil society and citizens could help combat corruption, respondents suggested:

What can civil society do?	What can citizens do?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness and educate citizens about corruption, their rights, and strategies to combat corruption; • Oversight; • Help protect whistleblowers; • Help defend or come to the aid of citizens who are adversely affected by corruption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a hard stand and refuse to participate in corruption; • Denounce corrupt people; • Educate the next generation; • More online shaming.

Regarding civil society specifically, this seems to be one group of organizations in which most respondents have some degree of trust. When specifically asked if civil society has a role to play in combatting corruption, none of the respondents expressed concern with that sector's integrity. By and large, participants see civil society organizations as credible and trusted intervenors that do have a role to play in this area.

Regarding the upcoming municipal elections, some feel that the type of corruption that is influencing how the country is being led at the national level will also influence how municipalities will be run. Some are also concerned that the election process itself may be corrupt. Not all respondents were pessimistic, however – some felt that the proximity of the process to citizens inherently increases its potential for integrity and accountability.

Each session concluded with a brief discussion about the return of foreign fighters. Most respondents agreed that the risks of their return outweigh the benefits. When asked to take a position of stricter punishment (e.g. imprisonment) versus one involving reintegration into society, most would prefer a stricter approach.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

This study evaluates Tunisian citizens' opinions of the situation facing the country approximately two years after the seating of a new president and parliament, and six years after the revolution. NDI conducted 12 focus groups with 123 respondents throughout Tunisia in late February 2017. The findings, drawn from respondents' comments, are detailed below.

I. National Direction

Tunisians are not satisfied with the direction in which their country is going, and few believe the situation will change any time soon. This sentiment is equally shared among young and elderly respondents, among men and women, and across all regions where focus groups were held.

What is going well?

Similar to what was observed during the previous round of research (conducted in August 2016), unless specifically prompted for positive elements, respondents tend to focus exclusively on what is going wrong in Tunisia. During focus group discussions, it was not uncommon to hear at least one participant voice that “nothing is going right!” When asked specifically if anything in Tunisia is going right, respondents were able to identify a few positive developments, including:

- **Freedom of expression** – respondents tended to agree that they have seen improvements in terms of their ability not only to have an opinion, but also to voice that opinion. Similar to what was expressed during previous rounds of focus group research, respondents feel this is one of the more notable outcomes of the revolution. In a few instances, it was suggested that freedom of expression is being taken too far by some citizens, to the extent that respect and courtesy are not being observed.

“People are aware and conscious.” (Female, Tunis, 25, Student)

- **Foundations of democracy** – a few respondents felt that the basic elements of democracy were in place, and with this, there was some appreciation for the fact that Tunisia will undergo difficult changes and will see challenging times as the country adapts to new systems.

“I think they [MPs] are still new. I think they want to serve the country, but need more time.” (Male, Tunis, 46, Civil Servant)

- **Safety and security** – although not noted as often as it was during the focus groups held in the summer of 2016, some respondents did indicate that they believe their country is now safer and that there have been improvements in overall public security and the fight against terrorism.

What is going wrong?

While it was sometimes a struggle for respondents to identify positive aspects of life in Tunisia, the opposite was true when respondents articulated what is going wrong.

The two themes participants most commonly and consistently identified when asked to specify what is going wrong were corruption and the economic welfare of Tunisians. When discussing these two themes, respondents often expressed frustration and, in some cases, outright discouragement to the point of believing that the situation is completely irremediable. These two themes were raised by men and women alike, by young and elderly Tunisians, and across all regions; however, there are nuances within various demographic groups and from one region to another.

- **Corruption** – Nearly all respondents agreed that corruption is a significant challenge in today's Tunisia. Most agreed that it has always existed in their country and that it has evolved over time in ways that they fear are now almost impossible to control or correct.

“Corruption. There is a lobby, a coalition between politicians and media. They serve each other as they have mutual interests. Politicians serve media and media serve businessmen. It is a vicious cycle.” (Male, Gabès, 61, Doctor)

Compared to the preceding round of focus group research, respondents were much less likely to focus on corruption in police forces and were more likely to refer to corruption in the areas of education and health care, in the judicial system, and in the form of favoritism within employment in both the private and public sectors. Consistent with findings from 2016 research was the extent to which participants viewed corruption as having spread throughout public institutions, including small bribes sought from front office service clerks to expedite service delivery, as well as bribery and preferential treatment within the education and the health care systems.

- **Economic situation** – The economy, or a specific aspect of the economy, was another area that respondents agreed was a major issue in Tunisia. Attention tended to focus mostly on employment, especially youth employment, and on inflation. While youth employment was certainly a common theme among youth participants, it was likewise raised frequently by older Tunisians who expressed concern for their own children who continue to depend on parents for food and money and who, in many cases, pursued post-secondary education yet remain unemployed or under-employed.

“The political strategy of the state. They should focus on employment rather than cannabis¹. We do not care whether it is legalized or not. Also, youth who are expressing their opinions and bloggers are put in jail.” (Female, Siliana, 33, Employed)

“Unemployment is getting worse. They have no programs for youth and families. A lot of families do not have a sole source of revenue.” (Female, Gabès, 38, Homemaker)

“Everything is getting more expensive. I feel sorry for families with children.” (Female, Gabès, 48, Teacher)

Respondents' views on the economy and corruption are explored in greater detail below. Beyond the economy and corruption, a variety of other areas were seen as “going wrong” in Tunisia. Even though these issues were raised by only some respondents across all discussion groups, they remain important issues for those who raised them:

- education;
- health care (poor service, poor infrastructure, challenges regarding access in the regions outside Tunis);
- transportation;
- housing conditions;
- pollution and cleanliness;
- regional favoritism;
- confidence crisis regarding Tunisian politicians;
- lack of infrastructure (sidewalks, lighting, social infrastructure);
- lack of investment in agricultural development; and,
- the moral crisis of Tunisians (especially an issue among women participants).

¹ This statement refers to a draft law regarding drug criminalization reform.

II. Parliament

A significant segment of each session was dedicated to gauging respondent sentiment towards government, parliament and members of parliament. Following discussion of the direction of the country, the shift in topic was quite relevant since many respondents were already explaining that some aspects of government, parliament and its members were among the many things going in the wrong direction.

It was clear once again to the researchers during this round of focus groups that participants struggle to differentiate the executive branch of government from the legislative side. There was a tendency to attribute responsibility for the performance, or lack of performance, of the entire government to the parliament since, “we [citizens] elected them; they are responsible.” While the questions posed focused on the elected parliament, it could be extrapolated that participants’ sentiments conflated those regarding parliament and MPs with the executive and broader government.

There was near-unanimous agreement that the level of confidence citizens have in their parliament has decreased compared to a year ago.² This shift in confidence has also led to a significant gap in trust between citizens and MPs and the parliament as an institution. Many factors have contributed to this generalized sense of frustration with parliament:

- Respondents do not feel any change or improvement in their personal situation – in fact, many have seen their personal situation deteriorate. For many participants, their personal wellbeing is the barometer against which they judge their elected officials.
- Parliament is seen to be passing laws, but many respondents feel no actions are taken afterwards. As mentioned previously, for most respondents, the parliament and the government are indistinguishable.
- There is a sense that the laws MPs pass and the efforts they undertake have nothing to do with citizen priorities or with what is important for Tunisia as a whole.
- Some respondents expressed disenchantment over the level of MP absenteeism.
- There is a sense that MPs are more focused on serving their own personal, familial, and party interests rather than representing the citizens who elected them.

