

IMAGINING THE ROAD AHEAD

CITIZEN ATTITUDES ABOUT TUNISIA AND THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTION PERIOD

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA
Conducted May 23 – June 1, 2011

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CONTENTS

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE	1
PREFACE	2
MAP OF TUNISIA	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
PRINCIPLE FINDINGS.....	9
I. THE ECONOMY, SECURITY AND STABILITY	9
II. THE GENERAL DIRECTION OF THE TRANSITION	11
III. DEFINITIONS OF DEMOCRACY	13
IV. THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND CONSEQUENCES.....	16
V. THE PERFORMANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND INSTITUTIONS	20
CONCLUSIONS.....	23

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

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

PREFACE

The nationwide protest movement that led to the overthrow of the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 was a first of its kind in the Arab world. In the following months, the country has proceeded through a political transition where political parties and civil society organizations are struggling to play a role in representing citizens' interests in the political system. Elections for a constituent assembly, which will be tasked with drafting a new constitution, were originally scheduled for July, but have been postponed to October 23, 2011. This round of focus group research took place during the national debate about an election delay, and captured citizen sentiment about political decision-making and technical aspects of progress on Tunisia's road to democratic transition. The findings point to a citizenry that continues to register profound concern about the direction of the country, particularly outside of the capital.

Purpose. In order to provide political and civic leaders in Tunisia with timely and objective information about citizens' priorities for the constituent assembly elections and their preferences for political participation, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) led a qualitative study in cities across Tunisia from May 23 to June 1, 2011. The study comprised 12 focus group discussions throughout the country and examined the following:

- Perceptions about how the electoral process is unfolding;
- The extent to which gender, age and residence affect perceptions of politics;
- Perceptions of the degree of security and civil liberties enjoyed by Tunisian citizens;
- Attitudes toward the performance of the interim government and political parties; and,
- Expectations for the future direction of the country.

The findings of this study were used to inform Tunisian decision-makers—in transitional government, 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. While several quantitative surveys have been conducted in Tunisia since January 2011, this study marks the second round of qualitative research on political issues in Tunisia's history, as independent public opinion research was not permitted under Ben Ali. For NDI, the study represents the second in an on-going series

of public opinion research that the Institute intends to conduct 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-12 per group. However, depending on the situation, groups may be slightly smaller or larger than the ideal. 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 late-May / early-June 2011.

Method. From May 23 to June 1, 2011, NDI held 12 focus groups in four cities across Tunisia with a widespread geographical representation: Tunis, Sfax, Gafsa, and Medenine. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location and role in the events of December 2010 and January 2011. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI designated three distinct demographic groups for each location: 1) mixed gender youth (ages 24 – 35), 2) women over age 35, and 3) men over age 35. Each group comprised between seven and 10 participants. The gender breakdown was 56 percent men and 44 percent women. Fifty percent of participants were unemployed. 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 moderator 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, Sfax, Gafsa, Medenine. (See the map in this section). The sensitivity of both the topics discussed and of the prevailing political climate posed unique challenges to implementation of the project. Fluctuations in the security environments in certain cities necessitated the rescheduling of groups. Such areas also lacked prior exposure to public opinion research, as marketing research initiatives were largely focused on coastal cities. NDI and EMRHOD worked in close partnership to navigate around such obstacles.

Facilities: Locations selected for the study were urban or peri-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 is made to ensure there is no undue influence exerted on the participants in the groups. The focus group guideline is not shared with local authorities prior to the group, except in the rare cases when disclosure is required to proceed with the research. Also, in the majority of instances, the participants are gathered in some random fashion. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from findings in the groups overall, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

MAP OF TUNISIA



One World Nations Online. July, 2011.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores public opinion in Tunisia in the late spring of 2011. Based on 12 focus group discussions with 102 Tunisian participants, the report examines attitudes and concerns of Tunisian citizens about the 2011 political transition and constituent assembly electoral period. As with all NDI public opinion studies, participants were asked about their views on political party and governing institution performance, security, and related issues. 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.

