

CONFIDENCE GAP:

CITIZEN PRIORITIES ON THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA
Conducted October 30 – November 7, 2012

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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.

PREFACE

Coinciding with the one-year anniversary of Tunisia's first democratic elections following the ouster of Zine El Abedine Ben Ali, Tunisians are actively debating the extent to which the new pluralist political landscape is meeting citizen expectations for economic, social, and political change. Since elections in October 2011, members of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) have worked to draft the country's new constitution, while an interim coalition government has grappled with concerns over the increasing cost of living, high unemployment rates, and social and political tensions that have frequently erupted into violence throughout the country.

This round of focus group research took place in late October/early November 2012, immediately following the one-year anniversary of the NCA elections and the symbolic deadline for completion of the constitution. Acute frustration over what citizens view as unwarranted political infighting has resulted in transition delays that an increasing number of citizens view as untenable. Trust of political parties is at an all-time low since NDI began conducting public opinion research in March 2011, even as the Tunisian electorate's exposure to a genuine multi-party environment grows. Expectations that the NCA and individual elected officials must do a better job communicating progress made toward drafting the constitution are uniformly high, as are concerns that the credibility of the next national elections could be threatened by the contentious political atmosphere.

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](#). For its seventh round of focus group research, NDI focused on citizen attitudes toward the constitutional process and political parties, as well as expectations for political events during the coming year, including completion of the constitution and national elections. Through the study, conducted from October 30 to November 7, 2012, 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 citizen expectations;
- Perceptions about the role political institutions, including the National Constituent Assembly and the coalition government, are playing in Tunisia's transition;
- Attitudes about the role and contributions of political parties; and
- Expectations for completion of the constitution, agreement on a future political framework, and administration of future elections.

The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in four cities across the country. ELKA is a marketing and public opinion research firm based in Tunisia. For NDI, the study represents the seventh in an ongoing series of public opinion research conducted since March 2011 to provide analysis on Tunisian citizen attitudes toward the ongoing political transition.

Focus Group Research: Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following pre-set guidelines. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of 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 providing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held—that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys. Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of 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. 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 held when research was conducted in late November/early December 2012.

Method: From October 30 to November 7, 2012, NDI held 12 focus groups with a total of 121 participants in four cities across Tunisia: Tunis, Sidi Bouzid, Gabès, and Monastir. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location, and voting patterns in the 2011 elections. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI divided participants at 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 12 participants. The gender breakdown was 52 percent men and 48 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 Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in four cities across the country. The moderator conducting all focus groups was a Tunisian citizen trained in focus group moderation techniques by NDI and ELKA. 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: Greater Tunis, Sidi Bouzid, Gabès, and Monastir (see the map in this section). Locations selected for the study were urban or semi-urban areas. Greater Tunis was selected because it encompasses the capital and largest city, Tunis, and its surrounding areas and is the national center for public administration, commerce, and tourism. Sidi Bouzid, the site where protests that resulted in the country's political transition began, has traditionally been neglected by central government. Despite its location on Tunisia's coast, the economy of Gabès has been driven by industrial production rather than tourism, and the city experienced weeks of strikes throughout October in reaction to a hiring process organized by the area's leading chemical plant. Finally, Monastir was selected to represent the Sahel region; it is also the birth and resting place of Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba. 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 guidelines were not shared with local authorities prior to the sessions. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from overall findings, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

MAP OF TUNISIA



One World Nations Online. January, 2012.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores public opinion in Tunisia in late October/early November 2012. Based on 12 focus group discussions with 121 Tunisian participants, the report examines Tunisian citizens' attitudes and concerns about progress toward drafting the country's constitution, the role of political institutions, and expectations for future elections. 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, are detailed in the Principal Findings section of this report.

I. National Direction

Following the one-year anniversary of elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), Tunisians express concern over political divisiveness and confusion about the role the opposition should play during the transitional phase. Two-thirds of respondents feel the country is headed in the wrong direction. Participants point to delays in drafting the constitution, as well as the inability of parties to set aside parochial interests to find consensus on key legal questions, including agreement on a political framework and division of powers. While views on how opposition parties should position themselves vary, there is widespread frustration with their performance since elections.

An optimistic minority continue to cite freedoms of expression and association as indicators of positive progress. Specifically, some respondents view these improvements as enabling citizens to oversee the work of government in ways never possible during the presidency of Zine El Abedine Ben Ali.

Participants believe that economic development and job creation have been hampered by chronic strikes and related instability, coupled with corruption and inefficiencies within the Tunisian administration. Residents of Gabès are particularly focused on these issues, following weeks of protests motivated by what was seen as a discriminatory recruitment process at the local chemical factory.

The majority of respondents believe the quality of life for Tunisians has deteriorated since the elections, primarily due to diminished purchasing power in comparison to rapidly rising prices. Participants blame the government for failing to live up to the promises made during the elections. They view attempts to provide positive improvements, such as pre-election unemployment stipends in 2011, as hampering real job creation or as simply inadequate to match the price increases occurring throughout the country.

Political parties—from the ruling coalition and the opposition alike—are the main object of respondents' frustration, though men are more likely to believe that the government needs more time to address pressing problems than their female counterparts. Despite increased economic anxiety and political delays, the probability of open and sustained protests will likely remain low, unless the current localized instability degenerates into major economic or social shocks that are felt throughout the entire system.

II. Citizen Priorities

Job creation and economic development to alleviate the rising cost of living remain participants' main priority, regardless of gender or geography. Respondents see efforts by the government and private investors to create jobs as too limited and disproportionately favoring certain segments of the population.

Respondents believe that addressing corruption and reforming public administration would increase productivity and improve the country's economic outlook. Youth in particular mention the need to reform the tax system, seeing effective penalties on tax evasion as an important means of increasing state revenues.

Participants believe security is improving slightly, though they consistently mention the need for police to be vigilant and their fellow citizens to respect the rule of law. Citizens view the Ministry of Interior's efforts to reform the security sector as insufficient. Similarly, participants encourage police to uphold their commitment to ensuring the safety of the communities in which they serve. Respondents also hold that their fellow citizens need to "change mentalities" in areas ranging from respecting driving laws to respectfully waiting in line at public offices.

Regardless of the priority, participants view improved communication by decision-makers and a process for public consultation as important elements of any workable solutions to citizen concerns. One year after the NCA elections, the electorate believes that officeholders are accountable to citizens and have a responsibility to communicate with voters on a regular basis.

III. Engagement and Activism

Focus group respondents prize greater freedoms of expression and association, though concern is growing over increased bias in the Tunisian media. Participants increasingly consult Tunisian news outlets for information about political developments while viewing each outlet as having a specific political affiliation or leaning. While respondents reference Facebook frequently, its credibility as a trusted source has diminished compared to prior studies. Family and friends remain a trusted source of information.

Women are most likely to feel restrained in exercising their freedoms, citing fear of harassment or physical violence. Respondents note several examples of being verbally attacked for their choice of dress. Women participants also cite work and children as obligations that hinder them from more fully taking part in public life.