² See [“Five Years After the Revolution: Tunisian Citizens Express Their Views,”](#) National Democratic Institute, April 1, 2016.

*“It takes years to pass laws. They keep drafts in drawers until they decide to vote. They said they would increase taxes for doctors and lawyers and make them fair. They did not because they were pressured.”
(Female, Kasserine, 31, Teacher)*

“MPs do not represent people; they do not talk to their constituents. MPs do not represent constituents, but their professions. We have seen how lawyer and doctor MPs defended their professions for example. They care about their personal interests.” (Male, Kasserine, 36, Businessman)

“They are there to serve their own interests. They could not care less about us.” (Male, Tunis, 52, Civil Servant)

“Why don’t they have a box receiving complaints and suggestions from people? They are supposed to represent constituents. How can they represent us if we cannot even reach out to them? Whenever they talk about a draft law everyone wants to talk. Why don’t they discuss what they actually know? For instance, I worked in different schools. I can talk about that. The parliament should work like that: only specialists should explain their opinion. There is no methodology in their work.” (Female, Tunis, 48, High School Supervisor)

Although largely negative, feedback suggests that respondents are engaged with their political surroundings and happenings. Such engagement is not unanimous, nor is it necessarily very meaningful for some respondents. Nonetheless, a good number of them seem to have some sort of opinion, albeit a misinformed one at times, on their parliament and many affirmed they keep up with parliamentary news through mass media channels such as television, radio, and newspapers. A few participants in each session mentioned that they have either stopped following “politics” or that they no longer follow related news as much as they used to because of their growing disenchantment with and lack of trust in elected officials.

“I cannot judge. I am not an expert to judge their work. What I care about are health care, housing, economy.” (Male, Tunis, 62, Engineer)

A noticeable trust gap has emerged; many respondents expressed an increasingly keen interest in following the actions of their MP, perhaps in response. Considering that most participants do not believe parliament has been addressing citizen needs or meeting their expectations, this increased desire to keep up with the goings-on of the ARP is reasonable.

When specifically asked how they feel MPs should keep them informed of what is happening in parliament, results are very consistent with what was heard in the last wave of focus groups. Respondents insist that greater direct contact and interaction with

citizens should be a priority for MPs. In every session, respondents insisted that MPs were very engaged and visible during the election campaign but that afterwards, they became distant and inaccessible. While they view direct engagement by MPs as ideal, some respondents do not think that updates and local contact need necessarily or always be done by their elected official – it was suggested that a “local representative” be identified in each constituency to provide updates on a regular basis.

- Awareness of events or meetings organized by MPs was very low. In the rare instance where a participant was aware of such a meeting, he or she typically explained that the MP “came and went” and that there were no meaningful outcomes from the meeting.

“We do not have any meetings or town halls here. We want to see ministers visit. We cannot even meet the governor, here. They are supposed to listen to their constituents.” (Female, Gabès, 38, Homemaker)

“They need to be represented. MPs are from the region and know the issues. They knew how to talk to people during campaign and whom to target to influence as many as possible. How come they forgot it right now?” (Female, Siliana, 45, Anesthetist)

Respondents are also interested in greater use of mass media channels to keep them informed, including coverage on television, radio and in newspapers. Some specific suggestions here included the following:

- Consistently providing parliamentary updates during news segments on television;
- Having a dedicated parliamentary channel on television;
- Have a dedicated daily time slot on a specific channel providing an overview of what happened in parliament that day or recently.

“Some information does not make it to social media. I want to feel a tangible change when I go to the market.” (Male, Tunis, 37, Restaurant Industry)

What did surface in a few sessions was the importance of simplifying parliamentary deliberations, decisions and issues in such a way “for the average citizen” to understand. Some admitted that they do not understand what is happening when they watch part of a parliamentary session or are unfamiliar with the parliamentary debate process and that they would appreciate a simple summary targeted to the average Tunisian.

“Laws need to be explained in plain Tunisian dialect. My mother is an old lady that likes to follow but does not understand classical Arabic. They need to speak simple clear language.” (Female, Tunis, 48, High School Supervisor)

Views of Parliament's Roles

Respondents were specifically prompted to discuss how well their parliament is fulfilling its three key roles. The following feedback was heard on each key role:

Passing Laws	Most respondents do not believe that parliament is fulfilling its role of passing laws. Upon explaining their assessment, what is revealed is that respondents do realize it is in fact passing laws; however, they do not believe that it is passing the right laws, and therefore it gets a failing grade on this specific role. If participants saw their parliament focused on priorities like employment, corruption or inflation, they would be more likely to give a positive score on this front.
Government Oversight	Respondents do not believe the parliament is fulfilling its role of government oversight although there is potentially some confusion over what this role really involves. Nonetheless, some participants seemed to understand it and their feedback points to three key perceptions of how well parliament is fulfilling this role: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respondents are not seeing any tangible results or improvement in the country's economic or social situation, so by extension their government is not seen as doing its job, from which respondents conclude that there is no parliamentary oversight.• Among the few who seemed aware of ministers being questioned by parliament, the practice was considered ineffectual, "toothless" and generally insincere.• A few actually doubt that MPs will be critical of government since by doing so, they would be indirectly criticizing themselves, as they are the ones who approve the ministers.
Representing the People	Finally, respondents do not believe the parliament is representing the people. Although, in a very conceptual sense, members of parliament are representing their constituents in the ARP, respondents do not believe that their MPs are representing the interests of the people. Participants were particularly vocal and critical of how poorly they believe they are being represented by their elected officials, a sentiment that is amplified by the lack of contact or presence by their MPs in their constituencies and by an increasingly entrenched belief that their MPs are using their positions for their own or their parties' purposes.

"The parliament does not reflect expectations of people. There is a lot of political back and forth in the parliament. They represent parties instead of constituents. We care about investment and development and the parliament does not even discuss this! They are always absent. Quite often sessions are adjourned because the quorum is not reached." (Female, Kasserine, 37, unemployed)

Citizen Legislative Priorities

In this round of research, NDI sought to gauge participants' legislative priorities. Respondents were presented with the following list of 12 draft laws that parliament will discuss during the next parliamentary year:

