

# REVOLUTION TO REFORM: CITIZEN EXPECTATIONS ON THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE TUNISIAN UPRISING

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA  
Conducted December 7 - 17, 2011

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## **NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

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

## PREFACE

The nationwide protest movement that led to the overthrow of the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 was the first of its kind in the Arab world. Over the course of the following year, political parties and civil society organizations took on new roles in Tunisia's more open political arena. Elections conducted on October 23, 2011 for a national constituent assembly (NCA) marked a historic milestone in this transition. Newly elected political leaders negotiated a power-sharing agreement within the new body and appointed a transition government to serve for the next year as the NCA drafts Tunisia's new constitution.

This round of focus group research took place in December 2011. The findings show that the October 23 elections were a cathartic experience for Tunisians, who for the first time in their lives were able to express freely their choice for political leadership. While reactions to the election results vary widely, there is broad recognition that Tunisia has passed an important political landmark. Participation in the elections reinforced citizens' commitment to the goals of the revolution and to the role they now aspire to play in monitoring the performance of elected leaders as they govern during this phase of the transition and draft the constitution that will shape Tunisia's political future.

**Purpose:** In order to provide political and civic leaders in Tunisia with timely and objective information about citizens' priorities and attitudes toward the political transition, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) has conducted regular qualitative research throughout Tunisia since March 2011<sup>1</sup>. For its fourth round of focus group research, NDI focused on citizen attitudes toward the national constituent assembly elections and its results, as well as expectations for the coming year. Through the study, conducted from December 7 to 17, 2011, citizens took part in 12 focus group discussions in four cities throughout the country to discuss the following topics:

- Reflections on the extent to which the current political transition is fulfilling the perceived goals of the revolution;
- Perceptions about the role of the electoral process in the political transition, including how the elections were administered;
- Attitudes toward newly elected leadership and political participation; and,

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<sup>1</sup> *Voices of a Revolution: Conversations with Tunisia's Youth* (published April 2011), *Imagining the Road Ahead: Citizen Attitudes about Tunisia and the Constituent Assembly Election Period* (published July 2011), *Framing the Future: Citizen Attitudes about Electoral and Constitution Drafting Processes* (published September 2011).

- Expectations in the post-election period for political, social and economic development.

The findings of this study were used to inform Tunisian decision-makers – in political parties and civil society organizations – about citizens' attitudes and opinions. The Institute commissioned EMRHOD Consulting to organize the study in four cities across the country. EMRHOD is a marketing and public opinion research firm based in North Africa, with offices in Tunis and Algiers, and a member of the ESOMAR research group. For NDI, the study represents the fourth in an ongoing series of public opinion research conducted in 2011 to provide analysis on Tunisian citizen attitudes toward the evolving political transition.

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

**Method:** From December 7 to 17, 2011, NDI held 12 focus groups with a total of 118 participants in four cities across Tunisia. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location and role in political events during 2011. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI divided each location into three distinct demographic groups: 1) mixed gender youth (ages 24 – 35), 2) women over age 35, and 3) men over age 35. Each group comprised between nine and 11 participants. The gender breakdown was 51 percent men and 49 percent women. Participants were selected and re-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels and professions.

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

**Group Locations:** The 12 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in four locations throughout Tunisia: Tunis, Gabès, Sousse, Jendouba (see the map in this section). Locations selected for the study were urban or semi-urban areas. In all cases, appropriate venues for focus group discussions were identified to ensure participant privacy and sufficient space for indirect observation by NDI staff.

**Outside Influence:** In all cases, every effort was made to ensure there was no undue influence exerted on the participants in the groups. The focus group guideline was not shared with local authorities prior to the 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



One World Nations Online. January 2012.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores public opinion in Tunisia in mid-December 2011. Based on 12 focus group discussions with 118 Tunisian participants, the report examines Tunisian citizens' attitudes and concerns about progress toward the goals of the revolution, the recent electoral process, and the next phase of Tunisia's political transition, which will include the drafting of a new constitution. As with all NDI public opinion studies, participants were asked about their views on political party and governing institution performance, security, and issues of public concern. A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from participants, can be found in the Principal Findings section of this report. To provide context for the one-year anniversary of the fall of the Ben Ali regime, this report also includes key trends identified over four rounds of qualitative research conducted by NDI throughout 2011.

### I. Reflections on the Revolution

**One year after the beginning of the uprising, Tunisians continue to view dignity – in political, social, and economic terms – as the primary goal of the revolution.** While participants prioritized these goals differently, often depending on their access to economic opportunities, demands for greater political, social and economic dignity have remained consistent since March 2011.

**Participants cite removal of Ben Ali's system of dictatorship – including efforts to end widespread nepotism, enhance freedom of speech and individual choice (through elections), and increase political pluralism – as a key achievement since the revolution.** For many respondents, newfound freedoms made possible by the revolution include joining political parties and exercising their right to vote.

**Participants share mixed views on the extent to which the goals of the revolution have been achieved, with women and youth expressing the most skepticism.** The most frequently mentioned challenge is undoing the legacy of regional favoritism based on geography and proximity to previous political power centers. With some exceptions, notably in Jendouba, respondents primarily place responsibility for addressing this phenomenon with the government and political leaders.

**While political progress is expected to be slow but considered on track, similar patience with economic and social prospects was not present.** The most commonly cited deficits are lack of compensation for the families of those killed during the uprising and a comprehensive job creation program.

## II. National Direction

**Tunisians take great pride in political developments over the past year, and are optimistic about the future.** Participants cite benchmarks such as the past election and the appointment of new transition government officials, and generally credited citizens with the recent progress.

**Political diversity and the presence of a legitimate and articulate 'opposition' are considered newfound strengths not permitted under the previous regime.** Equally important to participants is an emerging emphasis on transparency – from election officials to political leaders to public sector employers – which they viewed as further evidence that things are moving in the right direction.

**Growing unemployment and cost of living are consistently identified as immediate concerns that the new government should address.** Participants from Gabès and Sousse are particularly insistent that they are owed compensation by the government – financial or symbolic – in response to economic hardship suffered since the uprising began.

**The majority of participants who feel that the economy is moving in the wrong direction see the regular recourse to strikes and work stoppages as a major hindrance to economic recovery.** Many participants voice their frustration with strikes throughout the country and branded protestors as self-interested. Strikes are seen to be hurting the country as a whole and not addressing the critical issue of job creation.

**Youth are more likely to express concern about political developments, and feel most affected by the lack of job opportunities.** Many young participants lament that, despite receiving credit for the revolution, they have received no tangible benefits. They feel sidelined by politicians and frustrated that nepotism continues to be a barrier to employment.

## III. Elections and Voter Confidence

**Tunisians were motivated to vote in the October 23 elections based on an overwhelming sense of civic duty and will to contribute to the goals of the revolution.** Citizens, many of them first-time voters, express jubilation about being able to vote freely without fear of retribution. Participants also voice a deep sense of obligation to make a positive contribution, both by expressing their desires for future political direction and countering any attempts to return to the system dominated by the former ruling party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD).

**Confidence in the election administration was high, despite anticipated and observed flaws.** Many participants consider that the elections were well-organized and credit the

High Independent Authority for Elections (ISIE) for their success. Some specifically mention ISIE president Kamel Jendoubi's leadership as a determining factor of their support.

**Some citizens witnessed infractions committed by political parties and, to a lesser extent, election administration officials; however, the violations did not affect their confidence that announced results reflected voter will.** Despite minor infractions, participants see Tunisia's elections as a strong and successful example for other transitioning Arab countries.

**While confident in the administration of the vote, some participants note that political parties used emotional and financial incentives to manipulate voters.** While most participants agreed that Ennahda was expected to take a plurality of seats in the NCA, some critique the party's tactics. The strong showing of the Aridha Chaabia list also concerns citizens, as they claim voter manipulation was prominent and unduly influenced results.

**Voters cite a range of influences on their decisions at the ballot box, including religion, party platform, and regional favoritism.** Regardless of their motivations for selecting a particular party or independent list, citizens are adamant that for the first time, their vote was based on personal conviction, rather than external influences.