In order to attract new members, political parties need to present clear solutions to citizens' priorities and focus on building public confidence. Respondents seek more concrete ideas and policy programs from parties, as well as more information about political leaders' professional qualifications and achievements.

Participants may be dissatisfied with the ruling coalition, but they also remain unenthusiastic about opposition parties, which they view as unqualified and unprepared. The pace of political progress has not been fast enough for many focus group participants, who cite political posturing for future elections as the primary reason for delays. Respondents directly credit opposition parties for a recent escalation in political tensions.

IV. Constitutional Process

The majority of respondents believe the constitution-drafting process to be off course. While almost all participants express a belief that the majority of NCA members are not qualified to successfully complete the drafting task ahead of them, a vocal minority also consider the process of constitution-drafting, which includes committee and plenary sessions, to be ineffective.

Expectations regarding the completion of the constitution vary, but few focus group participants demonstrate awareness of the various "roadmaps" for constitution-drafting proposed by ruling coalition and opposition NCA members. Lack of information about various proposals confirms persistent communication deficits between political elites and citizens.

Political divisions within the NCA over the question of separation of powers are mirrored in focus group discussions. Participants supporting a presidential regime stress Tunisia's political legacy and the need for strong individual leadership, whereas those supporting a parliamentary regime express the need to counter any trend toward the centralization of power. Some advocate for a mixed system but struggle to define how such a political system would work in practice.

The majority of focus group participants support the inclusion of specific references to the protection of the rights of women in the constitution. In many cases, participants make the case for their inclusion in order to focus on responsibilities referenced in Islamic law. A minority of respondents, however, challenge this view, asserting that the constitution should enshrine basic human rights without mention of gender.

Participants continue to reference the value of a referendum on the draft constitution as a means to express a lack of confidence in NCA members' abilities to reach consensus on the draft constitution within a reasonable timeframe. Participants view elected officials as distanced from constituents as they collect large undeserved salaries and benefits and neglect their primary responsibility to finalize the draft constitution. Some participants raise concerns about the budget and time needed to organize a constitutional referendum; the majority, however, consider a referendum a vital means of ensuring appropriate citizen input into the foundational document.

V. Elections and Voter Confidence

There are differing points of view on a timeline for the next elections. Some participants are certain elections will be held in the early summer as the ruling coalition announced, while others believe such a timeframe is unrealistic. Participants view the lack of progress on the constitution, election law, and legislation to create an election management body as reasons to postpone the polls until the fall.

Participants expect key aspects of the electoral process, including voter registration, to proceed smoothly, yet many believe that political parties will attempt to manipulate vulnerable voters. The administration of the 2011 elections continues to receive positive feedback and serves as a minimum starting point for the organization of future elections. Focus group respondents see resolution of some administrative issues—such as the voter registration process and the post-election grievance process—as essential to enhancing the credibility of the process. Administrative issues aside, participants are much more concerned about the potential for political parties to intimidate or confuse voters.

Expectations for increased political competition and tension in the run-up to Tunisia's next national election are pervasive among focus group participants. They cite the tenor of political debate since the launch of the Nidaa Tounes party in June—coupled with politically-motivated violence, including the death of a Nidaa Tounes party activist in Tataouine and attacks on opposition party branch offices and events—as evidence that the pre-election environment will be more heated than in 2011.

Participants view the ability of election observers—Tunisian or international—to counter voter intimidation or potential fraud as contingent on their observing the entire electoral process and not just election day. Respondents express diverging viewpoints about the value of Tunisian versus international observation; however, they generally agree on the value of nonpartisan election oversight.

VI. Political Leadership

Focus group participants increasingly view Tunisian political parties with skepticism, complaining that parties are focused on serving their own interests and are not prioritizing their duty to represent citizen concerns. The ruling coalition, and Ennahda more specifically, has not met expectations to provide clear policy programs that respond to citizen interests. Government supporters view opposition parties as impeding the work of the NCA.

If Tunisian opposition parties are to take advantage of opportunities to attract support, they must deliver persuasive messages that demonstrate the weaknesses of the ruling coalition while offering credible alternative solutions. While participants support the idea of opposition parties effectively holding government accountable, they are concerned that parties in the NCA are more focused on lobbing accusations at each other than on presenting sound projects that respond to citizens' needs.

Respondents' interest in alliances and parties created since the last elections, including Al Joumhouri and Nidaa Tounes, is tempered by their views that such groups are contributing to a divisive political environment. Confusion stemming from the number of parties in the 2011 elections left voters hoping for greater political consolidation. Voters view mergers and election coalitions as helpful in distinguishing between political options; however, mutual attacks in the media are hurting parties' reputations.

VII. Looking Forward

More than one year after national elections, Tunisians prioritize improvements in their daily lives over political progress. Localized concerns, including economic development, education reform, and security improvements, dominate participants' focus.

Respondents voice concerns that the economic situation will continue to deteriorate, pointing to inflation and the view that the government has not fostered sufficient job growth since taking office. Focus group participants clearly feel that their quality of life has deteriorated but not to the point that discontent will lead to mass action against the government beyond localized strikes or protests. Retirees and workers from sectors dependent on the state budget continue to hinge their hopes on the government's ability to revitalize the economy. Participants view long-term job creation, as opposed to temporary employment schemes, as the only way to adequately address economic challenges.

Serious attempts to counter corruption and increase government transparency would help increase citizen confidence in the country's leaders. Participants specifically list

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health care, education, agricultural production, and transport and service industries as areas requiring greater transparency and reform.

Participants consistently cite discrimination among regions as a barrier to healing wounds from the past and developing a democratic culture, which they view as essential to ending the current transition phase. Sidi Bouzid residents are most vocal about being abandoned by politicians since Tunisia's independence, though similar sentiments are also expressed in Gabès and Monastir. Residents in Tunis acknowledge a higher standard of living but also point to stresses on infrastructure, like public transportation and sanitation services, resulting from a greater influx of job-seekers from rural parts of the country.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

This study is both a continuation of previous research conducted by the Institute exploring citizens' opinions of the political transition in Tunisia since January 2011 and a retrospective on evolving attitudes in the year since the elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in October 2011. To determine the factors likely to influence citizens' assessments of the transition process, NDI conducted 12 focus groups with 121 participants throughout Tunisia in late October/early November 2012. The findings, drawn from participants' comments, are detailed below.

I. National Direction

As Tunisians reflect on the one-year anniversary of the 2011 NCA elections, two-thirds of focus group respondents feel the country is headed in the wrong direction. Participants blame political squabbling and indecision by the government and political parties—in the ruling coalition and the opposition alike—for what participants consider lost time that should have been focused on addressing key economic and security issues.