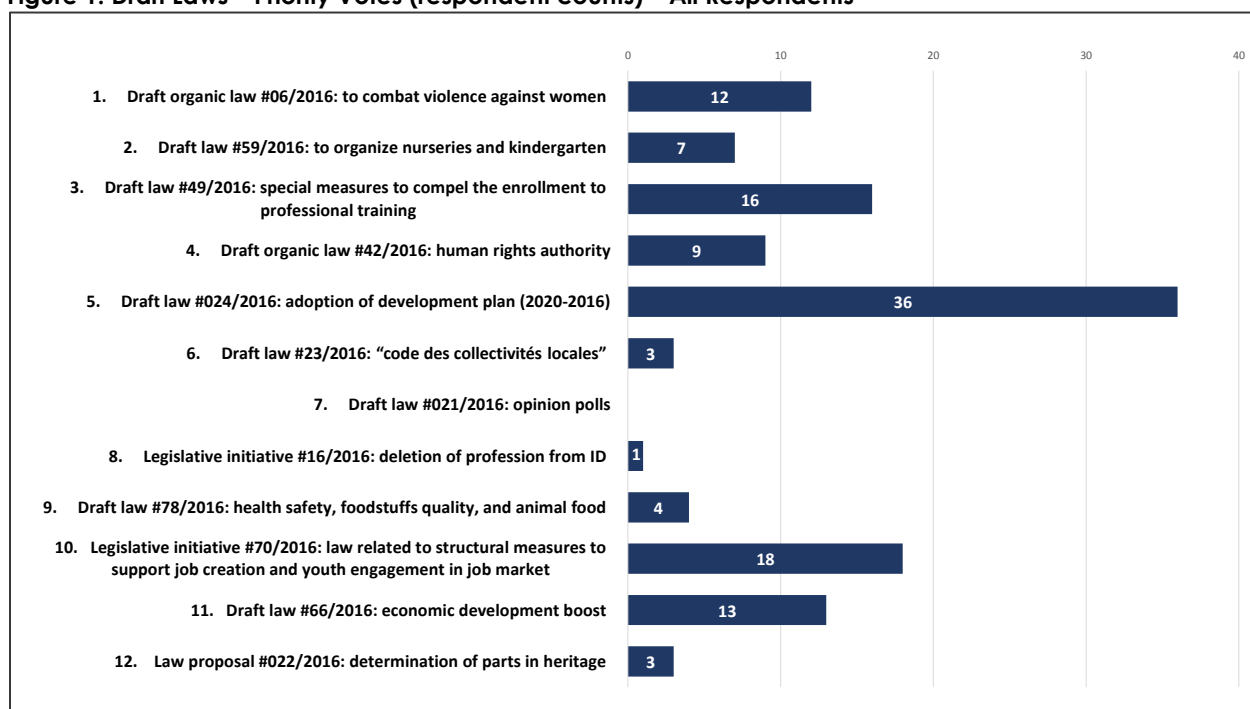
DRAFT LAW	
1.	Draft organic law number 06/2016 related to combatting violence against women: aims to set appropriate mechanisms to eliminate all forms of violence against women to realize equality, protection and assistance for victims, and punishment of those found guilty.
2.	Draft law number 59/2016 related to organizing nurseries and kindergartens: to counter all kindergarten and nurseries working illegally and to organize this sector by designating minimum levels necessary for the capable protection and care of children.
3.	Draft law number 49/2016 related to implementing special measures to compel enrollment to professional training: to counter the phenomenon of early dropout from education and to reintegrate and train dropouts.
4.	Draft organic law number 42/2016 related to human rights authority: to promote human rights and freedoms and to oversee to what extent they are respected.
5.	Draft law number 024/2016 related to the adoption of development plan (2020-2016): a new development system aimed to boost the economic cycle, development in regions, employment, and good governance and to combat corruption.
6.	Draft law number 23/2016 related to “Code des collectivités locales”: to organize the work of municipalities, and to give them prerogatives to respond to the needs of their residents as they relate to infrastructure, cleanliness, sewage, etc.
7.	Draft law number 021/2016 related to opinion polls: to organize the surveys and statistics conducted during a certain period to gauge opinions and choices of citizens in politics and percentages of media outlets follow up.
8.	Legislative initiative number 16/2016: related to the deletion of profession from ID cards.
9.	Draft law number 78/2016 related to health safety, foodstuffs quality, and animal food: to guarantee the safety, the health and the quality of nutritional foods and animal feed and to prevent unhealthy foods.
10.	Legislative initiative number 70/2016 related to adoption of the law related to structural measures to support job creation and youth engagement in job market: to facilitate the process of youth engagement in the job market.
11.	Draft law number 66/2016 related to economic development boost: this draft law aims to create specific procedures to encourage and facilitate investment to promote economic development.
12.	Law proposal number 022/2016 related to determination of parts in inheritance: to consecrate equality between men and women in inheritance.

Based on this information, respondents were asked to select one draft law they believe should be the priority for the parliament and to explain their reasoning. The results from this exercise are shown on the following pages. The numbers in the graphs are “vote counts” and do not represent percentages. It should also be noted that **the various graphs are not intended to convey statistically valid research results since they are only based on 123 focus group participants. They are for directional purposes only.**

Results from this exercise reveal the following:

- A few respondents volunteered that ALL the laws are important and that it was challenging to prioritize one over the other.
- In the end, respondents focused on the draft laws that most directly address the priorities that they had emphasized throughout the discussion: the economy and corruption. As such, the draft law related to development (#5) was the most commonly selected priority (selected by 36 respondents). Not only were participants attracted to the fact that this draft law aligns with their own priorities, it also refers to a plan, which to many suggests forward thinking and some semblance of a roadmap.
- The next most popular laws were those that focus on youth employment (#3 and #10).
- Among the various draft laws presented to respondents, the one that addresses inheritance (listed as #12) proved fairly contentious as many participants, including some women, believed that the Koran already addresses this issue and that parliament does not need to revisit it.

Figure 1: Draft Laws – Priority Votes (respondent counts) – All Respondents



"If the economy improves, crimes and problems will decrease." (Male, Tunis, 38, Financial Manager)