## IV. Definitions of Democracy and Citizenship

**Conceptions of democracy have expanded beyond freedom of expression to include individual responsibilities – including voting – and the belief that democracy legitimizes the right of voters to expect their government to work on citizens' behalf.** Citizens view the NCA elections as their first legitimate experience to participate in a democratic process. They have seen their votes translate into representation in the assembly, and expect newly elected leaders to actively place citizens ahead of personal or party interests.

Respondents place emphasis on elections when defining democracy, **though citizens lack clear avenues to support their electoral choices or stay politically engaged between elections.** This reflects both a lack of experience in party politics and a dearth of information and outreach from political parties since elections. While to be expected following an intensive election period, some respondents consider shifting their sense of volunteerism to civil society organizations.

**Women encounter the most difficulty identifying areas to participate politically between elections, and most often express the view that they have turned their rights over to elected officials to make decisions on their behalf.** Additional barriers facing women's participation are negative perceptions expressed by both men and women about the

historic role of the women's movement in Tunisia and their perceived linkages to particular political movements.

**Some participants express skepticism over the goals and actions of civil society organizations; however, there is a nearly unanimous interest in volunteer activities.** Participants are most likely to have positive views of charitable or social development associations.

**In cases where participants see civic associations as a bridge between citizens and government decision-makers, they express great interest advocacy to reform public administration and locally-owned development projects.** Citizens in Jendouba are particularly self-reliant and express interest in developing entrepreneurship programs to encourage home-grown development, which could serve as a positive model for other regions.

## V. Governance

**In all cities, citizens give equal importance to constitution-drafting and job creation for the next year, and consider the NCA responsible for both.**

**Participants display a willingness to be patient with newly elected politicians and note the diversity within the NCA as a step toward democracy.** Participants show high confidence in NCA members' competence to carry out their mandate. They feel that one year is a reasonable amount of time to present a draft of the constitution.

**Participants do not grant leaders similar patience, however, in addressing Tunisia's economic problems.** Job creation and lowering the cost of living are consistently identified as immediate priorities for the government. A vocal minority feel that over the past year, the economy was entirely neglected in favor of political goals.

**Expectations regarding the constitution-drafting process are varied, with strong support for a referendum on a draft constitution.** As procedures for the drafting process have yet to be defined and presented to the public, expectations for the process are mixed.

**Divergent viewpoints persist over the extent to which religion and women's rights should be represented in the constitution .** Respect for religion and the rights of women are consistent among participants; however, the extent to which religious texts or specific provisions on gender should be included in fundamental political documents, such as the constitution, continue to stir public debate.

**Opinions are mixed on the extent to which the NCA should have legislative power.** Those who support a legislative role noted that the NCA is more legitimate than any previous transitional government and that law-drafting is necessary to address key

issues in the coming year. Some participants raise concerns about the competence of NCA members to draft legislation and fear that Ennahda's strength in the assembly would unduly influence potential legislation.

## VI. Political Leadership

**Tunisians view newly elected and appointed political leadership as proof of a formal break with the past, after a year-long transition process.** Though the large number of political parties vying for seats in the NCA intimidated some voters, the resulting composition of the NCA and the imperatives its members have to work toward compromise is seen as a positive and natural progression toward a more democratic culture.

**The majority of voters made their selection based on their perception of parties' or candidates' distance from the RCD, or from governance structures during its reign.** Many participants note that Tunisia is in an experimental period, where citizens are testing political parties. If parties or elected officials do not perform to expected standards, participants often say that they will not receive support in future polls.

**For the first time, Tunisian citizens have high expectations for transparency and responsiveness to constituent needs.** Participants comment on Tunisia's maturing political culture, which increasingly values performance over promises.

Despite expectations that parties will focus on constituent needs, **citizens point with concern to the lack of party outreach since the elections.** Respondents, emboldened by recent democratic experiences, state their expectation for party outreach apace with the frequency experienced during the election period.

## VII. Looking Forward

**Tunisians expect political leaders to immediately address the economic stagnation that has gripped the country since the revolution.** While some economic vulnerabilities pre-date Tunisia's political transition and are influenced by the global economic crisis, participants hold interim government officials responsible for resolving the country's economic crisis, and expect newly elected representatives to develop policies and plans in the next year.

**Participants consistently mention the need for a change in mentality to address the pervasive sense of victimhood that was perpetuated under the Ben Ali regime.** Confronting the legacy of the previous regime and holding individuals accountable are seen as benchmarks for measuring political progress and rebuilding the sense of social unity.

**Safeguarding pluralist, inclusive, accountable decision-making through citizen vigilance is viewed as a political and security imperative.** While the majority of participants prefer to give NCA members time to settle political disagreements that are the natural result of diverse representation following elections, citizens generally link timely political progress to enhanced security.

**Reform of public administration will be required to build more responsive institutions – another key benchmark in determining democratic progress.** Participants specifically list healthcare, education, agricultural production and transport and service industries as areas requiring reform.

## PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

This study is both a continuation of previous research that explored citizens' opinions of the political transition since the revolution in January 2011 and a retrospective on evolving attitudes in the year since the fall of the Ben Ali regime. Taking stock of how Tunisians view their political transition over the past year and their priorities today will help frame expectations for the all-important next phase of the transition, which includes the drafting of a new constitution. To determine the factors likely to influence citizens' assessment of the transition process, NDI conducted 12 focus groups with 118 participants throughout Tunisia in mid-December 2011. The findings, drawn from participants' comments, are below.

### I. Reflections on the Revolution

**One year after the uprising began, Tunisians view freedom of expression and new leadership as evidence that goals of the revolution are being achieved.** Some respondents believe that additional time is needed to fully determine whether the revolution has resulted in a successful transition. Participants express a determination to judge the performance of newly elected and appointed leaders on their commitment to transparency and fighting corruption.

*"One year has passed – we can now express ourselves, youth are slowly becoming more responsible, the security is improving..."* Female, Sousse, 35 years old, factory employee

*"We learn through our mistakes. We are still learning. We have gained many steps so far. One of them is freedom of expression. This is the most important gain."* Male, Tunis, 49 years old, tailor

*"Freedoms are the most important gain– freedom of religion, of dress. We have the right to do as we please, as long as we respect others."* Female, Gabès, 25 years old, unemployed graduate

*"Most importantly, the system has been changed. We can't judge the speed with which things are happening because the new government was just put in place."* Female, Tunis, 66 years old, retired

*"There will be no more injustice and corruption. People currently in positions are well-educated activists, so hopefully things will go toward the better. The people are behind this."* Male, Tunis, 36 years old, unemployed



*“People who hold power should be afraid and work seriously because this generation is not the same as the one before the revolution. I have confidence in them because we are united. Everything is happening in front of our eyes. Everything is on newspapers, nothing can be hidden anymore.”* Female, Tunis, 45 years old, maid

**Views differ, however, on the extent to which all goals have been achieved.**

Respondents who question progress raise concerns about their perception of lack of inclusivity among emerging political leaders, specifically noting the limited positions available for young people.

*“The youth who made the revolution happen were not Islamists. But now the people who are in power are, so they have taken advantage of the revolution. So those who actually made the revolution, the youth, are not in power.”* Male, Tunis, 26 years old, student

*“The goals have only been partially fulfilled. Unemployment is still so high, factories are closing, and the strikes don’t help.”* Female, Sousse, 65 years old, housewife

*“This goes back to the youth who made the revolution. If you see the older generations like myself, we fought through our silence. We had to be patient and live through the oppression for our children. The system has neglected the youth, and this is what made them rebel. There are people who are hypocrites and supported the RCD for the same reason – they had to feed a family; all those factors which led to the revolution.”* Male, Tunis, 49 years old, tailor

*“I see things going slowly. There is a lot of talk, but we don’t know what is happening behind the scenes. Everything is tied to politicians and political parties.”* Male, Tunis, 58 years old, nurse

*“Now we have a temporary government which does nothing but argue for personal purposes. They are ignoring economic problems – this was not what the revolution was about.”* Female, Sousse, 29 years old, unemployed graduate

**Unaddressed economic hardship is also considered a sign of unfulfilled goals.**

Respondents first note high levels of unemployment and the increasing cost of living as examples. In some cases, the lack of foreign direct investment and locally-led development are also considered hindrances to revolutionary goals, which focused in part on attaining economic dignity through greater innovation and productivity.