I. The Economy, Security and Stability

Participants cite lack of jobs and economic security as a principal issue of concern and cause for discontent with the political transition. Negative attitudes about how the political transition is progressing center around the following beliefs: economic development is hindered by political nepotism, and continued intimidation and manipulation experienced under the Ben Ali regime.

About half of the groups say they feel unsafe because of increasing criminality and the threat of renewed political violence. Looting and disorderly behavior including localized violence are particularly troubling to participants, and women in particular. Some fear that these behaviors signal a new period of political infighting and instability.

Participants lament egotism and corruption on the part of politicians. Much of participants' outrage is reserved for politicians, whom they accuse of, at best, a complete lack of concern for the welfare of the people and, at worst, of corruption.

II. The General Direction of the Transition

Most groups express divided, rather than outright positive or negative, views on the current direction of the country. Those who generally feel, with few or no reservations, that the country is indeed moving in the right direction tend to be residents of Tunis, with the majority being youth. People who have overwhelmingly negative views about the direction of the country are likely to be unemployed and living in the south.

Economic woes, security and discontent with political elites are at the base of participant pessimism. Participants lament high rates of unemployment and the resulting poverty, enflamed by instability in Libya. They also complain about the lack of attention given to development of the agricultural and industrial sectors. Furthermore,

participants talk of a 'revolving door situation' with political elites from the past again taking roles in decision-making. Respondents largely feel that party leaders in Tunis do not understand the needs of average citizens.

Freedoms of expression and association are the base for participant optimism. Along with a slight sense of increased security in their community, participants point to the ability to gather freely, debate political ideology in public, and enjoy expanded press freedoms as the basis for their sense that the country is moving in the right direction.

III. Definitions of Democracy

Divergent definitions of democracy emerged, revealing lack of clarity on the process and citizen roles. While elections were often cited as a cornerstone of the democratic process, there was little discussion of how citizens might play an active role outside the polling station.

In terms of the role of religion in democracy, participants feel that politicians should not use Islam as a political tool to gain votes. Democracy and Islam are seen as consistent and not mutually exclusive. As such, there was strong sentiment that politicians should focus less on debates about religion, and instead present programs to address core issues including employment and security.

The majority of participants stressed that the state should be separate from, but respectful of, religion. Participants consider religion to be a private matter, and feel that citizens should be able to exercise the freedom to practice as they see fit. Article 1 of the constitution was consistently cited as the foundation of Tunisia's commitment to respect religion.

IV. The Electoral Process and Consequences

Participants are divided over the timeline for the constituent assembly election, and about half of the groups expressed concern over the lack of transparency and inclusivity in the debate over a delay. Positive sentiment toward an earlier election date is usually linked, not surprisingly, to the need to allow parties and citizens more time to organize and understand the process. Participants with positive attitudes toward the postponement of the elections say that a transparent and fair election is essential. Some opposed to the postponement note that many officials in the transitional government were appointed under the Ben Ali regime and have no legitimacy. Some also cite technical concerns about holding the election during the school year as a potential negative disruption.

Participants exhibited a low degree of knowledge about the type of election to be held and demonstrated a fairly low level of familiarity with political parties. Each group was able to correctly identify that elections would be for a constituent assembly. However, when probed, several mistakenly assumed the next elections would be for a president or parliament. Familiarity with parties was also quite low, with a few notable exceptions – the *Ennahda* (Renaissance) Party and the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP).

There is significant opposition to the 50/50 gender quota for party lists presented in the electoral decree. Those who criticize the decree base their argument on women's limited exposure to politics, in some cases going further to state that women have no place in politics. A plurality of participants opposed the quota, stating that gender should be irrelevant, and voters should focus on competency of candidates.