Figure 2: Draft Laws – Priority Votes (respondent counts) – Results by Region

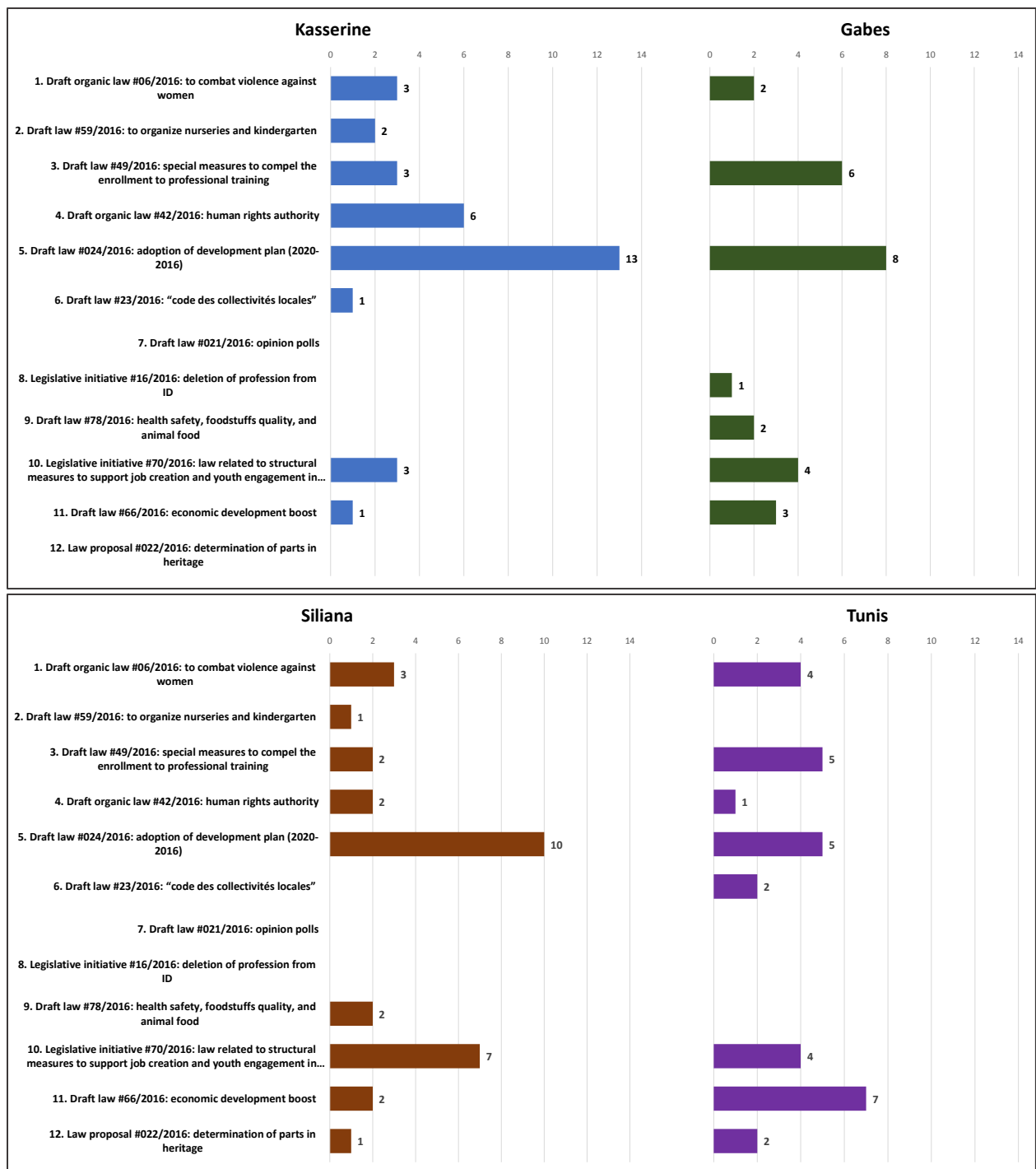
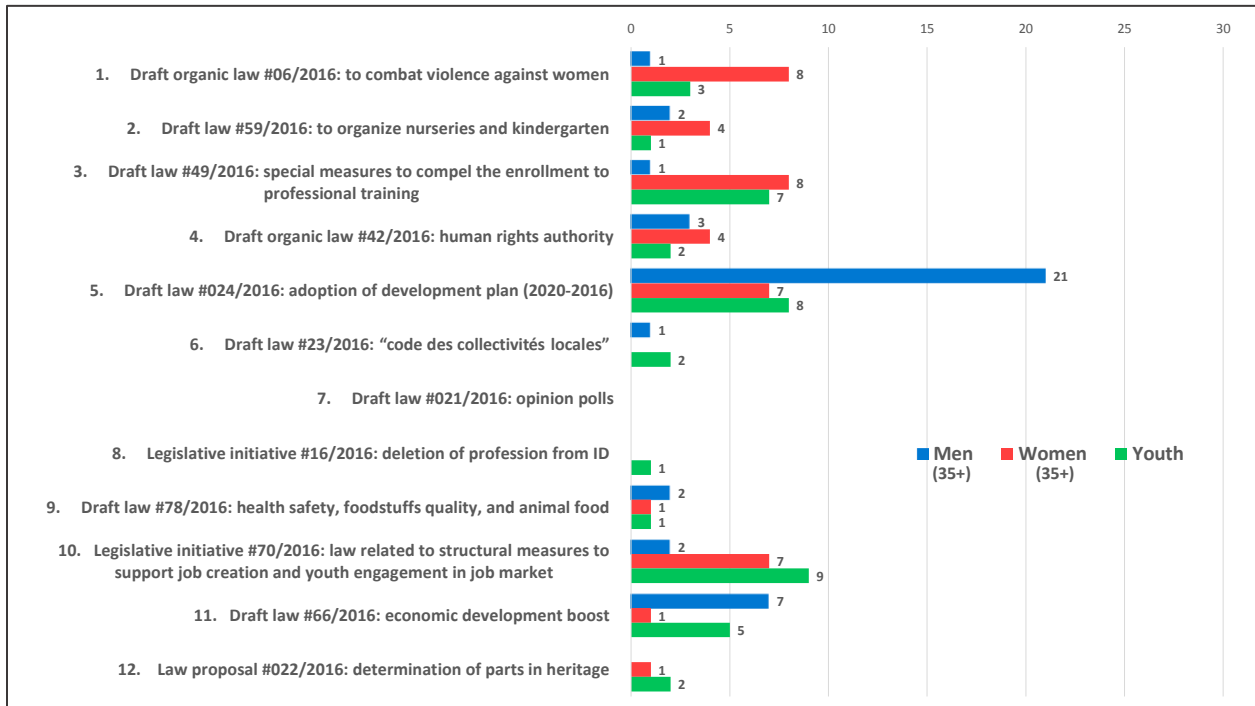
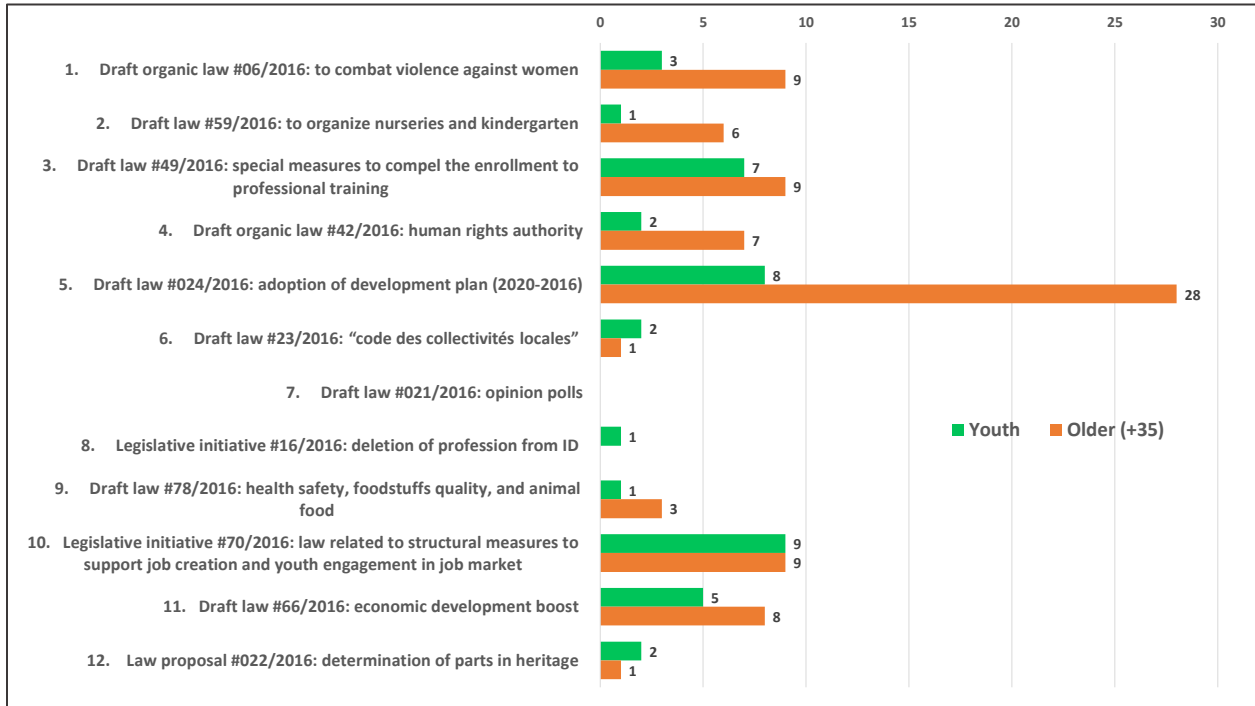