*"The goals haven't been achieved yet. The revolution happened to bring about democracy and freedoms. That's fine, but the situation of unemployment is still the same."* Male, Jendouba, 28 years old, agriculture laborer

*"What the new president is saying is comforting. Our main problem is that we have high unemployment, once the economy is back on track, things will be better and we can say the revolution was a success."* Female, Tunis, 47 years old, shop employee

*"Those who are asking for an improved financial situation are already employed. We should be thinking more about working on creating employment opportunities for those who are unemployed. Instead people just want more money. I am under the impression that people are taking advantage of the revolution and the goals of the revolution have not been reached."* Male, Gabès, 30 years old, unemployed graduate

*"I see that progress is slow. I want to work, I want to live. I don't need to talk. We have shouted a lot. Now I need to see what is happening. I want concrete changes."* Woman, Tunis, 26 years old, unemployed

## II. National Direction

**Tunisians remain proud of their political accomplishments in the last year and are very hopeful for what the next year will bring.** Participants were generally satisfied with the political progress achieved since Ben Ali's overthrow, including the holding of national elections with a wide range of political choices and whose results were widely accepted as legitimate. Genuine political debate and competition were new concepts to Tunisians, and created some confusion; however this did not detract from the October 2011 elections being referred to most often as an important accomplishment on the road to democracy.

*"The elections went in the right direction. Everyone expressed their opinions as they wanted. That was one of the most important phases. We all chose the party that would represent us and express our opinions."* Female, Tunis, 26 years old, student

*"The election of lists we chose for the NCA, who now have to address an important goal of the revolution – the new constitution – is a good sign. Most members should be there – we know the ones who fooled people and will be watching them."* Male, Sousse, 27 years old, student

*"We now have democracy. There are discussions within the NCA. There are opposition parties. Even the majority parties are now taking into account the opposition's opinions and they are discussing various matters."* Female, Gabès, 29 years old, unemployed

*"Now there is freedom of expression. Bribes used to get things done in the past, but not as much anymore."* Male, Gabès, 35 years old, auditor

Focus group respondents also credit fellow citizens with a heightened awareness of political processes and choices, as well as a newfound sense of responsibility to follow politicians' promises and actions.

*"We want transparency in decision-making. Before the president had all powers – the legislative, judicial and executive. Now there has been a separation of powers. People have developed a better sense of awareness."* Male, Jedouba, 34 years old, taxi driver

*"The people have made a choice and the power is no longer imposed on the people, but rather drawn from them. This is good for the country. Patience!"* Female, Gabès, 42 years old, high school teacher

*"A person who gets to power should think about how they got there and realize they won't be there forever. The meaning of freedom should take into account others' freedoms as well. Power is taken from the will of the people."* Female, Tunis, 26 years old, law student

*"We have a lot of resources – agriculture, industry and tourism. So, I think things will be better in the future if the government focuses on the most urgent priorities."* Female, Gabès, 47 years old, shop employee

**A sizeable minority of respondents remarked that the role of the police, and to a lesser extent the judiciary and broader government, is to ensure public order,** underscoring the concern for security that some respondents continue to voice.

*"The political situation is moving in the right direction. Those who were involved in corruption are being prosecuted. So we are going in the right direction. The judicial system is also a good thing."* Female, Tunis, 26 years old, graduate student

*"What we have gained in the recent period is very important. We have freedom, and we no longer have chaotic arrests on the streets, with hundreds of people taken to police stations for no reason."* Male, Tunis, 49 years old, tailor

*"In the past the police forces were considered the main power, this is no longer the case."* Female, Gabès, 42 years old, high school teacher

The role of the media is seen in a positive light, particularly in terms of televising NCA proceedings and providing regular coverage of assembly sessions.

*"In the past, we never had any idea about who was a minister, but now we can see on TV. The media is showing everything. When you want to transmit your voice, there is always someone to listen. Now you feel like you can speak freely. There is no reason to be afraid."* Female, Sousse, 35 years old, factory worker

*"The press has obtained their freedom to say whatever they want. Now we can speak freely. We are no longer afraid. Even within the NCA members can say whatever they want."* Female, Tunis, 45 years old, shop employee

*"Before the revolution, the members of the parliament were not known to the people. They were like a picture on a wall. Now they are all known. It's true there was a lot of chaos during the last year, but this leads to order at some point."* Male, Tunis, 49 years old, tailor

**Political diversity and the presence of a legitimate and articulate 'opposition' are considered positive attributes of the NCA, especially as dissent was not permitted under the former regime.** Equally important to participants is an emerging emphasis on transparency – from election officials to political leaders to public sector employers – which they view as further evidence that the country is moving in the right direction.

*"There is opposition. As long as we have opposition and people are aware of what is happening, and what policy-makers are doing, things should be ok."* Female, Tunis, 26 years old, law student

*"Every night I watch the NCA and see so many different opinions. That is democracy. Eventually we reach a solution."* Female, Sousse, 35 years old, businesswoman

*"We have to look at the glass as half full. If we look at the conditions of the country since December 17 [2011] and how things progressed – this is the most important thing. Everyone went out together – people from all social and age groups came out during the revolution."* Male, Jendouba, 45 years old, professor

*"We had elections for the NCA. During one of the NCA discussions, many members were disagreeing, but people tried to find a compromise. There*

*are people trying to work for their own interests, but others are trying to do their job, so we have to see the positive. This is thanks to God and secondly to the people. There are many negatives, but also positives. Now we should be positive."* Male, Jendouba, 45 years old, professor

*"There is democracy now; diversity in political parties. This is one step in the right direction. This allows for constructive criticism."* Female, Gabès, 42 years old, high school teacher

**Growing unemployment and cost of living were consistently raised as immediate concerns that the new government should address.** Women in particular are concerned about economic hardship.

*"The cost of living is very high. We are working, but others are not. The cost of living is so high that people who try to buy groceries can't afford anything. The economy has stagnated. The mine region in Gafsa is not working well. The economy will not develop unless people work – we should stop protesting."* Female, Gabès, 40 years old, notary

*"Employing the youth should be a priority of the new government. Poverty has increased over the last 10 years."* Female, Gabès, 47 years old, shop employee

*"I believe the government will solve unemployment. Furthermore, I suggest that people start their own small enterprises. We should help one another to build the society."* Female, Sousse, 35 years old, businesswoman

*"Nothing has changed. People are saying what they want and nothing else. For example, the cost of living is becoming higher and higher. People are not working. Those who had a job are becoming unemployed. Tourism is stagnated; even those who had positions have lost them."* Female, Tunis, 30 years old, employed

*"Things are going backwards. Tourism isn't getting better. Tourists don't want to come because there isn't stability. Without mentioning regions, but there are some regions who rob foreign visitors."* Female, Sousse, 45 years old, nurse

**The majority of participants who feel that the economy is moving in the wrong direction see continuing labor strikes and work stoppages as a major hindrance to economic recovery.**

*“Sit-ins and violence create chaos. Instead of getting rid of unemployment, it’s increasing. It is also increasing fear among people. Unemployment is going up”.* Gabès, Female, 53 years old, unemployed

*“We are unemployed and we didn’t even take part in sit-ins. How can those who already have salaries protest? We would like to see more security. I am afraid to go out with my wife in the middle of the night. Cement prices have gone up. We are the losers in the end. We are the ones to blame for all this – we need to take responsibility. We don’t know how to behave; we don’t understand what revolution is.”* Male, Sousse, 36 years old, factory worker

*“I’ve been going back and forth to get one bottle of gas for three days. Because the workers at the factory are on strike, prices are going up. Obtaining services through contacts hasn’t changed. We are all responsible for this. We are not organized – the sit-ins are making things worse.”* Female, Jendouba, 45 years old, nurse.