“Unfortunately, Tunisians lost confidence in one another. In every field, you don't trust the other, whether he is an instructor, a teacher, or a doctor.... What matters most is regaining confidence, especially in the government.” Male, Monastir, 42 years old, employed

“We didn't have a revolution—what happened in Tunisia was an ‘intifada’ (uprising). In Tunisia, nothing has changed. All political parties are looking out for their own interests. Before the revolution, there were a lot of corrupt people—and everybody knew them. Those people robbed the country of all its wealth. Now, we don't know who is corrupt and who is not because there are so many. This is shameful.” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 25 years old, unemployed

“There is more bribery and nepotism. There is a lack of security. We need a statesman who takes the right decisions. We have had enough of lagging behind. They work for their own interests and those of their parties.” Male, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

“No one in the government is serving the country. They are serving personal or partisan interests.” Male, Tunis, 35 years old, employed

“It's neither on the right track, nor on the wrong one. It's torn between the government that should be influential on the one hand, and the opposition that seeks to be effective, on the other hand. Even when we

notice some positive changes, the conflicts hamper any improvement."
Female, Gabès, 49 years old, employed

"Many people belonging to the political party in power have been appointed to different positions. Many people have been fired and have been replaced by some of the people belonging to the political party. We failed to improve Tunisia economically. Why is life so expensive now? We have to organize things economically to make all people lead a normal life." Female, Monastir, 53 years old, housewife

"I feel the current situation in Tunisia is much worse than before the revolution. Under the Ben Ali regime, I felt much better psychologically. Today, we are very worried, very tired, very stressed; the cost of living is getting more expensive. Now, the people for whom the revolution was made—I mean the poor and the needy—are completely forgotten. And those who were in jail and currently in power—thanks to the poor who revolted—have forgotten them and us, and their only concern is to be in power: they are struggling for positions and not for the purposes the revolution was made. Just look at the constituent assembly, you will notice the ferocious struggles between the parties and there is even disrespect between the members. How do they want people to respect them? We can't expect much from these people or parties." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 25 years old, student

Women and young men are most likely to acknowledge confusion about the current state of affairs and to indicate that the ruling coalition and government alike should take responsibility for communicating more clearly and frequently with citizens.

"Sometimes we are going in the right direction and sometimes not. We can say we are in the right direction when there is stability. Both the parties in the opposition and the ruling coalition are responsible. The government lacks experience in ruling which resulted in errors. The parties in the opposition deny any positive achievement even if it is a little one."
Male, Sidi Bouzid, 32 years old, employed

"I don't have a clue whether we are moving in the right or wrong direction, we are really confused due to the political turmoil and the way people behave. Sometimes I question whether there were really transparent elections, whether the prices will ever decrease, and whether the situation will be better, and sometimes black ideas cross my minds like the issue of Salafism and extremism." Male, Monastir, 26 years old, student

"I can't decide whether it's right or wrong. I didn't vote for the 'troika' because I knew nothing about them but I'm opposing Ennahda.¹ Now I can't say who is right and who is wrong. Is the 'troika' doing their job but the opposition is blocking their way? Or is it that the opposition wants to have a say but they are confused? These are the major questions asked by Tunisians who are watching from a distance." Female, Tunis, 35 years old, employed

"I am sure we are taking the right path. So, if we are capable of diagnosing the real problems in Tunisia we would be less frightened of such circumstances and explain things for our kids and know where we are exactly. However, I don't see the government telling us what is getting better, so there is fear." Female, Monastir, 35 years old, employed

Citizens continue to identify expanded freedoms of expression and association as proof that the country is moving in the right direction. Some participants link these rights specifically to newfound expectations of tracking the work of politicians and government.

"Mistakes and infringements still exist. I think we are on the right path in terms of freedom; we can express ourselves without restrictions. This meeting is proof that we enjoy more freedom of expression now. Protests about salaries are also manifestations of greater freedom because citizens can ask for their right to work. What we observe in the streets is normal because it's a natural situation after any revolution." Male, Monastir, 43 years old, employed

"What keeps me optimistic is the freedom of expression. The economy and the unemployment problems cannot be solved in a year and a half. We, the Tunisian people, have to change our mentality and work hard. A meeting like this one was impossible in the past. All this political competition will eventually create a good political environment one day. It is true that there is ambiguity because of the big number of parties, the lack of credibility, a lot of boring political debates, and media magnifying things." Male, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

"In spite of all the different opinions regarding the work of the government, we gained a positive thing: oversight. In the times of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, citizens wouldn't dare try to oversee the work of the government. Now the government is more careful because the

¹ Following the 2011 NCA elections, three leading political parties—Ennahda, Congress for the Republic (CPR), and Ettakatol—formed a governing coalition known as the 'troika.'

opposition will criticize its decisions, whether they are positive or negative. What matters most is that we get complete and correct information.” Male, Monastir, 47 years old, employed

“As far as religion is concerned, things are getting better in our society. You can exert your religious freedom. Before, [the government] used to track youth who frequented mosques but now this has been stopped. However, some people are using beards for other purposes and their own interests.” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 32 years old, employed

Those who consider the country to be headed in the right direction highlight the need for patience, to allow NCA members more time to build consensus on the draft constitution and for ministerial policies to take effect.

“Now we enjoy more freedoms that we didn’t even dare to talk about before. However, there is a condition for this to be beneficial—we should let the government do its job.” Female, Gabès, 30 years old, unemployed

“Whatever the conditions are, they are much better than before. People are no longer threatened or jailed. Islamists and politicians were tortured in the past. Now, we no longer have the same fears. Step by step, things will be better. The situation in Tunisia is much better than that of Egypt, Libya, Syria, and even Iraq.” Female, Gabès, 36 years old, unemployed

“There are good initiatives. Ennahda is progressing step by step although not quickly. The current government is paving the way for the upcoming one.” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 46 years old, employed

“We are going in the right direction. I am not saying this out of any partisan affiliation or alignment. The world is undergoing big changes and Tunisia can’t be isolated.... We can’t escape our engagement with the international institutions like the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. We cannot make a revolution without paying tax for it.” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 42 years old, employed

“I think the government and the whole country are on the right path. What’s going wrong is that we don’t receive correct and sound information. When I listen to the news I read between lines and scrutinize their truthfulness. The reason behind the current troubles is that the government officials don’t receive exact information. Mass media are turning things upside down. They mislead people by transmitting false information. It’s just like a family that quarrels because of a false rumor reported by a brother or a sister.” Female, Gabès, 47 years old, employed

The majority of respondents believe the quality of life for Tunisians has deteriorated since the elections, primarily due to diminished purchasing power in comparison to rapidly rising prices. Gabès and Sidi Bouzid participants are especially skeptical of a government-administered temporary employment scheme instituted in the final months of the interim government headed by Béji Caïd Essebsi.

“Sidi Bouzid has been further disadvantaged because of the government-administered temporary work scheme (الحظائر); people were laid off after having worked for one year and having barely started to achieve some economic stability for their families.” Female, Sidi Bouzid, 50 years old, retired

“The government tried to find a solution for unemployment so they gave 300 dinars as an unemployment stipend but this has only encouraged people to remain unemployed and not look for proper work.” Female, Gabès, 36 years old, unemployed

“No salary augmentation, life is very expensive. The price of one kilo of lemons costs 3.500 dinars, green peppers are 2.500. Many people wish now that Ben Ali did not leave the country and that they did not have such a revolution. It is in fact heartbreaking.” Female, Monastir, 50 years old, employed

Respondents' expectations for job creation have not been met, spurring frustration with unions and government alike. Participants continue to voice concern that favoritism and inefficiency are hurting economic recovery.