Figure 3: Draft Laws – Priority Votes (respondent counts) – Results by Age and Gender



By focusing on participant demographics, we can notice the following trends:

- The draft law related to human rights (#4 in the list) was particularly popular in Kasserine;
- The draft law related to foodstuffs and animal feed (#9) was only selected as a priority in Gabès and Siliana;
- The draft law that focuses on a five-year development plan to boost the economic cycle, development in regions, employment, good governance and to combat corruption (#5) was especially popular among men at least 35 years old;
- Women at least 35 years old were more likely than their male counterparts and youth respondents to believe that the draft law to combat violence against women (#1) should be a priority;
- Women at least 35 years old and youth were more likely than men at least 35 years old to believe that the priority should be the draft laws related to youth employment (#3 and #10).

The presentation of the list of draft laws allowed the research team to explore a few other important dimensions related to how citizens find out about parliament-related activities and the impact a bit of information can have on public attitudes.

From an awareness and media consumption perspective, discussions revealed that a few respondents in each group claimed they had heard of all the draft laws presented, although more commonly, a few respondents in each group were aware of a few of the draft laws. Laws that seemed to be getting the most media attention were those related to violence against women (#1) and inheritance (#12). Respondents seemed to be finding out about these draft laws mostly through traditional media, especially television, and through Facebook.

“[MPs] seem to be working on the right issues.” (Male, Siliana, 49, Retired)

“Now that I have seen these laws, I feel a bit optimistic.” (Male, Gabès, 61, Doctor)

Just finding out about the draft laws had an impact on participants. Many were pleased to see that the parliament is “doing something” and that it is focused on issues that respondents see as priorities. This sentiment was not shared by all respondents, but the exercise still revealed that a little information can have a meaningful impact on how citizens view their parliament. While some were impressed by, and a few even thankful for, the list, a good number remained at best cautiously optimistic, explaining that in the end what matters to them is execution and action and that the list of draft laws is really “only ink on paper.”

“We need to distinguish between passing and enforcing a law. No one would claim vocational training, employment, child protections...etc. are not good. The problem is all these laws remain on a shelf.”

(Male, Kasserine, 36, Inspector)

“I will not trust any official until I see concrete actions. They all make the same promises regardless of the party. As soon as they ascend to power, they forget about us.” (Male, Siliana, 39, Businessman)

“Theoretically, this is good but I do not think this could be implemented.” (Female, Gabès, 27, Homemaker)

“We have seen no action since 2011, nothing but talks.” (Female, Siliana, 48, Homemaker)

“They need to activate laws, some of which already exist.” (Male, Kasserine, 36, Unemployed)

III. Local Elections, Decentralization and Local Governance

As noted in this report's preface, local elections are Tunisia's next step towards elected, representative governance at all levels. For the first time in their history, Tunisians will democratically elect the municipal councilors whose decisions directly impact their communities. An upcoming decentralization process is expected to grant new prerogatives to the heads of municipalities and the municipal and regional councils that will be elected. The government has drafted legislation that will create a framework for the decentralization process, and it will be submitted to parliament. The “Code des collectivités locales” [Law on local authorities] is expected to grant new prerogatives to heads of municipalities and to municipal and regional councils. An important part of the discussion in each session focused on this decentralization process.

Even though there have been discussions about a decentralization process for many months already in Tunisia, most respondents are not aware of this development and even among those who are, any meaningful and accurate understanding of what the process involves is sparse. As such, it is not surprising that very few can confidently explain how the decentralization process will impact Tunisia, their region, or themselves. Based on what they may have heard, seen or read, respondents seem to *assume* rather than *know* that the process will be beneficial. Feedback revealed that significant efforts are still needed to educate citizens that decentralization will happen, how it will happen, and what it will ultimately mean for them.

“It is the local management by the municipality and local officers. They have more extended powers.” (Female, Gabès, 40, Lawyer)

“Right now the entire country is based on the coastal areas. Under decentralization, the regions will have a chance. This is unlike the current situation where the coastal areas benefit from their positions and wealth and become even richer.” (Female, Tunis, 25, Student)

To enable respondents to have an informed opinion and discussion of decentralization, the moderator provided the following basic explanation of the process: *Decentralization is a government planning process that transfers some of the central government's prerogatives and powers to regional and local jurisdictions.*

Despite hearing this basic definition, respondents were left to decipher what advantages and risks might be associated with decentralization. Given the lack of more information, respondents were inclined to create their own image of what decentralization could entail. The following grid summarizes what respondents believe the advantages will be and what their concerns are:

Advantages	Concerns / Risks
<p>Participants hope that decentralization will lead to outcomes that a centralized system has not been able to generate, especially more employment.</p> <p>There is an expectation that decentralization will involve a greater focus on specific regional needs and regionally-specific measures and initiatives.</p> <p>Because elected officials will live and work in the regions (rather than “disappear” to Tunis), participants believe there will be more accountability and more contact with constituents.</p> <p>The transfer of prerogatives to the regions suggests to many that services will also become decentralized, resulting in faster and closer access to certain services that currently require travel to Tunis or processing in Tunis. Similarly, respondents in Tunis seemed to think that fewer Tunisians in the regions would travel to Tunis to access these services, leading to less congestion in the capital.</p> <p>Decentralization is also expected to reduce regional favoritism and lead to greater equality among the regions.</p>	<p>There are concerns that corruption will dominate the decentralization process and will influence the outcomes.</p> <p>A few believe that regions might compete with each other through activities like resource hoarding.</p> <p>There is a concern that regions may achieve too much independence and that national cohesiveness and sentiment might be compromised.</p> <p>Some are concerned that there may not be sufficiently competent or experienced individuals in the regions to assume the new responsibilities that they will be assigned.</p> <p>A few also raised the prospect for heightened corruption, as elected officials would be closer to people, making it easier to bribe them.</p>

“People no longer have to wait for approval/authorization from the national level.” (Male, Siliana, 45, Civil Servant)

“Authorities will be closer to people via direct representation.” (Male, Siliana, 25, Host)

“The question is, are we ready? I do not think our people here are aware enough regarding this type of government.” (Male, Siliana, 27, Unemployed)

Voting Intentions

Even though respondents were not familiar with the decentralization process, the majority expressed intent to vote in the local elections. Certainly more are intending to vote than are familiar with the process – and for a good number, those intentions were based exclusively on the little bit of information they obtained during the focus group. Motivations and barriers to voting were then explored. These tended to be fairly consistent across demographic and geographic segments. Among those who indicated they would not vote, there are a good number who are really only putting their vote “on hold” until they obtain more information about the process and candidates. In other words, they are not non-voters; they are just “wait and see” or undecided voters.