**Tunis residents are particularly sensitive to threats to security, which they define as social divisions and inter-regional discrimination**, expressed in a range of ways such as fights between youth and being barred from economic opportunities.

*“We should be united, we have sacrificed a lot. We hope to see more employment and more security.”* Female, Tunis, 52 years old, unemployed

*“Before the revolution, we had a lot of bad things, but we also had a lot of solidarity. Now there are a lot of divisions. Divided into modernists, Salafists...the solidarity that existed before January 14 is no longer present.”* Male, Tunis, 27 years old, graduate student

*“We would love to see our country stable. Through security – people have to feel safe in their homes, in their jobs. We want these psychological comforts. There shouldn’t be any sit-ins.”* Female, Tunis, 42, shop owner

*“I am originally from Kef. When I went there, they don’t have as many acts of violence as we see here. Many buses do not enter certain areas in Tunis because someone tried to hijack the driver using a knife. I think the situation is chaotic here.”* Female, Tunis, 66 years old, retired

*“The city is over-populated. There are too many cars and a lot of pollution. Too many buildings and too many illegal stalls. There should be a better development plan for the town.”* Male, Tunis, 36 years old, unemployed

**In contrast, Jendouba residents identify areas for of concern but also display a unique level of self-reliance and willingness to work toward solutions.**

*"We have some security here in Jendouba. But what we are really concerned about is unemployment. We have many resources, but we are not utilizing them. We need to wake up a little and unite and things will get better here."* Female, Jendouba, 35 years old, unemployed

*"We haven't seen much improvement in our town. There is nothing encouraging for people to see in terms of the economic future in this town. We want to work with the new government to improve things."* Female, Jendouba, 29 years old, student

*"Things will be better than other areas. During the revolution there weren't many acts of violence toward public buildings in Jendouba except the local government office which represented the RCD. People were guarding their businesses, their homes, their families. We had lots of officers from the security forces who were involved in looting, but the people were vigilant. So the chaos at the time wasn't related to security, but to the social situation."* Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, merchant

### **III. Elections and Voter Confidence**

Elections for Tunisia's NCA on October 23, 2011 were highly anticipated and the source of much public debate before and during the campaign period. Despite concerns about election-related violence and intimidation, election day itself was viewed as a political and symbolic success by Tunisians and international observers alike, as citizens exercised their right to vote, in many cases for the first time. **Focus group respondents reflect on the dramatic differences from past elections.**

*"In the past, we had to vote for the red list, and there were two police officers watching. This time we could vote freely. Things went according to my expectations because there were observers and the results were more or less known for the big party [Ennahda]."* Female, Jendouba, 35 years old, unemployed

*"Compared to the past, this is considered a huge improvement."* Male, Gabès, 50 years old, inspector

*"In the past, elections were not fair. You just had to vote for the red list. You could not show up at all and still vote! This is the first time we see elections and are happy with them. This happened in a well-organized*

way. The military were observing and taking care. None of this would have been possible without the revolution." Male, Tunis, 49 years old, laborer

"I used to work as an election official during Ben Ali's time. Everything seemed transparent, there were voting booths and all, but after the voting process was over behind closed doors, transgressions were allowed. I saw entire boxes of ballots disappear and other appear in their place." Female, Sousse, 47 years old, nurse

**When asked if they considered the NCA elections to be conducted fairly, citizens give positive responses, crediting the country's first independent election commission (ISIE) for a well-organized day at the polls.**

"I do trust the [ISIE]. It is normal that the results were delayed because we don't have an experience in elections, and everything was being counted manually. I have some confidence in the ISIE because we actually got to go and see that there was a computerized system for voter registration. There was probably an attempt to change the results, but they couldn't." Female, Gabès, 25 years old, unemployed graduate

"Different parties were watching and there were no influences. In the past, the red paper was imposed on you. Maybe they even changed the box after you voted!" Male, Jendouba, 56 years old, unemployed

"When we say the ISIE, we say Jendoubi. I would say well done to him. I hope [the ISIE] will become a constitutional establishment." Male, Sousse, 35 years old, wholesale market owner

"Many people voted. I didn't expect this. When I saw this on TV, I was surprised, and liked it." Female, Tunis, 50 years old, unemployed

**Participants note a few concerns about the elections, but their apprehensions do not affect overall confidence that the elections were conducted according to international standards and that results were reported accurately.**

"The elections went as we thought. They were fair. Then later in the news we heard there were a few transgressions like bribery, which make us a bit skeptical." Female, Tunis, 46 years old, unemployed

"If they tried to do anything with the results, I am sure these people would remember their patriotism. It's hard for them to tamper with the elections because the people were always there watching." Male, Jendouba, 34, taxi driver



*"There was a little gap. [The ISIE] should have insisted on everyone registering, but they didn't. In the end, they just gathered those who didn't register to register at the last minute. Of course, the registration office had no observers, so anything could have happened there. So there may have been transgressions at this level." Male, Jendouba, 57 years old, technician*

*"The proof is that there wasn't an overwhelming majority for any one political party. Of course some parties had a lot of votes, but that's normal. The winning party was the most abused in the past." Female, Jendouba, 25 years old, unemployed*

**Some citizens witnessed infractions by political parties, but these violations do not affect their confidence that results reflected voter intentions.**

*"Elections were fair, but not perfect. There were many attempts to influence people in the lines." Female, Tunis, 26 years old, unemployed*

*"The process was fair, but during the campaigns there were a lot of infringements of the law. For the illiterate, many political parties put the symbol of their parties in their hands. They stamp the symbols in their hand so they will vote for them." Female, Tunis, 26 years old, law student*

*"In the past you were forced to choose the 'red' party. These elections were fair because most of the people voted. Many people voted for Ennahda because it's the symbol of Islam and most people want that. We need to give the parties some time to work, and if we don't like what they do, we can always get rid of them later." Male, Jendouba, 27 years old, textile worker*

*"At the beginning we thought they were fair, but then we had an impression that people were trying to make us believe that they weren't. We voted for the people we thought fit the positions. On TV we heard things about Ennahda, but I think they were fair. Even when we were in school, we studied that elections should be free, fair and confidential, and this was the case for the elections." Female, Gabès, 25 years old, graduate student*

*"[Aridha Chaabia] took advantage of people's lack of awareness of the political situation especially in Fernana [a small town outside Jendouba]. He mentioned goals in their agenda which are impossible to achieve. He's someone who doesn't know the country at all." Female, Jendouba, 29 years old, student*

*"When I was going to vote, someone said vote for that party, but otherwise things were as I expected."* Male, Sousse, 35 years old, baker

**Focus group participants consistently remark that they voted based on their own convictions, in most cases unhindered by outside influence.**

*"The first thing that influenced my vote was religion. In the past people were afraid of religion."* Female, Tunis, 45 years old, shop owner

*"When I vote for a political party, they have to have a clear economic and political program."* Male, Tunis, 26 years old, nursing student

*"For me, I've looked at the agendas of each political party and I made my decision."* Female, Gabès, 40 years old, accountant

*"Being able to vote freely. I was very happy to vote because I was confident that the list I voted for would not be changed. I live in a rural area and in the past, I remember that we were told to pick the red list during the elections and the results were always like 89 or 99 percent."* Male, 27 years old, Jendouba, textile worker

**For the first time, Tunisian voters overwhelmingly felt their vote mattered and that taking part was an act of patriotism, as well as a duty.** A nominal minority of focus group participants did not vote; their reasons ranged from not registering to concerns over the credibility of the election process.