V. The Performance of Political Parties and Institutions

Participants stressed the need for parties and institutions to be seen as listening to and connecting with real people. Views toward parties are generally negative, coupled with the sense that people do not know what they stand for or how to distinguish between the growing number of parties. While particularly strong among groups outside Tunis, this sentiment was reiterated in the capital as well.

Name recognition of a party does not necessarily translate into support. Participants consistently noted that even if they recognize a party's name, they cannot vote for most parties because they have no idea who they are or what their goals and platforms might be. This was the case for the majority of parties, including those that existed prior to January 2011, such as the PDP and *Ennahda*.

Expectations for the constituent assembly could not be higher. When asked what the role of the constituent assembly was, a significant majority listed addressing economic development, providing security and revising the constitution. There is inconsistent understanding of the assembly's mandate – with constitutional reform coming in after other citizen interests. In some cases, participants used the terms 'parliament' and 'constituent assembly' interchangeably. Participants' understanding of the role of constituent assembly varies, but expectations for rapid and positive impact on their daily lives was noted consistently.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

I. The Economy, Security and Stability

The most acute concern for Tunisians is the lack of jobs, and financial instability since the January revolution. Unemployment is the most often cited concern of all age and geographical groups. Women over 35 years old often cite the employment needs of their children rather than their own.

"We thank God that people are no longer afraid and for the freedom we gained. We now want employment for our kids." Medenine, Female, over 35

"The first thing we need is to guarantee employment for young people. The government must respond to needs of the unemployed youth and the unemployed university graduates." Sfax, Male, over 35

"The first thing is to reduce rates of unemployment. Jobless people either need to work or have their own projects. Then, security will prevail and the economy will improve." Tunis, Female, over 35

"Employment is most important, if the youth have decent jobs they won't steal. With security prevailing and people working, democracy will be established." Gafsa, youth

Stability and security are secondary concerns for most groups and were often linked to economic opportunities. To achieve stability and security, participants cite the need to spur economic activity and for police to return to work.

"We need two conditions to provide stability. We need freedom and we need to re-establish the economic activity." Medenine, Male, over 35

"I'm not fine, I'm afraid for my daughter, I'm afraid for her to get kidnapped, I have to talk to her every night and make sure she is fine. All this is due to the revolution and the problems that resulted from it." Sfax, Female, over 35

"Freedom doesn't mean chaos. I don't think we have order; chaos is reigning but not freedom." Gafsa, Male over 35

"Police should go back to work so everything can get back to being orderly."
Sfax, Male, over 35

"The average citizens have nothing to do with the looting and the violence committed lately; there are some hidden powers at play." Tunis, youth

Lack of trust in the interim government and political institutions tasked with overseeing the transition persists. Establishing trust in the government and interim institutions would contribute to a sense of stability. Participants note continued high incidences of corruption in their daily lives as a primary contributing factor for lack of trust.

"With good and fair elections we can succeed. Tunisia will settle down and the economy will grow. This can be achieved only once a permanent government is formed, not if it is an interim one." Sfax, Male over 35

"People have lost confidence in the government and we need to get trust back." Sfax, Male over 35

"We hope we will have a leader that understands people. Stability, security and equality between people with no selfishness; their priority should be on the interests of the country and not in power only." Tunis, youth

Corruption still exists. We need to change the way some policemen function as they still ask for bribes." Gafsa, Male over 35

Concerns about corruption are not only an issue involving police, but also access to employment and education.

"We have always faced corruption. I think that everyone should have equal opportunity to access any job. Improvement at the social level depends on the political level. The judicial system is not independent and bribery still exists so leaders need to think about the interests of Tunisia and not personal interests."
Tunis, youth

"Good things are possible if we fight nepotism and corruption. If you provide equal opportunities for people it's possible." Tunis, Female over 35

II. The General Direction of the Transition

Participants are divided on whether or not Tunisia is headed in the right or wrong direction. **Personal security is the main issue that citizens need to see addressed, even more quickly than advancing the democratic transition.**

"In order for things to go in the right direction after we have a Constituent Assembly and a president, they will need to really address the issue of security." Gafsa, Male over 35