“The union [Tunisian General Labor Union or UGTT] has made the country a mess. Sit-ins and strikes in this period are not innocent. The simple citizen who is paid much less than the doctor is more patient than the doctor. There are people who deserve punishment but when the government wants to do that, the UGTT protests.” Male, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

“We have to defend and recover the assets that we already have here, such as the Monastir airport, Skanes Furniture [local furniture factory], and the textile factories that were sold. All these need to be recovered and divided equally.” Male, Monastir, 34 years old, employed

“The revenues from the industrial zone [in Gabès] have not been used to provide adequate healthcare facilities with specialists to treat health problems unique to our region. The funds that are being generated thanks to the hard work of the local population are used to benefit other regions.” Male, Gabès, 55 years old, employed

"I believe that the government has positive prospects and if we let them do their jobs, it would be more positive. For instance, they want to create projects in Sidi Bouzid. Every time they start a project and say they are going to employ 500 people, people revolt by saying, 'Why are these 500 employed and we aren't?' So, in this way they are not going to let the government work and then they say there was no development in the region. Development can't occur if you don't encourage it! Lately, they employed people in the CNAM [National Health Insurance Company] in Gabès; unemployed people protested against this, questioning the criteria of employment and the people who have just been employed didn't start working because of this. This is selfish!" Female, Gabès, 25 years old, student

"All the projects here have been developed locally and with no government funding at all. But many factories have shut down; 'Skanes Meubles' [furniture factory] and the textile factories were closed and no compensation was allocated to employees; the airport was sold and it is poorly managed. There are no outlets for the working class; there are no new projects and the old ones have not undergone any restructuring." Male, Monastir, 42 years old, employed

"We do not know how the funds that were injected into Sidi Bouzid after the revolution have been used and we don't know how the new construction projects are being financed." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 33 years old, employed

II. Citizen Priorities

Regardless of employment status, gender, age, or residence, respondents agree that economic recovery and job creation are essential priorities for Tunisian citizens. All participants speak of greater economic pressures due to rising costs of basic supplies and transportation; many mention corrupt or inefficient public administration as a complicating factor. Concerns about political instability have given way to fears of economically-driven crime, which adversely affects women.

"The poor, the needy, the homeless, and the jobless are a priority. Those who have jobs should stop asking for wage increases, they should stop being selfish and think about the situation of the jobless." Female, Monastir, 25 years old, student

"There should be revolutionary decisions especially in this period. The revolutionary policy-maker should not have hidden agendas. There should also be some revolutionary decisions in employment. We need to

encourage investment and help people launch their business so that we keep all the money in the country. I hope this investment would be Tunisian.” Male, Gabès, 37 years old, employed

“If I were a decision-maker, I would certainly employ people who are originally from this region, such as Gabès, Metouia, El Hamma.” Male, Gabès, 37 years old, employed

Respondents believe that addressing corruption and reforming public administration would increase productivity and improve the country’s economic outlook. Youth in particular mention the need to reform the tax system, seeing effective penalties on tax evasion as an important means of increasing state revenues.

“There is a lot of corruption going on in relation to recruitment and the people in the head office in Tunis are responsible for this. What I want to say is that people who are originally from Gabès should make decisions. If I were a decision maker, I would order people in the governorate to act accordingly.” Male, Gabès, 37 years old, employed

“We have to get rid of corrupt people in the Tunisian administration. This would help improve services. It’s worth noting that the Tunisian administration hasn’t collapsed. It could serve people in the hardest situations during the revolution. However, many officers are corrupt. So, it needs purging. Law must be respected.” Female, Gabès, 42 years old, employed

“We should stop thinking about the social classification of people according to their home towns. Whether we come from the country or from the town, we are all Tunisians. We should get rid of this discrimination in investment and we should foster the independence of the judiciary too because this would make investors feel secure.” Male, Tunis, 50 years old, employed

“Civil servants should work hard to lead the country forward. There should be a daily oversight of their work. We should test them. They don’t even give 20 percent of the effort they should be giving.” Male, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

“I would like also to highlight the issue of public services and the method of recruitment and appointment in all fields. We have recently noticed that the government has promised to reorganize recruitment drives under pressure from protests. The government lost its credibility. People protested after the releasing of the results of the recruitment process by phosphate

companies in Gafsa because the employees are very well-paid in that company. All the inhabitants of Gafsa want to work in that company. We notice the same situation in the chemicals plant of Gabès." Male, Monastir, 47 years old, employed

"We should spend more time changing peoples' mentalities. First, we don't need all these holidays. Second, the change in the administrations' working hours is not helpful. But above all, the mentality of public officials should change; so should their behavior with people. In the post office, for example, people are not doing their job ... the mobile phone and Facebook are always a priority. We wait for hours and then they ask us to come back the following day!" Female, Tunis, 35 years old, employed

"To guarantee transparency, the official must provide a statement of his income and that of his family before starting work. When he quits his position, he should give the same statement. This document should be published in newspapers once every six months. In this way, officials would bear in mind that they should serve the national interest, but not their personal interest." Male, Monastir, 47 years old, employed

Participants believe security is improving slightly, though they consistently mention the need for police to be vigilant and for their fellow citizens to respect the rule of law.

"I suggest more firmness in applying laws. Any person who violates laws should be punished. We should no longer have confidence in them." Female, Gabès, 44, employed

"I think law and order should be restored; everybody who breaks the laws should be punished. As the lady said, the police are not secure and this is due to the appearance of gangs claiming to protect the revolution. The origins of these gangs are militias and they are wrecking the country; they all grew beards and are supported by people in the government who say they remind them of their youth!" Female, Tunis, 36, employed

Regardless of the priority, participants view improved communication by decision-makers and a process for public consultation as important elements of any workable solutions to citizen concerns.

"Bourguiba in the past did his best to advise the people on different issues. What I want to say is that when the president of the country speaks out, he has to be convincing to people and make them aware of the fact that this is their country. Members of the NCA should make people aware

of the necessities of their country." Female, Monastir, 40 years old, employed

"The [work of the NCA] should be carried out through a consultation with the people to reach final decisions and provisions on many issues, such as law, the economy, and many other related fields." Male, Gabès, 39 years old, employed

III. Engagement and Activism

In the year since the NCA elections, citizens have remained interested in the political process and mention enhanced freedoms of expression and association. **Yet they criticize Tunisian media outlets for partisanship in fueling confusion over political developments.**

"I think the only benefit that we had from the revolution is freedom of the press. At least now I'll be able to vote for the appropriate party in the future." Female, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

"Media outlets are politicized. They work for the interests of certain groups for large amounts of money." Male, Monastir, 37 years old, employed

"Tunisian media has become very passive and hides the truth because different channels are politicized and unprofessional." Male, Gabès, 25 years old, employed

"I have never seen reporters hold a face-to-face interview with the president before. Now I see them doing that and interrogating ministers as well, which I was not used to in the past.... The media has its freedom of expression now and I wish that the reporters would just be credible on what they are presenting." Male, Gabès, 38 years old, employed

"The most important thing is that now everything can be said on TV. There are right and wrong news, I agree, but at least there is freedom to tell them and then people can choose what to believe. There are debates in which the interlocutors give a bad example to the spectator with their way of arguing." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 41 years old, employed

When asked what may hinder citizens' abilities to fully exercise their freedoms, women throughout the country cite harassment as a leading factor.