*"Of course my vote mattered! Naturally. We had to go through a lot to get to this stage."* Female, Tunis, 47 years old, shop employee

*"Regardless of the conditions, I had to vote. It was an obligation – that is what influenced me. The future of the country was in question – we had to vote."* Male, Jendouba, 55 years old, unemployed

*"This was my first experience. I thought this was the first time my vote would make a difference."* Female, Jendouba, 32 years old, housewife

*"Of course – my vote and someone else's add up to something. As you can see there were about 14,000 votes in Jendouba. There were only a few hundred votes between different parties who got seats in Jendouba, so you can see it's important."* Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, businessman

*"You have to prove that you are Tunisian. The whole world was talking about the election. You had to go and express your opinion. It was almost*

*like a celebration – I just had the feeling that I wanted to say ‘eid mabrouk’ to everyone.”* Female, Jendouba, 32 years old, housewife

**During the course of election day, almost all focus group respondents saw Tunisian observers, both nonpartisan citizen groups and political party agents, at polling places. In most cases, they have a favorable view of their work and contribution to the transparency of the elections.**

*“This year was exceptional. There were people who were observing, watching, but they were neutral. That is a good thing.”* Male, Jendouba, 27 years old, technician

*“Observers, though not many, actually declared a few issues. All in all, it was still considered a good step forward.”* Male, Gabès, 50 years old, inspector

*“They were taking note of all the transgressions. They were always observing those in charge in the polling stations, so they contributed to the transparency of the voting process.”* Male, Tunis, 36 years old, unemployed

*“They contributed to the organization of elections and to observing the process. Being present at the counting gives more credibility to the elections and helps Tunisians accept the outcome.”* Male, Gabès, 38 years old, laborer

*“It’s true they were actually observing within the polling stations but there weren’t any outside. There were people who were being transported to the stations to vote. The voting sheets were being copied and I saw them being circulated outside.”* Female, Gabès, 49, unemployed

**Participants evince confusion over the role of observers and the difference between non-partisan citizen monitors and party pollwatchers.**

*“[Tunisian observers] were there to observe but they had no influence. I imagine in the past, they used to impose specific lists on people.”* Female, Jendouba, 29 years old, student

*“There were observers, some of them were young, but I felt free to choose whoever I wanted to vote for. I went three times to vote, it was so busy. I voted in the end and was so happy.”* Female, Jendouba, 35 years old, factory worker

## IV. Definitions of Democracy and Citizenship

**Following Tunisia's historic elections, participants articulated expanded views of democracy, with a focus on individual duties.** During focus groups conducted prior to the NCA elections, citizens cited freedom of expression as a fundamental democratic value, but the role of voting and ties of accountability to elected officials was not mentioned.

*"Democracy means freedom. We should accept each other's opinions. Now there is a possibility of saying no, and we can try to fix things that go wrong, which wasn't the case in the past."* Female, Gabès, 25 years old, graduate student

*"Democracy is individual freedoms, freedom of expression. People could take part in political life. They could communicate and speak to a minister."* Male, Tunis, 48 years old, laborer

*"It's true that democracy is freedom, but not in excess. Not to the point of resorting to acts of violence."* Female, Jendouba, 25, student

*"Freedom of speech. Respecting differences. Including women in political life. Giving her certain rights."* Female, Jendouba, 35 years old, unemployed

*"I have to keep following up and become more politically active."* Male, Tunis, 25 years old, graduate student

Respondents also declare that citizens should be the center of a functioning democracy, rather than political leadership. This has both positive and negative implications.

*"Democracy has to be implemented through the people at all levels. Through practice, it will become part of us."* Male, Tunis, 58 years old, nurse

*"Democracy involves allowing the people to have a say in decisions. If there are reforms to the constitution, people should be consulted."* Male, Tunis, 25 years old, tourism student

*"People are becoming divided. It's not like January 14 when we were all unified. Now you see people working against each other – on the street and in Bardo."* Male, Sousse, 28 years old, student

The successful experience of the NCA elections has encouraged citizens to see democratic development as a continuous process that requires hard work and vigilance.

*"We haven't achieved it yet. People are still afraid. It may take years for democracy to be achieved, and with Ennahda, I am not optimistic at all."* Female, Sousse, 35 years old, businesswoman

*"This is an experimental period which hopefully will allow us to improve things in the country."* Female, Jendouba, 36 years old, unemployed

*"It's a huge concept. The people should give their opinion – that is the importance of democracy. I hope we will achieve some part of it – we don't have the full term yet. We are still working gradually toward achieving it."* Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, businessman

As the one-year anniversary of the January 14, 2011 revolution approaches, some respondents indicate enthusiasm for building on their participation in the election and finding new avenues for expression and participation.

*"Citizens should work seriously and reduce their demands on the government. All sorts of demands are arising now: pay raises, promotions.... These should come gradually, not all at once."* Female, Gabès, 40 years old, accountant

*"People should have more awareness. There are some 'secret hands' manipulating people. It's my role to raise awareness so people can make their own decisions."* Female, Gabès, 40 years old, accountant

*"I want to participate in other discussions like this one – we couldn't do this in the past, and it's so important that we don't get lazy now that elections have passed."* Male, Sousse, 25 years old, tourism employee

Despite an emphasis on individual responsibility and action, some respondents are confused about how to engage in politics in the post-election period.

*"I can't do anything except to wait and see what happens. I voted and I am now waiting for [political parties] to carry out the promises."* Male, Sousse, 35 years old, Publinet café owner

*"I can participate in protests, and also work on the next elections. We used to all be sports analysts, now we are all political analysts. We can't just take what the media tells us. We have to enter different groups, even*

*if you are not part of those political parties, you can still go.” Male, Gabès, 32, unemployed graduate*

*“Now that we have learned a lot, we have to see what political parties are like. We have learned a lot about politics, so we can decide who to vote for and who to work for.” Female, Tunis, 39 years old, secretary*

**Women struggle most in identifying ongoing avenues for political engagement and are most likely to express a passive view of their role between elections.**

*“There are women within the NCA. There are many women – they will certainly speak out and represent my interests. I don't need more than this.” Female, Tunis, 66 years old, retired*

*“Nothing has been mentioned as far as women are concerned. No rights, no obligations. There is no concern for women. Even within the NCA, it seems women have very little say.” Female, Sousse, 35 years old, businesswoman*

*“Now you can't do anything but sit back and watch.” Female, Sousse, 48 years old, hairdresser*

*“Tunisian people are aware now. We will be judging [NCA members] on what we see. They should be honest. They should be well-behaved and not constantly trying to get a position. They just have to be honest and credible.” Male, Tunis, 35 years old, electrician*

**Citizens are aware of the growing number of civil society organizations and in most cases have had direct interaction with charity-based or social development associations.**

*“There are many types of associations – environmental, cultural, political. Some do a good job and transmit info to citizens. Others just form a name and that's it.” Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, electrician*

*“Citizens could create associations to communicate with the NCA, to raise awareness of the constitution.” Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, merchant*

*“In addition to monitoring the NCA through associations, it is possible to form different committees in different governorates, with special skills, for instance, experts in constitutional law, linguists and professionals from across the political spectrum to develop constitution proposals, check different clauses and offer suggestions for improvements. This way, any*

*risks of power abuse by the majority will be mitigated. Confidence cannot be granted blindly, the NCA needs to prove that it deserves trust.” Male, Gabès, 50 years old, inspector*

**The potential for civil society to play a positive role in the transition will be based on the ability of CSOs to build trust with citizens and identify effective strategies to engage in the political process.**

*“The government can't reach all the remote areas, so these associations could help identify priorities in these areas. Maybe associations could organize discussions like this.” Male, Jendouba, 34, taxi driver*

*“To be honest, if anyone starts voluntary work, it is very hard to get out of it. Scouts are not politicized, but there are others which are. There are voluntary roles which will help you gain experience. Everyone wants to work. Here in Gabès, there is the spirit of good community work, building bridges, helping others.” Male, Gabès, 29 years old, unemployed graduate*

*“There are many like Basma [association headed by Leila Ben Ali] that just take money. There are others which help the poor. There are people who are needy and want people to help them.” Female, Jendouba, 25, student*

*“There are anonymous associations who would come to see your situation, and if they could help they would. With those, yes. But the associations who are doing the work just for the sake of advertising, no.” Male, Sousse, 43 years old, unemployed*

## V. Governance

As Tunisia's newly elected officials assume their positions in the NCA and government, citizens expect to see tangible progress on political and economic goals. **Focus group respondents identify several priorities to be addressed in the constitution: national identity, separation of powers, and security.**

*“There is no point in discussing identity. We are an Islamic country. Separation between powers – it should be there for the next 200 years and not tailored according to personal interests.” Male, Gabès, 29 years old, unemployed graduate*

*"We should agree on certain things like identity. We are all Arabs, but you cannot include things which are not part of our culture. Separation of powers is so important."* Male, Tunis, 57 years old, retired

*"The priorities are to provide security and safety. Give security forces their rights through the constitution so they will work for the people properly and not go for bribery."* Female, Tunis, 39 years old, secretary

*"It should be a civil constitution that guarantees the separation between religion and power. There should be independence of the judiciary."* Male, Tunis, 27 years old, graduate student

**Respondents have strong and divergent views of the role religion should play in the constitution.** Some respondents expect a clear division of religion and the state, whereas others consider the Quran a sufficient foundation for the constitution.