“I am so happy and satisfied I have not voted in the past elections. I want to participate in elections, but I do not trust any party/person.” (Female, Gabès, 35, Homemaker)

The most common motivations and barriers are summarized in the following chart:

Motivations to Voting	Barriers to Voting
<p>Many see it as their right.</p> <p>Many see it as their duty.</p> <p>Some feel that if they don't vote, someone they do not like may get elected.</p> <p>Some believe that if they don't vote, they forego their right to complain and to hold elected officials accountable.</p> <p>A few argue that the revolution occurred so that they could have the benefit of choosing their elected officials and that they should exercise that right.</p> <p>A few also recognize the relevance and importance of regional and municipal elections in improving their lives and moving</p>	<p>The biggest barrier is that respondents do not trust anyone.</p> <p>Some complain that they have voted in past elections and that nothing has changed; therefore, they do not believe it will make a difference if they vote in another election.</p> <p>A few don't know who they would vote for but note that perhaps by seeing the list of candidates, they could be persuaded to vote.</p> <p>A select few do not believe their vote will make a difference – that it is “only one vote”.</p> <p>A few specified that if the ballot is just a list of parties rather than a list of actual candidates, they are not likely to vote.</p>

Tunisia forward democratically.	
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“Voting is a right, a proof I exist.” (Female, Siliana, 46, Teacher)

“As for voting, you should all vote. It is not about parties, it is about you and your rights as citizens. You must pressure to make sure you vote for people and not for parties. You mustn’t abstain from participating.” (Male, Gabès, 60, Retired)

“I know my vote will not change a thing. It did not change a thing in the previous elections.” (Female, Tunis, 32, Middle Manager)

Updating Registration Address

In the new elections law, citizens wishing to register to vote or to update their existing voter registration information must present documentation verifying their address. In cases where the address listed on an individual’s national identity card does not match their current address, a residency certificate or a utility bill with the person’s name and address would suffice for registration.

Generally, the proposed measure seems reasonable and acceptable to respondents. They generally accept that a citizen should only be allowed to vote for the officials in the municipality and region where they live. This is not to say that the measure will be easily executed among voters. In fact, one of the biggest challenges is awareness, as very few participants were aware of the new measure. To exacerbate the challenges around voter education in general, a variety of specific barriers related to the registration measure may hinder voter turnout. Examples of these barriers include:

- Some Tunisians live in one region but work in another, making it difficult for them to vote if they happen to be working that day;
- A few Tunisians indicated they are “nomad” renters – in other words, they are constantly changing physical address for whatever reason;
- Some are temporarily living in a region other than the one where their permanent home is located;
- Some claimed that the mere cost, administrative burden, and time associated with updating their ID card or obtaining a residency certificate is dissuasive;
- Some in the groups mentioned they know people who do not possess an ID card or other documentation and doubt that they will get one in order to vote in the upcoming elections.

“I am not even sure people will turn out to vote with such measures.” (Male, Tunis, 45, Doctor)

Priorities for Municipal Councils

Respondents were invited to propose priorities for municipal councils, they are elected and seated. In the absence of a law assigning specific prerogatives to regions and municipalities, respondents were completely free to suggest any area they saw fit. Above everything else, respondents tended to mention employment and job creation as the priority for these councils. Other suggestions included:

- Garbage and general cleanliness, which was especially noted in Gabès;
- Measures to combat corruption;
- Transportation, which typically meant better roads in the regions and less congestion and more taxis in Tunis;
- Health care, including better service in general, and access to more clinics in the regions;
- Infrastructure, which often referred to better roads, but also included in some regions investment in street lighting, traffic lights, better and more affordable public utilities like water and electricity, and recreational and green spaces.

Kasserine	Gabès
<p>Most common priorities noted included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate the economy and combat poverty by creating projects and economic development in general • Improve infrastructure, especially roads, but also: spaces for culture and sports, family parks, gardens, traffic lights • Improve affordability and quality of utilities (water and electricity) • Combat corruption and provide general oversight of law enforcement and rules, especially in public administration and construction • Improve cleanliness and improve the environment, which includes garbage collection <p>Other secondary priorities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better conditions for temporary / seasonal work • Improving relations with citizens • Better access to and quality of local health clinics • Support for citizens with special needs 	<p>Most common priorities noted included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve cleanliness and pollution • Improve infrastructure, especially roads, but also green spaces and street lighting • Address economic development and employment, especially for youth <p>Other secondary priorities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing in culture • Better access to and quality of local health clinics

Siliiana	Tunis
<p>Most common priorities noted included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Address economic development and employment, especially for youth; some reference to creating industries that better support or align to the region's strength in agriculture ● Focus on youth in general ● Improved cleanliness and pollution <p>Other secondary priorities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved infrastructure, especially roads, but also the quality of municipal buildings ● Better access to and quality of local health clinics 	<p>Most common priorities noted included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Address economic development and employment ● Focus on youth in general ● Improve cleanliness, pollution and garbage collection ● Improve infrastructure, especially roads, but also improve landscapes, and street lighting <p>Other secondary priorities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved quality of housing ● More taxis ● Public security (to feel safe walking in the streets at night) ● Combating corruption in public administration ● Organized markets ● Improved education to better align with job market

Engagement and Outreach

In terms of engagement and outreach, many proposed the same tactics and approaches they would like to see from their MPs, which most often involved some form of in-person or direct interaction with the electorate.

Specifically regarding how respondents would like councils to **engage** citizens in the decision making process, participants suggested the following:

- In-person meetings, occurring ideally every month; similarly, “dialogues”, debates, forums, and plenary sessions were suggested;
- Many liked a meeting format similar to how the focus group was conducted;
- Surveys / public opinion research;
- Suggestion boxes;
- Obtaining citizen feedback by working closely with associations and civil society – in fact, feedback along these lines suggests that respondents generally trust these types of organizations, which is noteworthy considering respondents do not seem to trust anyone else;
- Social media, especially Facebook;
- Radio.

“They need to have representatives from all sectors.” (Female, Siliana, 45, Anesthetist)

In terms of being **kept informed**, respondents believe that meetings can also serve this purpose; however, they also recognize that a range of other means and channels could prove effective:

- Developing municipal and regional websites where decisions and actions are listed and described;
- Using mass media, especially radio and television;
- SMS / text messages;
- Facebook;
- Distributing pamphlets to households and supermarkets;
- Driving through the streets and using a megaphone to announce decisions and developments;
- Designating representatives who would walk through neighborhoods or do door-to-door canvassing to inform citizens;
- Posters in the streets;
- Using civil society websites.

IV. Economy

The economy is a topic that all respondents were quite eager to discuss. As has been noted earlier in this report, the dire state of their economy is one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, participants feel their country is headed in the wrong direction. They have clearly indicated that economic development should be one of the top priorities for national, regional and municipal governments moving forward.

There is a general appreciation for the fact that economic success is one of the most important cornerstones for citizens. Certain logic was apparent in how respondents explained the importance of the economy – they appreciate that an improved economy has a significant domino effect on nearly every other aspect of socio-economic life. For instance, if someone is gainfully employed, then they are less likely to depend on or participate in corruption, they are in a better position to afford goods and services, their overall quality of life improves, their morale improves, etc.