"Security is absent. I became very suspicious and cautious; I even started wearing a veil so as to avoid trouble. So, in the absence of security, my freedom is threatened. Added to this is the absence of tolerance; some people are imposing their views on other people. They accuse people of being atheists just because they don't dress in the way they would recommend them to follow. I'm not an atheist; I'm even more faithful than those who have knee-long beards!" Female, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

"As a Tunisian citizen, I claim the right to difference. I am a self-respecting person and I need to exert my freedom. Salafists gained a lot of freedom and they think that freedom begins and ends with them. As we accepted them, they need to accept us and respect our right to be different from them." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 25 years old, student

"I feel free, thank God, and let me admit that people are a bit scared nowadays because of the Salafists. I work like any other Tunisian woman. I am totally free to go outside, to restaurants and cafés." Female, Monastir, 25 years old, employed

"Freedom has limits. For example you can't go out at night. Rights also are limited—for example, the right to have a job. Look at the man here, he has had his bachelor's degree for five years but he hasn't found a job yet." Female, Tunis, 30 years old, employed

"I feel I'm disabled and my freedom no longer exists. The fact that when I pass by a bearded man, he would say, 'I ask God's forgiveness.' I consider this as aggression; it's violent. How can you advise me to wear the veil? It is a personal choice." Female, Tunis, 55 years old, employed

Respondents are divided on the extent to which they believe the interim government is effectively representing their interests. Some see elections as a legitimate process that brought leaders to power, while others believe parties are only focusing on their own interests.

"[The government] represents me to some degree. The current government is working under public pressure and supervision. It's the best government that could represent me. Let's take the example of the Interior Ministry. How can we expect them to change all corrupt officers overnight?" Male, Monastir, 44 years old, employed

"I used to respect the present government. I voted for them. Now, I don't think they represent me. They haven't met their obligations. They want to

make more money for themselves before they leave office.” Female, Monastir, 53 years old, housewife

“The majority of people can agree that this government is legitimate and legal; that is why it represents me even if we differ intellectually and even if I disagree with its policy. Every citizen should be represented by any legitimate government. We are no longer in dictatorship to say that this represents me and this does not.” Male, Gabès, 39 years old, unemployed

When discussing the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), however, participants consistently assert that elected officials are not meeting voters’ expectations.

“Some citizens are not well-educated but they have manners. They know how to discuss in a polite way. Some NCA members, including lawyers, lack good manners. Their tension at the NCA has stimulated citizens’ anger outside.” Female, Gabès, 36 years old, unemployed

“First of all, [NCA members] must reach a consensus in the constitutional assembly, because apparently they are unable to reach an agreement. They are stuck on the writing of the constitution; how can we rely on them to find solutions to the country’s problems?” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 25 years old, unemployed

“I consider [the NCA’s] members as vampires trying to suck citizens’ blood. Their salary is more than 4,800 dinars. There are more than 200 members and only 30 or 40 of them are present. In the first day of their work, they were offered a ‘Symbol’ car with a chauffeur and they refused it. They wanted another type of car—a ‘Passat’—to drive them.” Male, Gabès, 55 years old, employed

“I participated in the marches of April 9 that were repressed by the police and the militias. Members of the NCA came and talked with us. I talked to some of them because I know them. We spoke about the situation in Sidi Bouzid. We said that it doesn’t have a lobby. Sfax has a lobby but not Sidi Bouzid. Gafsa has the phosphate company but Sidi Bouzid has nothing.” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 52 years old, employed

When asked if they had engaged with political parties, respondents expressed hesitation.

“I am really happy that I didn’t vote because I know that politicians are only good at talking.” Female, Monastir, 26 years old, student

"I tried to communicate with one of the parties and then I hesitated. I preferred to inspect things from a distance and then take my final decision." Female, Tunis, 35 years old, employed

"I once went with people from Ennahda to one of their meetings because they insisted that I should come and see what they do. Then they started inviting me every day and we prayed together in the mosque until October 24 [2011] and then they disappeared. I was disappointed and I left the party although it won the elections." Male, Tunis, 28 years old, student

"When elections get closer, parties will be more active and try to convince citizens to vote for them. Now everything is on hold, and nothing is being done. There is a lot of gossip. We are waiting for a constitution and the next elections." Female, Monastir, 40 years old, employed

"What would make me join a political party is the hope of finding someone who listens to our problems; currently, there isn't any party that appeals to me." Male, Monastir, 26 years old, student

"Personally, in view of the experience with the RCD [Constitutional Democratic Rally] party, I am now very cautious about political parties. I thought, maybe, if I join CPR [the Congress for the Republic] or Ennahda now, there might come a day when I could be accused of having been a member in one of them! I chose to keep watching from a distance. I have the right to criticize all the parties as a free citizen. So I am only responsible for my beliefs and not those of the party leaders." Female, Gabès, 25 years old, student

"When a certain party is open to the views of different people, I would consider joining. Most of the parties now are looking for voters, but people have ideas. There are people who can help, can find solutions, can be beneficial, so why should they be discarded? At least, they should be heard and give their opinions." Male, Gabès, 25 years old, employed

IV. Constitutional Process

Participants are acutely disturbed by the passing of the one-year anniversary of the NCA elections, which also marked a symbolic deadline for drafting the country's new constitution. They also express frustration over NCA members' inability both to meet the deadline that they set for themselves and to communicate clearly to citizens the justification for delays.

"Thanks to the media, I have been able to follow the drafting process. I think that even though the process is slow, it is still acceptable. However, they need to find a solution concerning the next elections." Female, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

"I participated in the Kasbah III sit-in and we demanded a constituent assembly, but now I regret it. It has done nothing. The members of the NCA are getting very high salaries. This is unacceptable. They steal from the people." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 46 years old, employed

"They have been getting salaries for a year now and they haven't achieved anything yet." Male, Tunis, 50 years old, unemployed

"[The constitution] is not drafted in the right way; they are wasting a lot of time and a lot of money." Male, Monastir, 34 years old, employed

"I can't comment, because the constitution hasn't been drafted yet and they didn't respect the deadline. They are always asking for extensions and I wonder why they stay in their chairs if they are incompetent. They should resign and leave their places for more competent people." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 25 years old, unemployed

"I always watch the debates on Channel 21. When they discuss the chapters of the constitution, the conversation turns into violent quarrels. Citizens are expecting more important and urgent issues to be discussed. They should enact constitutional laws to settle order in the country. They finish at half past one, and then restart discussions to quarrel again and leave the assembly." Female, Gabès, 42 years old, employed

"The process has taken too much time. Some members just talk, but they are not aware of what they say. They are not specialists. They are discussing about the punctuation of words." Male, Monastir, 55 years old, employed

"They didn't respect the deadline and I think their work is illegitimate now. They didn't respect the nation, the government, and the people. The constitution should have been drafted by now and this would help Tunisia to recover from its current situation. They are working at leisure with complete disregard to the difficult situation we are living in." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 25 years old, student

"I am not knowledgeable enough to criticize this or that chapter, but I didn't like the way NCA members discuss issues. We hope to reach a

national compromise. NCA members only serve their political interests. We have to abide by God's will. Why didn't they accept a state that is guided by religion? This is because they aren't Muslims. We should say 'Tunisia is a Muslim country', but before that we need to say 'Tunisia is an Arab country.'" Male, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

Diverse opinions linger surrounding the issue of separation of powers in a future state.