*"Religion is as source of inspiration, but we need to use it according to the needs of the country."* Female, Tunis, 26 years old, law student

*"It's hard to have the sacred texts linked to the constitution."* Male, Jendouba, 56 years old, unemployed

*"Tunisia is a Muslim state. Religion can be a source of inspiration for the constitution which may be drawn from religion but we have to look at the modern side of religion."* Female, Gabès, 40 years old, accountant

*"Apart from saying that Tunisia is an Arab and Muslim country, nothing more."* Female, Sousse, 65 years old, housewife

*"The Quran itself is a constitution for any Islamic community. Everything is available in it."* Male, Jendouba, 27 years old, technician

*"The Quran is already a constitution. It is a constitution for Muslims. But to get closer to the way of living nowadays, we should try to adapt the Quran within the constitution. For example men can't really afford to marry four wives, so that doesn't really need to be included."* Male, Jendouba, 34 years old, taxi driver

**When asked whether specific rights should be enshrined in the constitution for women, the majority of respondents continue to reference Tunisia's Personal Status Code (PSC) from 1956 as sufficient.**



*"No. They already have the PSC. The previous constitution didn't include the PSC – it is separate. They should leave it as it is. This code has all the laws related to family." Male, Sousse, 36 years old, factory worker*

*"Women are the other half of society.... Without women, men cannot survive. They are complimentary." Female, Tunis, 42 years old, shop owner*

*"They should have the right to work, express themselves freely, take part in political life and civic associations. When people apply sharia, women's rights are systematically preserved. There is no problem in stating specific rights for women." Male, Gabès, 29 years old, unemployed graduate*

*"Women have had their freedoms in the past, and the constitution should preserve these rights which are noted in the PSC." Female, Jendouba, 32 years old, student*

**Expectations for the NCA remain high and varied, as they were in the pre-election period.** Confusion about the role of the newly elected body persists, most commonly in the form of expectations that the assembly will be responsible for economic development.

*"I expect the NCA to carry out what they promised – to improve the economy and reduce unemployment." Female, Tunis, 25 years old, graduate student*

*"Once the government is in place, we want to see all these coalitions formed. The same thing with reforms. There should be constant vigilance – someone should be watching them all the time." Male, Gabès, 34, unemployed graduate*

*"They should take better care of the rural areas to have more order within public administration, and encourage youth to set up their own projects." Female, Jendouba, 36 years old, unemployed*

*"I expect the NCA to change a lot of things. To do what the people want. The cost of living should be reduced." Female, Tunis, 30 years old, employed*

*"The fact that the NCA will prepare a government that is going to work for the interest of the people; all other issues will be tackled. The NCA will need solidarity between members to be effective." Female, Tunis, 26 years old, law student*

*"They do not represent my interests as a young person and they will not represent anything to do with youth in general. These people have been in prison for 15 years or so, so I can't expect anything from them."* Male, Tunis, 27 years old, graduate student

**Expectations and awareness about the constitution drafting process vary; however, there is strong support for citizen consultation, most often referenced in the context of a potential constitutional referendum.**

*"I imagine there will be drafting and then discussion to include consensus."* Male, Jendouba, 37 years old, company director

*"I would have preferred to see the constitution drafting in the hands of legislators. Now they can do it based on personal interest, and once they are gone, we'll find ourselves in trouble."* Female, Tunis, 58 years old, nurse

*"There will be a committee that drafts it according to the people's demands."* Male, Jendouba, 25 years old, professor

*"Once the constitution is completed, it should be distributed among the Tunisian people so they know their rights."* Male, Sousse, 36 years old, Factory worker

*"The drafting itself is not difficult, but to agree on the different clauses is a challenge. Before finalizing the constitution there should be a referendum. The constitution is a very complex matter, and is the basis for the whole society."* Male, Gabès, 50 years old, inspector

*"Now they are just reforming what is already given and taking the advice of the head of the committee to confirm the process. It's not up to the people to keep going to Bardo [outside NCA offices] and protesting. The NCA was elected and they should be able to carry out their work."* Female, Gabès, 40 years old, notary

**Tunisians are willing to be patient with newly elected politicians and note the diversity in the NCA as step toward democracy.** Participants display high confidence in NCA members' competence to carry out their mandate to draft a constitution and consider one year as a reasonable amount of time to meet this goal.

*"The NCA has to carry out its promises. I want to see improvements, not regression. You see people behaving in an uncivilized way, and if you say anything against that, they say its democracy. There are people who have taken advantage of the revolution."* Male, Sousse, 45, professor

*“When I see constructive criticism, interventions should be appropriate and adequate. They should stick to the agenda and their intervention should be pertinent, creative and take into consideration any point that is been overlooked by other political parties representatives. Active and constructive participation is required.”* Female, Gabès, 26 years old, graduate student

*“So far the NCA is quite varied and has many representatives of different categories and views. There hasn’t been any abuse of power yet.”* Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, merchant

*“There has been talk for months about one year to write the constitution. The new members should just get to work. One year is enough time, and then we can move on to other things.”* Female, Tunis, 30 years old, hotel administration

**Opinions are mixed on the extent to which the NCA should have legislative powers, in addition to their role overseeing the new constitution.** Those who support a legislative role argue that the NCA is more legitimate than any previous transition government and law drafting is essential to address key issues in the coming year. But some participants are concerned about the lack of experience within the NCA to draft legislation and fear that Ennahda’s strength in the assembly could unduly influence potential legislation.

*“It is good to have a law that’s been discussed between 217 people, rather than set by an individual.”* Male, Tunis, 35 years old, electrician

*“If there are laws that are going to be in favor of the country, why not?”* Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, electrician

*“[Legislating] is not the purpose of the NCA – they should keep focused on the constitution. They should be very busy with this for the next year. I didn’t vote for them to draft new laws as well.”* Female, Sousse, 38, teacher

## VI. Political Leadership

Focus groups were held as the leaders of parties who attained seats in the NCA were negotiating a power-sharing agreement. Opinions of public figures, therefore, focus on perceptions of their potential and not on any objective review of their performance.

**Support for Hamadi Jebali as Prime Minister is based on his track record of resistance as a member of the Ennahda party in opposition to the Ben Ali regime, including time spent in prison.** Some respondents doubt Jebali's sincerity and steadfastness, but many articulated support, saying that he will try to improve Tunisia, and is trustworthy because of his religious convictions.

*"[Jebali is] a well-known personality. I've seen him on different programs. He used to fight for human rights and was oppressed by Ben Ali in the past. I think he's honest and hopefully he'll do good for the country."* Male, Jendouba, 27 years old, technician

*"[Jebali] suffered a lot of injustice in the past."* Female, Jendouba, 25 years old, unemployed

*"Jebali is not politically prepared. He may have the social and religious ground, but not the political know-how."* Male, Tunis, 48 years old, laborer

Jebali's speech in Sousse in early December, which received widespread media coverage for his reference to the establishment of a caliphate, is proof for some participants of his inconsistency and questionable motives.