The gravity of the situation seems severe, irrespective of how respondents were asked to consider their economic situation. There was widespread agreement on the following:

- The Tunisian economy overall is at best “weak” or “fragile” and is most commonly

considered “very weak,” “catastrophic” or “deteriorated.”

- The economic situation in Tunisia has gotten worse compared to a year ago.

“The informal economy is going up at the expense of the formal.” (Female, Siliana, 33, Employed)

“Traffickers and terrorists have ruined the economy.” (Male, Siliana, 33, Technician)

“Everything is getting more expensive.” (Female, Siliana, 42, Homemaker)

“10 dinars is not enough to buy enough food anymore.” (Female, Siliana, 54, Businesswoman)

- Many feel that their own region is also faring worse economically compared to a year ago.
- However, respondents have mixed feelings when it comes to comparing their region to others in Tunisia. Participants in interior regions generally agreed that their regions are faring worse than Tunis or coastal regions, but many would also explain that their region is certainly not the worst off in the country. A few participants in Tunis seemed fairly disconnected from what is happening in other regions – one respondent even claimed that “there is no poverty in Tunisia.”

“It is a very different mindset there. There is a lot of wealth generated in Gabès. The issue is we have no access to it. The mindset needs to change. You cannot compare Gabès to Tunis. Gabès makes about 1.050 billion a year; if they give us half that money, Gabès will turn into a paradise.” (Female, Gabès, 34, CSO Activist)

“All people invest here. Investors come from different regions to invest here: better transportation and more HR.” (Male, Tunis, 48, Civil Servant)

Realizing that they are not the worst off in the country is hardly a satisfactory consolation prize. In the end, they want their own economic situation to improve and they want decision makers to turn their attention to strategies and investments that will enable their region to succeed, irrespective of what is happening in other regions.

When asked to describe their assessment of the economic situation of the country, respondents essentially focus on two specific performance metrics: employment and inflation. While concerns with both of these economic dimensions were common in each group, some participants, especially women, only focused on inflation and how it is making it increasingly difficult for them to purchase what they used to or what they need at the grocery store and in the markets. For them, weakened purchasing power is an indication of a weakened economy. A few participants also pointed to an increase in national debt and a weakened dinar as indicators of a struggling economy, although these dimensions were very rarely raised.

Unemployment

Respondents believe a number of factors are contributing to unemployment. The most common reason is the basic lack of “projects” and factories. Participants were divided on whether this investment should come from the public sector or whether the private sector should be either more involved or incentivized.

“Recruitment in Siliana is based on political affiliation; it is no longer about diplomas and qualifications. One of my students at the paramedic school now works as a senior officer at the state property department.” (Female, Siliana, 45, Anesthetist)

“Everybody talks about temporary work contracts in Siliana. This is a very fragile situation. It is not the solution.” (Male, Siliana, 33, Technician)

Barriers to Entrepreneurship

Respondents explained that entrepreneurship and the launch of small and medium-sized enterprises are also a particular challenge in Tunisia. Many argued that it is fairly difficult to start a project and that measures need to be taken to streamline and simplify the process. The issues largely revolve around access to financing and training. More specifically:

- The administrative burden for the applicant is significant when applying for financing.
- The co-signee requirement is too stringent.
- Lenders do not give borrowers enough time before requiring installments on the loan – some respondents believe a grace period should be granted to give the borrower enough time to start his or her business.
- The amounts to which borrowers have access are too small.
- Borrowers should have access to some training so that they know how to start and run a small business, manage finances, etc., and should receive guidance around what will be required of them when they apply for financing.
- Some would like to see dedicated kiosks (“*guichet unique*”) to help streamline access to information and funding for projects.
- A few suggested that lenders do not adequately study the projects they fund and that funding is wasted on futile projects, while projects with strong potential go unfunded because of a lack of capital.
- There was also strong suspicion of corruption and favoritism in the funding sector

whereby rich applicants receive preferential treatment for funding and lending agents are influenced by bribes.

“Whenever you talk to an officer, they tell you there is no employment. You know what; I do not need to be employed. Give me a loan and I will start my project.” (Male, Siliana, 39, Businessman)

“The state is giving incentives, but they are misused by people. They take the loan and invest it in other projects. You can be funded via different mechanisms.” (Female, Siliana, 33, Employed)

Corruption and Regional Favoritism

Respondents listed other factors that they believe are contributing to the country's economic struggles. Regional favoritism was regularly raised in the three regions outside of Tunis – by this they meant that both public and private investments are attracted to Tunis and to coastal regions, much to the detriment of interior zones. Although they can understand the appeal of investing in those zones, they certainly do not believe that there are no profitable opportunities further inland. In addition to the suspected corruption at lending institutions, respondents also believe that corruption is responsible for underemployment and “wrongful” employment. Respondents believe that “incompetent” or less competent individuals are gaining access to certain jobs and positions through outright nepotism, favoritism and corruption, resulting in frustrating experiences for those who participate in national competitions, who believe they have more education or experience, and who are not getting the jobs they believe they deserve.

There were also some concerns around the education system. In particular, some are feeling that the education system is not aligned with the job market and that the curriculum and training need to be adjusted to prepare youth for the job market of today and tomorrow.

“Education. So many people who are graduates have no background whatsoever. They would do whatever it takes to succeed that year.” (Male, Tunis, 31, Steward)

Finally, some of the older respondents believe that youth unemployment is partly attributable to youth not willing to take certain kinds of jobs. Adults believe that the younger generation feels entitled to better jobs and that they will wait for them, rather than accept a lower-paying job or a job outside their preferred field, because they are either too proud or they feel their education warrants it.

Parallel Economy

Respondents seemed to agree that the parallel economy has more disadvantages than advantages. It is largely seen as dangerous and risky for those working in it, it harms legitimate commerce, it short-changes the state in taxes, and it has no quality control mechanisms. Respondents explain that there are three main forces supporting the parallel economy: unemployment, inflation and corruption.



In order to reduce or weaken the parallel economy, respondents believe the country simply needs to address the root causes, especially unemployment. A few also proposed integrating the parallel economy into the legitimate economy by creating foreign trade zones (*zones franches*).

“Traffickers are more powerful than the state.” (Female, Gabès, 55, Homemaker)

“It is not an issue in Kasserine. It creates job opportunities for people.” (Male, Kasserine, 30, Trader)

“You know, where is the government? Where are the customs? They let the goods in and out. They do not care if it’s tomatoes or drugs. You pay a customs officer a thousand dinars and he will let you through.” (Female, Kasserine, 51, Retired)

V. Corruption

The general sentiment that best summarized how Tunisians felt about corruption last summer could read this way: There is a moral crisis in Tunisia! Few would disagree that the situation has changed and many seem to feel that corruption is in fact getting worse.

“I see and hear corrupt practices every day. I cannot do a thing about it.” (Male, Gabès, 41, Technician)

“Psychologically, you feel insulted when you are not treated fairly.” (Female, Gabès, 35, Unemployed)

The extent to which corruption impacts participants' day-to-day lives cannot be ignored – many believe that corruption is present in all sectors. Compared to the previous round of focus groups, respondents seemed less focused on corruption in the police. They were, however, more likely than before to refer to corruption in health care, education, the judiciary, and customs. Notwithstanding the focus on health care and education, participants continued to complain about corruption in public administration in general and in government and in parliament.