Whether participants favor a presidential, semi-presidential, or parliamentary political system, few demonstrate specific knowledge of how each system is distinct and what each would mean to the average citizen in practice.

"Ennahda got the majority of votes. It helped the other parties of the troika. The idea of a parliamentary system is borrowed from the British parliamentary system. It's different from the presidential system, which allows the president to use the three powers. Every political party has a different opinion about the system to be adopted." Male, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

"I am not knowledgeable in politics, but I just follow news. The government plays a role in enacting laws and settling order in the country. The parliament should play the role of check and balance. It has to supervise, guide, and deter the government. There should be a balance of powers between the government and parliament. They have to be complementary." Female, Gabès, 49 years old, employed

"I prefer the presidential system. We used to have a powerful president at the time of Bourguiba. Now, everybody is having power but in reality nobody does anything and the president is no more powerful these days." Female, Tunis, 27 years old, student

"I opt for a presidential regime because it is more effective. The proof for this is that it works in the most powerful countries." Male, Monastir, 28 years old, unemployed

"Presidential. The experience of the NCA makes clear that a parliament is a failure. When they finish the constitution they will be of no use." Male, Tunis, 35 years old, employed

"I prefer a modified presidential system. A parliamentary system is hasty. Ennahda in its program supported the parliamentary system and now it backed down. They think now more about a modified presidential system because it is more balanced." Male, Gabès, 28 years old, unemployed

"I prefer the parliamentary system. It allows debate over different issues and any member of the parliament can draw the attention of other members to any problem they are not aware of." Female, Monastir, 40 years old, employed

The majority of focus group participants support the inclusion of specific references to the protection of the rights of women in the constitution. In many cases, participants made the case for their inclusion in order to focus on relevant responsibilities referenced in Islamic law. However, a minority of respondents challenged this view, asserting that the constitution should enshrine basic human rights without mention of gender.

"They have to mention [women's] rights in the constitution. Our Prophet Mohammed, in his farewell speech, asked men to treat women well." Male, Monastir, 44 years old, employed

"I think that women are complementary to men, they cannot be equal." Female, Monastir, 25 years old, employed

"Yes, I think so. There must be some specific right for women. But to state that we are equal, we are not equal. I am for the word 'complementary.' I am not for the word 'equal.' If we were equal, I wouldn't have the right for maternity leave." Female, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

"I prefer we talk about 'the citizen' without discrimination against men or women but if we stipulate on equality in everything we will ignore what God says in Quran about inheritance and this is a thorny subject so we should except it from equality." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 52 years old, employed

"Women's rights must be embedded in the constitution. This undoubtedly must be in conformity with Islamic Shari'a. Shari'a is not well-understood by some Tunisians. For instance, I don't consider Ennahda party as the voice of Islam. I am not criticizing it, but it's more political than Islamic. Shari'a, according to Ennahda, is that of Quran and Sunna. However, I think women's rights cited in the current Personal Status Code are not bad." Female, Gabès, 49 years old, employed

"There should be equal justice and not equality between men and women." Male, Gabès, 25 years old, employed

Tunisians continue to weigh the benefits of a constitutional referendum compared to the challenges that such a step would pose in further stalling the constitutional process.

"They are both risky. The NCA will vote according to partisan affiliation and in the referendum you can't guarantee that people would understand the content of the constitution before evaluating it." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 41 years old, employed

"It needs time. The referendum would take one more year and the country can't stand it, the situation is not promising, already." Male, Gabès, 34 years old, employed

"I think that it is pointless to hold a referendum, and what if Tunisians say 'no' to the constitution? We will have then to wait for three years to come up with a new one. I think this is nonsense." Female, Monastir, 25 years old, student

"I think the NCA should be responsible for that because Tunisians do not have enough political knowledge. Besides, one word may change the direction of the whole country. In addition, a referendum may be influenced by rumors." Female, Monastir, 55 years old, employed

"So why did we elect the NCA members? There is no need for this referendum. We wish the country to be stable soon. We wish order would be settled soon. The country is in a critical phase." Female, Gabès, 49 years old, employed

"I support the idea of a referendum because you cannot be a judge and a party in the same game. The NCA gives the product and we evaluate it but the way and the procedures of the referendum should be made clear to us." Male, Tunis, 34 years old, employed

"I support the referendum because I don't have much confidence in the NCA." Female, Tunis, 41 years old, employed

"I am in favor of the referendum because this will spare us the controversy that would emanate from the fact that the Assembly chose it on its own. People will tend to make a specific party responsible for the outcome." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 28 years old, student

"There should be a referendum. The NCA officials are not trustworthy. Some of them left their parties and joined others." Male, Tunis, 47 years old, employed

V. Elections and Voter Confidence

The ruling 'troika' coalition announced in October that the next national election could be held on June 23, 2013. In response, opposition parties asserted that such a timeframe is not feasible, instead suggesting that the vote be held in the fall of 2013. **Disagreement about political and technical requirements for organizing the next national elections reflects the lack of political clarity on the topic at the time of the focus group research.**

"Delays are normal. The president said June or July of next year, but we have exams, the holidays, and Ramadan, so it will probably be later."
Male, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

"The government lost its credibility. They declare something, and then change their minds later. They said that elections would take place next month [November 2012], but you don't know when it will really take place." Male, Monastir, 43 years old, employed

"I think the elections won't take place. I feel the ruling party is trying to take over the country, through activists everywhere, governors, etc."
Male, Monastir, 28 years old, student

"What matters is that [the elections] will be in 2012. I think they will occur this year because people will not wait more than that. If they don't happen in November or October, they will not happen at all." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 28 years old, student

Optimism in the run-up to the 2011 elections has been replaced by concerns over transparency and a future election management body's ability to maintain international standards. Still, some participants are hopeful that future elections will feature improvements compared to the 2011 vote.