*"The sixth caliphate issue – what are we supposed to think?"* Male, Jendouba, 25 years old, professor

*"Contradictory. [Jebali] will say something and then later, he will say he said he didn't."* Female, Sousse, 48 years old, hairdresser

**President Moncef Marzouki's performance seems a litmus test for participants on the success of the revolution.** Supporters say Marzouki provides a radically different leadership model and secures a break from the past, while critics consider his motivations for office as selfish, rather than reflecting a genuine interest in serving the country.

*"[Marzouki] seems serious about his job and wants to do something for the country. He acknowledges his mistakes. He is self-critical and open to discussion."* Male, Sousse, 43 years old, unemployed

*"The president is educated, he is a good speaker, and he knows how to handle the Tunisian people. Because he was oppressed in the past, he's close to the poor, he knows what's happening in rural areas, and he sympathizes with unemployed graduates."* Female, Tunis, 42 years old, shop owner

*"I am sure [Marzouki] will be beneficial for the country – he is not at all like the last president. He will ensure freedom and help build the country."*  
Female, Jendouba, 47 years old, maid

*"[Marzouki] is close to the people and understands the citizens."* Male,  
Sousse, 35 years old, Publinet café owner

*"[Marzouki] chose exile and a very comfortable lifestyle when other activists were jailed and no one took notice of their sacrifices. He also came back and immediately said he wanted to be president at the beginning of the revolution when Tunisian youth were being shot."*  
Female, Gabès, 42 years old, secondary school teacher

*"Eager for power. I didn't expect [Marzouki] to be president."* Male,  
Sousse, 43 years old, unemployed

*"[Markouzi] is impulsive. He's not politically cunning, and is too spontaneous."* Female, Sousse, 38 years old, factory worker

**NCA President Mustapha Ben Jaafar is viewed as a serious and experienced politician, capable of managing Tunisia's new political leaders.** Participants see his education and manner of speaking as both positive and negative attributes.

*"Well-educated with good knowledge and experience in life. He can lead the country."* Male, Sousse, 67 years old, retired

*"Mustapha Ben Jaafar is competent, educated and wise but sometimes tends to change his positions depending on interests."* Male, Gabès, 50 years old, inspector

*"[Ben Jaafar] seems cold-blooded and very reserved when he speaks."*  
Woman, Jendouba, 35 years old, teacher

When considering Ben Jaafar's role presiding over the assembly, respondents noted his firm will, which is appreciated by some and considered overly biased by others.

*"From what I noticed, he's not fair with the members of the NCA; for example, he gives some people fifteen minutes, and only ten for others."*  
Female, Tunis, 45 years old, shop owner

*"He is a non-believer. During a [NCA] session, some members wanted to go for Maghreb prayer, and he refused."* Male, Sousse, 53 years old, factory worker

*"He attracted my attention during discussions in the NCA. he seems to have a strong personality."* Female, Jendouba, 31 years old, professor

**Participants look to the political parties who fared best in the elections to reinforce the break with the past political system.** Regardless of number of seats attained, respondents expect parties to keep their electoral promises and engage citizens directly, on their terms.

*"These members that we see on TV are hopefully the ones we'll see next year. We want them to come see the slums, not the expensive areas. Even if you aren't going to do anything, at least come and see. We don't want to wait until next year and the elections before seeing them."* Male, Sousse, 43 years old, unemployed

*"[Ennahda] should preserve people's rights. It's true that they suffered a lot during the last regime, but they are not the only ones. The younger ones actually suffered, but the leadership have actually left the country and sought political asylum. They lived in comfort."* Female, Gabès, 42 years old, secondary school teacher

*"I have seen Ettakatol leaders discussing quite a lot. They seem serious about doing something for the country."* Female, Sousse, 38 years old, factory worker

*"When you look into what [Ettakatol] says, the outer picture is unity, but you don't know what's happening on the inside."* Female, Jendouba, 29, student

*"When God-fearing people are in power, I don't think the same transgressions will happen again. The majority of the members are educated. They were all oppressed and we hope they won't do what the former pres did."* Male, Jendouba, 34 years old, driver

However, skepticism persists about the motivations of the three parties who make up the majority coalition as citizens watch negotiations for power-sharing unfold.

*"There are people who don't actually belong to Ennahda and have the extremist opinions, but pretend to be part of them."* Male, Jendouba, 27 years old, textile worker

*"The CPR may let go of certain rights if they carry on in their passive/negative role. They should not accept to be pressured and especially they should react more positively to the constructive counter*

*power of the civil society associations.” Male, Gabès, 50 years old, inspector)*

**Parties that did not fare as well during the election but still won seats suffer from lower name recognition among respondents, and are judged to have led less competitive campaigns.**

*“We heard about Ettajdid and their coalition, but we never saw them. It’s a good idea, but they were too distant from our reality.” Female, Tunis, 43, shop owner*

*“[PDP] made some mistakes during the election campaign, had it not been for that, they could have done better in the elections.” Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, businessman*

**Focus group respondents voice concern over what they viewed as remnants or refashioned RCD parties’ success in the NCA elections.** Despite attaining the third position in terms of seats, focus group respondents share distrust of the Aridha Chaabia list.

*“Hashmi Hamdi – He promises a lot of good things, but according to experts, it’s impossible for any of that to happen.” Female, Sousse, 65 years old, housewife*

*“I believe Hamdi is the new version of Zine El Abdine.” Male, Sousse, 35 years old, Publinet café owner*

*“Aridha is a project of dictatorship and regionalism.” Male, Tunis, 36 years old, unemployed*

*“It’s all negative. When I hear them [Aridha Chaabia candidates] speak, I am surprised because I can’t believe Tunisian people can get to this level of speech. It gives a very bad image about Tunisians.” Female, Gabès, 40 years old, notary*

By comparison, the Al Moubadara party receives mixed responses, with many respondents referring to its linkages with the former ruling party.

*“[Leader Kamel] Morjane has good relations with foreign countries.” Male, Jendouba, 55 years old, unemployed*

*“[Morjane] has high competencies and good experience but the fact that he’s worked with the RCD has affected his reputation. So, he may*

*have been punished based on these factors.” Male, Jendouba, 55 years old, unemployed*

*“[Morjane] tried to polish his image and refute the rumors against him.” Male, Sousse, 35 years old, day laborer*

## VII. Looking Forward

**Tunisians expect political leaders to immediately address economic stagnation since the revolution.** While some economic vulnerabilities predate Tunisia’s political transition, and others are influenced by the global economic crisis, participants hold interim government officials responsible, and expect newly elected representatives to develop policies and plans in the next year.

*“Speed up the drafting of the constitutions and hurry up developing the country.” Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, electrician*

*“There has to be a reduction in the cost of living. Corruption and bribery in the administration should be eliminated.” Male, Tunis, 25 years old, graduate student*

*“I would like to see that some regions and governorates improve. People in the capital are well off, they are living comfortably, but there are other areas which are living under bad circumstances; Kasserine for instance. There are many unemployed youth. I would like to see some investment in those areas so that those young people will find jobs in their home towns.” Male, Tunis, 48 years old, laborer*

*“Achieve the goals of the revolution through all the slogans raised during the revolution.” Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, merchant*

*“From a personal perspective I see that Tunisia is experiencing an economic crisis which is affecting the country.” Male, Gabès, 26 years old, employed*

**Participants consistently refer to the need for a change in mentality to address historical social grievances which were perpetuated under the Ben Ali regime.** Emphasis on rebuilding social trust by confronting the legacy of the previous regime and holding individuals accountable is viewed as a new benchmark for measuring political progress.

*“Development can’t just happen overnight; it happens on the long term. The mentality needs to change gradually – we are looking at 20 years perhaps, not two years. We are still afraid and feel insecure. There is a*



*crisis of trust. Compared to what things were like before the revolution, of course there were improvements, but development will happen with time. Psychologically we are not fixed on one opinion – we shift political allegiances.”* Female, Gabès, 26 years old, student

*“There has been a lot of freedom of speech. Chaos has led to freedom of speech, and this freedom should lead to something good.”* Male, Tunis, 26 years old, nursing student

*“It's not an easy thing to have things improve overnight. Whatever it takes, we will work for it.”* Male, Tunis, 35 years old, electrician

*“Forget about the martyrs. This is the first time in history that martyrs receive money. We should honor them, but not give them money. If they give 20,000 dinars to martyrs tomorrow I will just go and commit suicide so my wife can get the money.”* Male, Sousse, 60 years old, retired

**Safeguarding pluralist, inclusive, accountable decision-making through citizen vigilance is seen as a political and security imperative.** While the majority of participants prefer to give NCA members time to settle political disagreements which are the natural result of diverse representation following elections, citizens in general link political progress to stabilization.