"I'm not fine, I'm afraid for my daughter, I'm afraid for her to get kidnapped, I have to talk to her every night and make sure she is fine. All this is due to the revolution and the problems that resulted from it." Sfax, Female over 35

"Walking at night isn't as safe as it used to be. People are acting strange, they don't understand freedom and they are taking advantage of the freedom they have been granted." Sfax, youth

"Our children are afraid, we are tired. I am afraid for my kids, I have to pick them up from school." Gafsa, Female over 35

"The problem here is the security problem, anyone can block the road and facilities are set on fire. The police and army don't interfere, people are afraid, the first thing addressed should be security." Gafsa, Male over 35

The transitional government, including the High Commission and Independent Electoral Commission, are not seen as having legitimacy and are criticized for not sharing information. However, governmental and institutional transparency are noted as indicators for improvement in the future.

"Everything is going wrong, the interim president, the interim government, the media, and the newspapers. A state of chaos." Sfax, Male over 35

"We are happy because of the revolution. But there are some people who did not participate at all and they are taking advantage of the revolution for their own interests." Medenine, Male over 35

"The government is to blame for things not going right, the government isn't sharing any information with us, and they are covering each other's faults." Tunis, Male over 35

"There should be laws about transparency and I think then we will regain trust in the government. Transparency pertaining to decisions, regulations and relationships, from top to bottom." Gafsa, youth

There is frustration among participants over what they view as empty promises by politicians and officials. Police are blamed for not doing their jobs and contributing to the sense of instability. They are widely considered corrupt but essential for order and security.

"This revolution was for young people to claim their rights, but now we have more joblessness than before. Things are not clear. We are concerned and not happy about the situation. We are being given promises and false hope. They keep saying there will be projects in Sidi Bouzid or Gafsa and that jobs will be provided for the unemployed but nothing has truly happened." Gafsa, Female over 35

"Police need to be punished for the crimes they did. They need to be held accountable." Sfax, Female over 35

"The police lost the solid role they had before. They have no authority over people and consequently there are more law breakers." Sfax, youth

"The police forces were following old practices of violence and we want this to change. The police need to be trained; new practices need to be introduced." Gafsa, Male over 35

"It's the police force; if they go back to work and work properly everything will start going the right direction." Medenine, Male over 35

Despite overwhelming concerns about the direction of the country, Tunisian participants are hopeful about the future. **Enhanced freedoms of speech, assembly and press were cited consistently as signs for optimism.** A minority also noted the need for patience and recognition that the democratic changes called for in the revolution will take time to achieve.

"If we think of Tunisia's best interests then we will be able to achieve many things in a short time." Sfax, youth

"On TV there are debates and that is a good sign. I think there is freedom of speech." Tunis, Male over 35

"I think there is a lot of improvement and changes in politics. I don't feel afraid any more. And I think things are better than before." Tunis, Male over 35

"The only thing that has changed for the better is freedom of expression." Tunis, youth

"It is hard after 20 years – we can't say in three or five years that things will be fine. If we take a building that took fifteen years to build, it can be destroyed in one day, but it can't be re-built in one day. You need to think about how long it will take to rebuild an entire system that was built on corruption for 23 years. However, this can be done through hard work and security." Gafsa, Male over 35

"We also need to acknowledge that we can't expect the interim government to do everything. Once we have an elected president things will be clear and decisions will be made." Tunis, Female over 35

III. Definitions of Democracy

Significant debate and divergence of opinions emerged on definitions of democracy. Youth have particularly strong opinions on the topic, and were most engaged and passionate about what democratic dividends they expect. All participants share largely positive associations with the word democracy, including freedom of speech and expression. Elections are consistently included by participants in definitions of democracy.