"For elections to be credible, there should be complete transparency—results should be released at each polling station, the sorting and counting should be observed." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 42 years old, employed

"Last year everyone was happy but the next time things will be different because people know about the problems of last year. My mother didn't register. When she wanted to vote using her ID they sent her 14 kilometers away." Male, Tunis, 35 years old, employed

"I was very excited when I went to vote. It was the first time I had voted and seen my name written in electoral lists. I was very happy because I

would do something exceptional. I had confidence in the High Commission of Elections. The members were competent. Now, since the members of the commission are still unknown, the elections are not clear. The credibility of the commission is still doubtful. So I don't think I will vote next summer." Female, Gabès, 49 years old, employed

"[Voting] will be tough. It is time-consuming and they don't have enough time to do it which confirms that they aren't ready for elections now." Male, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

"I hope that the next elections will be more organized than last time. In 2011, there were people who didn't even know what to do in the polling station." Male, Gabès, 34 years old, employed

"Registration and organization of the elections will be easier now that we have the experience. There were many people who registered for the previous elections so they are already on the list." Female, Tunis, 45 years old, housewife

Respondents also voice concern over the potential for voter intimidation in future elections, specifically mentioning **the possibility that political parties will target vulnerable voters to secure more votes in what is expected to be a tight political competition.**

"I think a lot of problems will take place because everybody wants to take his part of the 'cake,' even by force." Male, Monastir, 25 years old, employed

"I think that political competition will be tougher because the mandate will be for five years this time. We shouldn't have doubts about the fairness of the elections." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 42 years old, employed

"The next elections will be more difficult. In the previous elections, people were spontaneous. Now, the parties that lost last time will do their best to win. The commission has to make additional efforts to supervise the process and avoid problems." Female, Gabès, 47 years old, employed

"I wish illiterate people could bring someone with them to help them and not let Ennahda choose for them." Male, Tunis, 47 years old, employed

"They should respect the laws they issue, first. For example, the CPR party did not provide its financial report to the committee yet and it was

charged 5,000 dinars. This party is ruling! So, laws should be respected when they are issued.” Male, Gabès, 28 years old, unemployed

“Everyone must present his or her plans. But most importantly, we must know where are their budgets from? There must be more transparency so that we make sure that the old regime is not coming back.” Female, Monastir, 40 years old, employed

“Nobody from the parties went to people who haven't voted to ask them why. The associations have to play a role here to raise consciousness about the importance of voting. We should make a law to fine people who don't vote because this is a duty as well as a right.” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 52 years old, employed

Participants invoke the need for voters to develop greater awareness of political parties and their candidates.

“Raising awareness is the missing element. The last elections were very ambiguous; parties didn't have a clear program. I attended a few rallies last year and they were far from being political, so we voted for the allegedly 'ready' party.” Male, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

“I think that some parties would reach close percentages but some others would receive an inconsiderable number of votes. Most of the people don't know half the parties.” Male, Gabès, 25 years old, employed

“Many people think it is just about a piece of paper and a queue. They have to understand that even if they don't want to give their voice to anyone, they should go and put a blank paper to say they don't trust anyone.” Male, Tunis, 28 years old, student

Expectations for increased political competition and tension in the run-up to Tunisia's next national elections are pervasive among focus group participants.

“First, this depends on the candidates. I am extremely worried about the next elections. We insist on honesty and credibility. Second, most parties changed their agenda.” Female, Gabès, 40 years old, employed

“Parties will have the same chance but the messages parties broadcast should be about their programs and not about attacks on other parties.” Male, Tunis, 36 years old, employed

"I think parties will have equal chances but there is one party, Nidaa Tounes, which is monopolizing peoples' minds because they seem to have a real alternative." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 39 years old, employed

"It is true that political money will play a role but we should be paying attention. The ISIE [election commission] had no relation with any party that won so we should not doubt the credibility of results." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 38 years old, unemployed

Participants express divergent opinions about the value of Tunisian versus international observers; however, they consistently acknowledge that observers play an important role in dissuading fraud and boosting citizen confidence in the election process.

"[Observers'] presence is vital to prevent any cheating but in spite of their presence, breaches can happen." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 25 years old, unemployed

"Domestic observers can spot all problems encountered during elections. Their reports may help overcome potential problems in future elections." Female, Monastir, 40 years old, employed

"Observers were inside the electoral offices. Nobody was outside. So you couldn't supervise what people did outside. I saw many members from different political parties who attempted to influence elders in front of polling stations. The supervisors were independent people. That's why they were honest and very credible. Supervision must be outside the polling stations also." Female, Gabès, 47 years old, employed

"I worked in a polling station and I saw how Tunisian observers worked. However, international observers take notes and show interest in the election process. I witnessed a lot of problems on election day and the Tunisian observers didn't intervene." Male, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

"Yes, we need both Tunisian and international observers, because the observer working for a particular party is going to be sure of the number of votes his party received; so, there can be no transgression in this way." Male, Gabès, 28 years old, unemployed

VI. Political Leadership

One year following the NCA elections, focus group participants view Tunisian political parties as primarily interested in serving their own interests and attaining power—through both coalition-building at present and competition in future elections.

"All parties just give promises, but in practice do little. All of them view Tunisia as a sheep. Their aim is to get the best part of the meat." Female, Gabès, 42 years old, employed

"There is a great variety [of parties] but our country is too small and the number [of parties] is too big. The paper we use to vote contains too many logos. How many are we supposed to memorize?" Male, Tunis, 34 years old, employed

"I think the number [of parties] has gone up considerably and most of them are not serious. There is too much talk and little action. And they try to harm each other's reputation. I think their main role is to attack each other." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 24 years old, student

"There are no parties who get close enough to people to know their problems, expectations, worries, ambitions..." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 35 years old, employed

"The parties now are the problem and not the solution. Ordinary people made this revolution but these politicians took over this revolution. For instance, Meherzia Laabidi [co-vice president of the NCA] did not even realize that Ben Ali escaped the country then she came here to be appointed in such a position. We voted for them but unfortunately they disappointed us. We are living in tough times and they got everything while they did not deserve it." Male, Gabès, 37 years old, employed

"I think the political scene is not clear yet. The revolution has not yet accomplished its aftermath. After every revolution it is quite normal to have this kind of dilemma. We're waiting for it to end so that good parties can be distinguished from the bad ones." Female, Tunis, 45 years old, housewife

If Tunisian opposition parties are to take advantage of opportunities to attract support, they must deliver persuasive messages that demonstrate the weaknesses of the ruling coalition while offering credible alternative solutions.

"The competence of the party members is what will make the difference. Some members don't convince the audience when they speak to the public. Better communication would help convince us." Female, Gabès, 36 years old, employed

"The political parties that represent the opposition are in fact a real problem. Opposition just creates problems. Many members of the National Constituent Assembly are just showing off on TV and they are making propaganda. They just misunderstood freedom. They are ignorant, inexperienced, and most of them belonged to the Ben Ali regime. I have a negative opinion of them." Male, Gabès, 44 years old, employed

"The disappointment we felt after the last elections will help us make more mature decisions and be open to different political parties." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 50 years old, retired

"They change their agenda quickly. For example, the PDP [Progressive Democratic Party] was a big, activist, and famous party. They have changed a lot though ... now they are close to Nidaa Tounes." Female, Gabès, 49 years old, employed

"I would like to discuss an idea. The opposition and media outlets are not serving the interests of the country. They are liars because they will attack any elected government, whether it is Ennahda or any other party. Even if Ennahda didn't win, they would show the same attitude towards the government. Suppose Ennahda would lose the elections, which party deserves to be elected? Which party can do better? The reaction of the opposition would be the same. We aren't worried about the past, but we are worried about the future." Female, Gabès, 42 years old, employed

"The opposition blames the government because it didn't make progress. However, the government can't proceed in the actual circumstances. The sit-ins are countless. Even capital holders changed their mind about launching projects. Many foreign investors are worried about security conditions in Gabès. An important project was stopped though it would have employed many jobless people in the region." Female, Gabès, 42 years old, employed

Respondents view the emergence of political blocs, most notably Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes, with interest, but their opinions are tempered by concerns that growing cleavages are contributing to a polarized political environment.