“We need a new revolution that will take down the public sector.” (Male, Tunis, 38, Employed)

Compared to previous rounds of research, participants were more concerned with the impact of corruption on employment. The greatest concern here was the extent to which favoritism, nepotism and bribes influence who is getting hired. Some go so far as to believe that these corrupt practices have resulted in unqualified individuals filling positions, in mistrust in certain hiring practices (e.g. national competitions), and in frustration among those who have invested time and money in education and training only to be overlooked for a position that they feel went to someone much less qualified.

Participants in a few sessions also emphasized that corruption is no longer just about offering or taking bribes – it is taking on various shapes and forms although financial bribes still seem to be the most common. Corruption might involve such things as buying a coffee or a pack of cigarettes for a clerk to expedite paperwork, employment favoritism and nepotism, political support, sexual favors, and preferential treatment for temporary work arrangements.

As dejected as respondents feel about corruption around them, they also admit that they are active participants in the process. Although nobody admitted to taking a bribe, many admitted to having no choice but to pay bribes for one reason or another; a few admitted that they benefited “from connections” to obtain a job or a promotion.

Respondents were asked what role they believe civil society and citizens could play to help combat corruption. While many had various suggestions, it is noteworthy that some have assumed a defeatist perspective, completely convinced that corruption is so ingrained in Tunisian society and attitudes that it could never be completely eliminated. Similarly, a few respondents explained that the current generation is beyond redemption and that the only hope lies in the next generation of Tunisians who need to be raised differently so that they have a different attitude towards corruption. Regarding civil society specifically, this seems to be one group of organizations in which most respondents have some degree of trust. When specifically asked if civil society has a role to play in combatting corruption, none of the respondents expressed concern with that sector's integrity. By and large, participants see civil society organizations as credible and trusted stakeholders who do have a role to play in this area.

"[Corruption occurs] because people are afraid of reporting it." (Female, Gabès, 40, Lawyer)

"The word Tunisian no longer means anything. We have no values. You actually have not spoken about a very important thing in this regard. Where are the billions borrowed by the state? Where are the billions as revenues? How come we never know where they are being spent? This is why I do not trust the state." (Female, Gabès 35, Homemaker)

Some of respondents' ideas are summarized below:

What can civil society do to combat corruption?	What can citizens do to combat corruption?
<p>They can be more active in terms of raising awareness and educating citizens about corruption, their rights, and strategies they can consider to combat corruption around them.</p> <p>They can play an oversight role.</p> <p>They can help protect whistleblowers or create mechanisms to encourage whistleblowing.</p> <p>They can help defend or come to the aid of citizens who are adversely affected by corruption.</p>	<p>Citizens need to believe they should take a hard stand and refuse to participate in corruption by paying bribes themselves.</p> <p>Citizens need to denounce corrupt people.</p> <p>Citizens need to educate the next generation and hopefully steer them away from the current mentality that has seen corruption blossom.</p> <p>Respondents were familiar with various forms of online shaming and believe this needs to be encouraged.</p>

“I said it is hard to change mindsets. It is hard to change the way I and / or my generation think. There is a need to work on youth.” (Male, Gabès, 60, Retired)

“The state must fight corruption, not citizens. If you do not provide employment, you cannot ask people not to pay bribes to be hired.” (Male, Tunis, 25, Student)

“CSOs must raise awareness, and citizens must refuse to take part.” (Male, Tunis, 45, Doctor)

Participants raised a variety of concerns in terms of how corruption could impact the upcoming local elections. Some feel that the type of corruption that is influencing how the country is being led at the national level will infiltrate how regions and municipalities will be run. Some are also concerned that the election process itself may become corrupt and that “the wrong” people will be elected – in fact, a few do not plan to vote in the local elections out of complete distrust in the system.

“I think corruption could be decentralized: I think it could move from corruption in one place to so many places.” (Male, Tunis, 25, Student)

Not all respondents were pessimistic, however – some believe that the fact that elected officials will all be from the area, that they will be known to locals, and that they will be regularly working and living in the area (rather than leaving for Tunis), leaves some believing that they will be less likely to succumb to corruption. In other words, the proximity of the process inherently increases its potential for integrity and accountability.

The Return of Foreign Fighters

Each session concluded with a brief discussion about the return of foreign fighters. This was a topic that inspired a full range of perspectives and one on which some respondents, especially those who are inclined to believe that foreign fighters should face severe consequences when they return, became fairly animated and passionate.

When considering the range of opinions provided, most respondents are concerned with the return of foreign fighters and most would probably agree that the risks of their return outweigh the benefits. When asked to take a position of stricter punishment (e.g. imprisonment) versus one involving reintegration into society, most would prefer a stricter approach.

One of the more popular strategies involved a combination of both approaches whereby all foreign fighters would be immediately imprisoned and go through a trial. Those found guilty of crimes would receive a punishment commensurate with their crime, while those exonerated would be appropriately counseled and trained (while still in prison) and possibly reintegrated into society. The more vocal respondents in the sessions tended to favor a stricter treatment of foreign fighters – in their opinion, these individuals are terrorists and should be treated accordingly. It is possible that the passion expressed by the more vocal respondents may have dissuaded those in favor of a more reintegration-oriented approach from voicing their opinions. Participants in this latter group, a minority in most sessions, were more open to the possibility that some foreign fighters were “victims,” that some were poor and uneducated, and that with some support, coaching and opportunities for work, they could be reintegrated into society.

“Prison is not a punishment. We do not have integration centers. We lack experts who can de-radicalize them.” (Male, Siliana, 33, Technician)

“They will be back. We do not have a choice. The state must be ready to deal with them. Some of them are victims, but they could end up hurting us and our children. The state must build prisons that can accommodate these types of people.” (Female, Siliana, 46, Teacher)

“These are people who gave up on Tunisia. They lived for years in bloodshed. They are not Tunisians.” (Female, Tunis, 55, Homemaker)

“They are criminals; they cannot lead an ordinary life like us. I know some of them might have been victims. Some of them were told they would fight Israel. They were fooled. In all cases, they fought and killed. Killers must be executed. They are always high on drugs. They would kill their own mothers. They must be executed.” (Female, Tunis, 53, Civil Servant)

“Before trying them, we need to know who sent them there. The intelligence services were really good under Ben Ali. One and only one party has said we need to forgive them, and we know why. It also hurts our reputation across the world.” (Male, Tunis, 46, Management)

“They are our children. Many of them have been misled. Some are poor and were lured with money. I think the state also should have played a role in mentoring them and raising their awareness. They should be put in a special kind of jail with psychiatric support to see if they are victims or not.” (Female, Gabès, 37, Teacher)

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- **123 total respondents**
- from Tunis, Kasserine, Gabès, Siliana
- **Up to 12 respondents** per group
- **Diversity** of ages, professions and neighborhoods within each group

Gender	Count
Female	60
Male	63
Age	Count
25-34	42
+35	81
Profession	Count
Employed	78
Unemployed	19
Retired	9
Homemaker	13
Student	4
Education	Count
University	64
Secondary	31
Primary	23
None	5