"Democracy means freedom, justice, and understanding rights and duties. You should respect others and everyone should enjoy one's rights while performing one's duties. It also means the independence of the judiciary system and the media." Gafsa, Male over 35

"Democracy means different opinions. We should not reject any idea. All ideas are important. Any person that represents any group or idea should be respected." Medenine, youth

"We should listen, accept different opinions. That is plurality." Gafsa, Male over 35

"Fair elections will establish democracy. For example, the former president was elected by 99 percent and the elections were not transparent. There was lots of corruption and most people didn't vote. This time everyone will express their opinion and vote in a free manner. Elections are a good measure to assess the person who we will choose." Sfax, youth

"Elections are a healthy system to choose the person we trust." Gafsa, Female over 35

Some participants note that democracy requires a degree of civic responsibility. The majority of participants do not feel that democracy is present in Tunisia yet.

"Democracy is responsible freedom. When practiced correctly democracy will be beneficial for the whole community. People should think about others not just themselves. It's a way of living." Gafsa, youth

"Everyone is responsible for one's actions and everyone is free; this is democracy." Tunis, Male over 35

"It means many things like human rights, if you go to some place you expect not to be discriminated against." Gafsa, Female over 35

"We hear the word democracy, but there is nothing like that here. We simply don't understand what it means." Sfax, Female over 35

"I think we just moved from one situation to another, and we should still deal with the problems of the previous phase." Sfax, youth

Democracy and Islam are seen as consistent, not mutually exclusive. Many participants maintain that the foundations of democracy are also found in Islam. **An overwhelming majority of participants say that political parties should not use religion to gain support**

as religion is a personal matter. Participants want political parties to focus on issue priorities rather than religion.

"Yes, they are consistent. Islam calls for the existence of many religions; it doesn't force any religion on anyone. Religion is a matter of personal choice. In the past, many religions used to co-exist peacefully." Sfax, youth

"The Prophet said that you cannot be secure if you are full and your neighbor is hungry, so this is democracy. Islam is democracy." Gafsa, Male over 35

"Islam is not contradictory with democracy, Islam doesn't use this word but all the principals of democracy are there." Gafsa, youth

"No, those are two separate things. Religion is personal and the parties are not to talk about religion. We are an Arab Muslim country and political parties must focus on developmental projects, progress, future projects and not talk about religion." Medenine, Female over 35

"I advise them not to talk about and not to get involved in religion because it is a personal matter." Tunis, youth

"Parties should talk about other issues that are more important to the daily life of Tunisian people, employment for instance." Medenine, youth

"We are a Muslim country so this is something we don't need to discuss. Parties need to focus on other issues." Medenine, youth

While there were divisions over the role of religion in government, participants in all groups noted that Tunisia needs a state that is separate but respectful of religion. A small minority showed some concern of losing cultural identity under a secular state.

"Everyone should be free to practice what they want. The government represents the country but religion is an individual matter. People are free. The government should not oblige anyone to pray, fast or wear the hijab." Sfax, Female over 35

"With a secular government we might lose our identity as Muslims." Sfax, youth

"The politician talks about politics but religious authorities should focus on religion like before. Religion should be practiced in the mosques." Gafsa, Male over 35

"Politics and religion should be separate. Politics is the work of politicians and religious scholars should be discussing religion. For instance, the president cannot represent the religious authority at the same time." Medenine, Male over 35

"This is the discourse they should adopt, as it is stated in the first article in the constitution: 'Tunisia is a free independent country, Islam is its religion and Arabic is its language.' It is clear." Tunis, Male over 35

"When a government has no religious bearing it would work for the interests of everyone. I'd rather feel I belong to my country regardless of religious orientation." Tunis, youth

"We all follow the principles of Islam, so if we separate state and religion I don't think religion will be followed." Gafsa, Female over 35

IV. The Electoral Process and Consequences

NDI conducted focus groups in the midst of public debate on the potential postponement of the constituent assembly election. **There are very mixed feelings on the potential postponement amongst participants.** Those that were in favor of postponement cite the need for more information about candidates and parties, as well as time to prepare for election administration. **A sizeable minority refer to elections for a president, underscoring the ongoing confusion about the political process and the next round of elections.**