*“We have suffered a lot from the previous government. We are shocked from all these issues in the past. We want to see good public administration and elected government; an active opposition. For me, we have to have a real state that preserves all the rights of the people. There should also be a separation between powers. People should do their jobs appropriately.”* Male, Tunis, 49 years old, tailor

*“We want stability and security for our country. They should listen to all opinions. Take care of the youth. We want our voices to be heard. We want women's freedom. They should have a role in the life like men.”* Female, Sousse, 38 years old, factory worker

*“If there is justice, there will be security. If we keep asking for security, we may get back to square one. When we had dictatorship, we had security. It's justice that we need. We should be able to bring the police to justice. Security is a result of justice.”* Male, Jendouba, 42 years old, merchant

*“Employment is also very important, as it will improve the economy. Also the Tunisian mentality needs to change. We need social equality. The issue has never been revolving around sit-ins and protests – the mentality should change. If this doesn't change the country won't move forward. It*

*needs time and people need to feel safe and secure to change this mentality." Male, Jendouba, 55 years old, unemployed*

**Reform of public administration will be required to encourage responsive institutions – another key benchmark in determining democratic progress.** Participants specifically note healthcare, education, agricultural production and transport and services industries.

*"We need an economic miracle. Speaking on a social level, there should be no more discrimination. Everyone has a salary and should be able to earn one's daily bread. Reforms in public administration are also needed. If necessary, things should be done over the Internet so you don't have to line up at different administrative offices. Why not even reforms at the level of sports? We want to be living in comfort." Male, Gabès, 42 years old, university administrator*

*"We all love Tunisia, so we need to get rid of egotism. There are many public administration employees asking for a pay raises. This is pure selfishness and opportunism. One has to be patient and work hard. We still have the issue of unemployment." Male, Gabès, 41 years old, employee*

## CONCLUSIONS

Focus groups conducted by NDI in Tunisia since March 2011 highlight the perseverance of the Tunisian people as they have grappled with monumental decisions to chart a political path forward, following an uprising which not only resulted in the removal of a dictator, but also inspired similar citizen-led uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa. On the one-year anniversary of the fall of the Ben Ali regime, the following conclusions offer a framework for considering the significance of the past year's accomplishments by shedding light on Tunisian attitudes regarding the country's political progress and revealing aspirations for the immediate future.

### *Expanding Definitions of Citizenship*

Conceptions of citizenship in Tunisia prior to the 2011 uprising were based on demonstrating obedience, and in most cases motivated by fear of repercussions by an authoritarian state. In the first months of the transition, Tunisians expressed enthusiasm for new freedoms; however, concern for a re-emergence of the RCD-backed regime was pronounced. The proliferation of new political parties and movements led to confusion about political choices, and skepticism among average Tunisians over what they viewed as a new class of political elites uninterested or unaware of citizen concerns.

Despite concerns that citizens lacked basic information to cast informed votes, the NCA elections proved to be a boon for confidence in the role of individual choice. Focus group respondents were pronounced in their conviction that a new democratic culture was taking hold, however also cautioned that in addition to exercising choice – one of the cornerstones of democratic practice – citizens need to be equally mindful of their duties. An underlying sense of disunity and geographic discrimination could threaten the continued cultivation of a strong national identity and political culture. If citizens do not find productive avenues to contribute to political goals, through political parties or civil society, enthusiasm for political gains may wane.

### *Increasing Political Legitimacy*

Political parties are both vehicles for popular expression and entities for organizing political life. Despite the country's newfound civil liberties and political freedoms, focus group research conducted by NDI throughout the spring and summer of 2011 revealed that citizens were suspicious of a political class seen as distant and incapable of addressing the country's pressing issues. In looking to the approaching NCA election in July 2011 (prior to the delay), NDI found high levels of anxiety over the large number of parties and independent candidates planning to contest. Respondents expressed a desire to learn about candidates and participate in the election, but a profound skepticism over leaders' ability to deliver on promises.

Despite this trepidation on the part of the electorate – many of whom were first-time voters – the elections were an overwhelming success, not only for confirming citizens' will and consolidating the political landscape, but also as a symbolic milestone that demonstrated a definitive break with the autocracy of the past regime.

Elected leaders, equipped with a new-found legitimacy, are now expected to provide tangible results to a public emboldened by their recent electoral experience. People need parties to connect them to the processes and events taking place around them. Parties and their leaders must both manage expectations and demonstrate meaningful efforts toward stated goals if they are to maintain relevance and build credibility. In a post-election atmosphere, parties that prove most adept in this regard will have the greatest chance of success in future elections.

### *Desire for Greater Social and Economic Justice*

Throughout 2011, Tunisians prioritized the importance of economic stabilization and growth, with particular focus on addressing the country's unemployment rate. Views ranged from the belief that government should take responsibility for job creation to more liberal economic views encouraging private sector expansion and entrepreneurship to support locally-led development. Diverging views aside, focus group respondents were united in their insistence that an increase in productivity will be required, acknowledging in part that strikes and work stoppages – while a demonstration of free expression – further slow potential for economic recovery.

Interim government officials struggled throughout most of 2011 to implement short term fixes to revive the economy in the absence of a political mandate to craft longer term policy. At the same time, political parties made campaign promises to would-be voters on economic recovery, but have offered no tangible suggestions following the elections. Looking to the year ahead, in which Tunisian politicians will need to focus great attention on building consensus on a series of fundamental political questions, the extent to which these leaders can also simultaneously manage expectations and address the very real financial hardships faced by many Tunisians will be a determining factor in how citizens evaluate transition progress.

### *High Expectations for Good Governance*

Tunisians want government services, political and economic stability, and representation by those they elected to serve them. Consistent with earlier findings, the constitution is viewed as a top priority because it is seen as a precondition for stability and integral to solving other problems. It may be that Tunisians are expecting too much of the assembly, given the challenges their society faces; or, perhaps in the absence of other organizing principles, the NCA represents the one tangible institution that in the

short term will bring some clarity to their situation and further the process toward genuine democratic governance.

Most focus group respondents say that Tunisia's political life – and its new constitution – should not be dominated by religion, but rather include and reflect religious values. Participants support women playing a meaningful, if not limitless, role in politics and public life. However, underneath these responses are often qualifiers that speak to the difficulties of launching a genuine constitutional democracy and pluralistic civil society in a country scarred by decades of divisive tactics by authoritarian rule.

Focus group respondents have consistently called for justice for the crimes committed against the population by the previous regime over the last 23 years, and particularly during the period of citizen revolt. Fair trials of former regime officials and police forces – overseen by an independent judiciary empowered to issue judgments – are seen as a necessary step to heal the wounds of the past.

### *Young Tunisians Continue the Search for Political Voice*

Young Tunisians were unanimously credited with guiding the uprising and initiating the transition to democracy, but their activism did not translate into political participation during the election process. As such, this important segment of society – often referred to as the 'youth bulge' in the past – stands at a crossroads. Faced with limited job opportunities and few avenues for meaningful contributions to the political discourse, young focus group respondents remain wary of political parties and see few options to contribute through civil society associations that they feel represent their interests.

With their potential to inspire and mobilize support bases cultivated during the campaign period, young Tunisians could be valuable assets for political parties in the post-election environment. Compared to their parents' generation, young Tunisians demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the political process and willingness to put their skills – including savvy online networking and organizing – and energies to productive use. Effective strategies to harness this potential could result in political gains for parties who seek to actively engage constituents as part of their strategic programs for 2012.