"What if we have elections and end up with a new president who is as corrupt as the former one and who we can't remove? I think we should postpone them to guarantee we can vote for the right person." Gafsa, youth

"I think if the election commission concluded that it's better to postpone then there must be good reasons behind it, especially when it comes to management. Honestly, I think it's better to postpone and do it right because it can't just be done in a few days. All parts of the government should help the commission." Tunis, Male 35

"I think we should postpone. Our problem isn't just elections. If they are not done on a solid foundation, or if they don't express real opinions of people they will not change anything. The parties should be prepared and have real programs." Sfax, youth

"They should postpone so we have more time to know the parties. Personally I don't know the parties. I hear there are 50 or 60 parties. This is the revolution of the youth now it's the interests of the old that are being served." Tunis, youth

Those that oppose the postponement want to see the election as soon as possible so stability and security can be restored. Many groups also view October as an inopportune time for elections because their children will be back in school. Elections, they feel, will interrupt their studies – this sentiment was particularly strong among women.

"Keep the date. Because the situation is not clear. We have no government and we want to get order and security back." Sfax, male over 35

"I think the sooner the better, we are tired, and we don't feel secure. It's been really stressful." Gafsa, Female over 35

"I want to keep the date, because we need to reestablish security. If we had a president we wouldn't have this chaos." Tunis, Female over 35

"If we postpone people will start to doubt the revolution. The idea of postponing the elections could be understood as a failure to keep the promises." Medenine, youth

"If it weren't for the school year, it would be okay. We are afraid for our kids, things are not going well in education, for example; studies didn't go well this year and the children and the students were badly affected by what went on." Gafsa, Female over 35

"July 24 is a good time as it will be; the summer break and many institutions will be not working so then the citizens can vote in a free and comfortable way. If they postpone, the elections will coincide with the new school year and that may cause many problems." Gafsa, youth

Elections are largely seen as bringing stability and security for the country, and a return to normal for families. Participants consistently link elections to legitimizing a new government which will address social and political issues outside the current scope of the constituent assembly.

"Everything will change. I expect to put an end to unemployment, corruption, violence. I expect security to return." Sfax, Male over 35

"First I want the elections to be held because we need to give legitimacy to the government and the institutions. Security needs to be re-established and a new constitution drafted." Gafsa, Male over 35

"I really hope that elections will be held in a pure and transparent manner. In the past we participated in the elections but we had no idea whatsoever about the other parties on the list. I truly hope we will have the right to choose this time." Tunis, Male over 35

"The institutions and the government have no legitimacy and that is why we need elections as soon as possible. The state needs to go back to legitimacy." Tunis, Male over 35

The majority of male participants oppose the 50/50 gender quota established for the constituent assembly in the electoral decree with most noting that the quota is too high. Some women participants support these assertions.

"Yes and no. I agree because this prioritizes equality. Men and women have equal rights and can participate in political life, so they can help improve the country. I don't agree because in my mind women should take care of kids and stay at home." Tunis, youth

"No I don't agree, I don't think women are made to lead." Gafsa, Male over 35

"It's too much because men always want to dominate. If we give 50 percent the men will be angry and this will create problems for us with them." Medenine, Female over 35

"It's too high because women are not yet qualified to engage in politics." Tunis, youth

"I don't think women should work in politics. I think men are better with authority. [Women] can work in any other domain but not politics." Gafsa, youth

"I don't agree because women may be helpless in such a chaotic situation." Sfax, Male over 35

A significant minority of both men and women note that their concerns about the quota are linked to the perception that women have little experience in politics, and that candidates should be elected based on merit. But a significant minority do support equal gender participation. The majority of women see other women as being uniquely able to represent them in a governmental position.

"It doesn't matter, woman or man, what matters is a person who serves the interests of Tunisia. We want patriotic, qualified people. It's not a question of gender here." Sfax, Female over 35

"I don't agree. When they limit us like this it is not effective. We need people who are worthy who can do the work regardless of gender. What matters is competence." Sfax, youth

"What is required is a skilled and efficient person who is able to bring about reforms." Tunis, youth

"We've got the personal code and it is different for Tunisian women than for women in other Arab countries. This is positive and we shouldn't lose that. We don't want to waste these gains and achievements as this is what distinguishes us from so many Arab countries." Gafsa, Female over 35

"I don't think it's too much. Fifty percent is good, the spirit is that of equality and we should practice it." Tunis, Male over 35

"I agree with this percentage – a woman will understand us better." Sfax, Female over 35

"It's a very good idea, the best idea. Many women are afraid about the future. If Ennahda wins we will be imprisoned in our homes. If women have a place in politics this will encourage other women not to be afraid of the future." Sfax, Female over 35

Participants primarily receive their information from TV and the Internet. Many people mentioned that seeing the video that accompanies TV news adds to its credibility. Participants in each group turn to multiple sources to gather information, also noting that friends and neighbors are important sources of information.

"I trust TV because you see everything clearly. They show us videos so it's all clear." Sfax, youth

"I trust TV because something on Facebook might be wrong. The reports on TV and the debates on the radio are more credible and are accountable for the news they give, unlike Facebook." Medenine, youth

"I prefer talking to people. I usually go to the coffee shop to know what's new." Gafsa, Male over 35

Among available TV channels, participants noted Al Jazeera and France 24 most often, followed by Nessma and Hannibal TV, then the National TV channels. When mentioned, regional radio stations were considered a reliable source of news. Facebook is universal among young participants; even those who do not use the site mention it as a credible source of information. Newspapers were the least commonly referenced source of information.

V. The Performance of Political Parties and Institutions

Participants note that information coming from the interim government and the High Commission is severely limited. Consistently, participants express dissatisfaction over what they consider insufficient information – both in quality and quantity.

"What are they giving us? Nothing! There is no information at all." Sfax, Female over 35

"No, I have no idea what the Council is doing, people aren't getting the information they expect." Gafsa, youth

"Sometimes they make announcements based on what they want; they don't consult people's opinions. It's just according to their plans." Sfax, Female over 35

"I'm not satisfied with them because they haven't realized the objectives of the revolution." Medenine, Male over 35

Overall, Tunisians desire direct interaction with officials listening to their concerns.

"There should be honest discussions and they should get us involved in their future plans." Sfax, youth

"They need to get closer to the streets, listen to the citizens." Gafsa, Male over 35

"They should convene more meetings and introduce themselves better and try to get closer to people. Conferences, forums, discussions and open meetings like this to talk to people and listen to us and explain things to us because until now we have had no clear idea about existing political parties." Tunis, Female over 35

Participants stressed the need for parties and institutions to be seen listening to and connecting with real people. While particularly strong among groups outside Tunis, this sentiment was reiterated across the country.

"If the parties want to be popular and get people's attention they should listen to the people of Tunisia." Sfax, Female over 35

"The parties should see our needs and demands. In Gafsa we need infrastructure and healthcare, we have many graduates, all unemployed." Gafsa, Female over 35

"Face to face contact. I need the parties to listen to me; it should be a direct discussion. I can tell them my requirements and demands and they will listen. This way we can understand each other and this won't work by phone." Gafsa, Female over 35

"They should have a very clear program and introduce themselves via campaigns and put promises into action." Tunis, Female over 35

Name recognition of a party does not always translate into support. Participants consistently note that they cannot vote for most parties because they have no idea who they are or what their goals and platforms might be.

"I cannot decide on voting without seeing agendas of the parties. What are they going to do actually? When I vote for a person or a party I have to be convinced first. I have to understand how he will rule, his program, what he will

do for us. If this doesn't happen, then there won't be a real election." Sfax, Female over 35

"So far we don't know which party is good or which to support, which one is coming to solve our problems or to help us find jobs for our youth and get the country out of this mess." Gafsa, Female over 35

"How do you expect us to know the parties? We don't see them and we don't know them." Gafsa, Female over 35

"Honestly, there is a lack of information. We want to know more about the political parties. We know we'd like them to introduce themselves and represent their programs. We need to know their agenda if they want us to vote for them." Medenine, youth

Expectations for the constituent assembly could not be higher. There is inconsistent understanding of what the assembly's mandate is, with constitutional reform being listed after other citizen interests, including economic development and security.

"I expect youth infrastructure, water, better standards of living for families, and improved conditions for the poor." Tunis, Female over 35

"They [constituent assembly members] should focus on unemployment, all kinds not just the young, so we can avoid problems of security." Tunis, Female over 35

"The Constituent Assembly should take care of the unemployed, build factories in the south and decrease the food prices." Gafsa, Female over 35

"They should write strict laws, they should deal with the issues important to people and they should prohibit the abuse of power." Medenine, youth

"Focus on providing employment for youth and poor areas." Sfax, Male over 35

"I expect [constituent assembly members] to amend the constitution and bring new articles and implement the law. The problem is not about the constitution itself, it is about its implementation." Sfax, youth

"[Constituent assembly members] should set a four-year term for the president. We would like to be like Europe and have a new president every four years. If a president is good we will re-elect them." Gafsa, Female over 35

CONCLUSIONS

Focus groups conducted by NDI in May/June 2011 point to exceedingly high expectations on the part of citizens about Tunisia's political transition. In general, citizens of Tunisia judge progress by, at minimum, whether they feel a sense of economic and physical security. However, after these concerns, participants are preoccupied with indignation about perceived injustices, including:

- Impunity for those who commit crimes;
- Lack of accountability for interim officials who are considered illegitimate; and,
- The necessity to resort to bribery to get justice.

Coupled with inconsistent understanding of the mandate of the constituent assembly, political elites face the common challenge of developing messages for an increasingly restive population. Although they laud the democratic and electoral process, they express deep frustration over the behavior of political leaders who they say display no concern for the welfare of the people, engage in corrupt practices and refuse to dialogue with their opponents.

Political branding and supporter fidelity remain weak. Nearly six months after the revolution, focus group findings suggest that citizens continue to be ambivalent about political parties – whether newly formed or pre-dating the January revolution. *Ennahda* is by far the most well-known party; however awareness of the party does not translate to awareness about its programs. This is even more so the case with lesser known, emerging parties. In order to build effective party brands and platforms, elites are encouraged to engage directly with citizens on issues of concern.

Inter-active public dialogue. As the process continues to move down the road toward the constituent assembly election and then the development of a constitution, public briefings, which are currently only being given to limited audiences, need to be expanded. There is a pronounced desire among Tunisian participants for information on, and a voice in, the transition process and institutions must find ways to provide both. Political leadership needs to be seen to be listening to people, as well as talking to them.

Unresolved debate on the role of women in politics. Despite a legislative tradition which places Tunisia at the most liberal end of the spectrum on women's rights in the region, ongoing disagreement persists about their role in public and political life. While the electoral decree requires 50 percent representation on any candidate list for the constituent assembly, there are significant social barriers to women seeking to access politics.

The question of religion and the state. Focus group participants demonstrate a high degree of fidelity to Article 1 of the Tunisian constitution, noting the need for separation of religion from the state, while maintaining respect for Islam. Importantly, however, concerns about identity fuel the public debate about the role religion should play in Tunisian politics. Most participants note dissatisfaction with what they consider the politicization of religion in the current public debate.

As the political contest continues to gain momentum in the months before the constituent assembly election, political leadership will need to develop platforms which represent core concerns of citizens, taking into consideration regional differences, including historical grievances of the 'interior'. The degree to which citizens feel genuinely engaged in the political process will impact expectations on progress toward goals of the revolution on the one hand, and meeting the practical daily needs of citizens on the other.