"There should be only two big parties. The winner will dictate the government, but will have to work with the other." Female, Gabès, 47 years old, employed

"I think it is a healthy aspect of a good political scene to have two sound parties which is the case of Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. I think we are on the right path as far as this point is concerned." Male, Monastir, 33 years old, employed

"I wish the smaller parties would join to form a big party so as to save the votes from loss as in the previous elections." Female, Tunis, 37 years old, employed

"Most of the parties represent a minority of the people. They hold the opinions of a specific category of people, but no one appeals to the majority." Male, Gabès, 28 years old, student

"I think that the Tunisian society is divided into two groups—one group is trying to save the country and another group is attempting to destroy it. The number of people who are trying to destroy the country is much bigger. I was really frightened during the last troubles in Gabès. In spite of the efforts to make reforms, the percentage of people who seek to undermine the country is bigger, that's why we can't make progress." Female, Gabès, 35 years old, employed

VII. Looking Forward

More than one year after national elections, Tunisians prioritize improvements in their daily lives over political progress. Localized concerns, including economic development, education reform, and security improvements, dominate participants' focus.

Sidi Bouzid residents reference historic marginalization and point to a deterioration in security—including increased crime and harassment of women—as evidence that the region continues to be a target.

"The major problem we have here is the lack of security. We know that there are groups purposely manipulating the security in our region so we don't benefit from investment." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 37 years old, employed

"In my mind, it seems instability is being done on purpose, as if to punish us and the region for having started the revolution. Even the media is not doing us justice, and security issues are not dealt with so that no

investment takes place here and we are not aware of our choices locally and what we should do to bring investment.” Male, Sidi Bouzid, 41 years old, employed

Residents of Monastir view their security situation more positively, prioritizing educational reform as necessary to improve relations between citizens and encourage a stronger work ethic.

“To change mentalities, education has to be reformed. The Tunisian administration should also undertake reform. Corruption and nepotism should be stopped.” Male, Monastir, 40 years old, employed

“Restoring the Tunisian educational system is very crucial. The Tunisian citizen is creative, innovative, and cultivated. Unfortunately, the educational system has been awkward for years. If we succeed to change or restore that system we could create new people and new society.” Male, Monastir, 47 years old, employed

“The mother is like a school. If you prepare her well you will prepare people with good ethics. Nowadays, the mother no longer brings up children. She is outside earning money. Unfortunately, the mother doesn't play her basic role, which is bringing up generations. She can't even see her children.” Male, Monastir, 50 years old, employed

“Education is fundamental and it is the role of school to train people how to behave. Unfortunately, many people are taking the wrong path. There is bribery in the administration and if you go to withdraw a document from the administration, it takes you months. There used to be a citizen supervisor who controls and keeps an eye on how things would go in the administration. Now, even if such people check the markets for high prices no one listens to them. All officers are facing difficulties in applying the law, such as in the central market in Tunis. Some of these officers are inclined to get bribery.” Female, Monastir, 53 years old, housewife

Protests following an employee recruitment process at the local chemical factory framed discussions in Gabès.

“Gabès is a coastal region. It has gained nothing as a touristic or industrial place. The government should go for more job opportunities in this industrial complex even though we are deeply affected by this pollution. Good salaries can keep people alive in this case. The industrial complex should provide the governorate with enough money to improve the infrastructure. There are millions of dinars emanating from this chemical

complex, but Gabès does not in fact have a good road, no good road, many people are affected by this pollution. There should be at least a payment of one day from the salary of these workers to the governorate to improve the roads in Gabès. There should be a university campus here with new disciplinary subjects such as engineering and a Faculty of Medicine that allows our students to study here. The chemical group financed many hospitals in the country, such as in Sfax, Tunis, Monastir, but not Gabès.” Male, Gabès, 38 years old, employed

Residents of the capital believe price hikes affect them more than they do other regions.

“In Sidi Bouzid, one can live on 10 dinars a day. In Tunis this is impossible.” Female, Tunis, 28 years old, unemployed

“Life in the regions is much more affordable and the quality of living is better.” Female, Tunis, 30 years old, employed

“The ministries should be decentralized—this would reduce the pressure on the capital to provide services and give more autonomy to regions.” Male, Tunis, 34 years old, employed

Serious attempts to counter administrative corruption and increase government transparency would help increase citizen confidence in the country’s leaders. Participants specifically list health care, education, agricultural production, and transport and services industries as areas requiring reform.

“Everyone should pay their taxes. There are many people who don’t meet this obligation and it hurts all of us. I lived in France where everyone pays their taxes—the poor people and ministers alike.” Female, Sidi Bouzid, 33 years old, employed

“What I am going to say is personal. To solve the economic problem, the government has two options, either to borrow money to rebuild the country’s economy or to end up with what we are experiencing now. The Essebsi government has overburdened the country with loans so this government shouldn’t do the same. So the ultimate and unique option for them is to increase the prices of milk, eggs, etc. so as to bring a remedy to the economy.” Male, Monastir, 26 years old, student

“We can’t have a total elimination of bribery, but to reduce bribery.... There should be a clear transparency in the Tunisian administration which

should be followed by all people." Female, Monastir, 40 years old, employed

"As a citizen, I would like to know about many things. There should be transparency of the administration. Also, the information should be accessible to the citizen. Along with the reducing unemployment, I would prefer to find a cleaner country with people who know how to behave and avoid throwing rubbish everywhere, because I find Tunisia very dirty. Even when schoolchildren misbehave at school, no one talks to them and asks them to behave well." Female, Monastir, 36 years old, employed

"Local development projects take time—the priority should be to restructure public administration and remove political appointees." Female, Sidi Bouzid, 40 years old, employed

Participants consistently cite discrimination among regions as a barrier to furthering development of a democratic culture and healing wounds from the past—something they view as essential to ending the current transition phase.

"People have to change their minds concerning finding a job only in big cities like Sousse or Sfax. In every region, citizens can find a job: in the South they can work in agriculture, in the North, they might work in trade or commerce. I don't know, I'm pretty sure that in some areas there is a fertile atmosphere for creating jobs. The big cities are overburdened with job-seekers; this creates stress and chaos everywhere which will lead to offenses." Female, Monastir, 26 years old, student

"Tunisians have to forget regionalism. The conception of regionalism nowadays is different from its conception before. The coastal towns in Tunisia are privileged." Male, Monastir, 50 years old, employed

"We have been discriminated against in the past, and now we are trying to make up for this lost time. It is chaotic for now, but there is hope that things will get better. People need to mobilize, work, and contribute so the region can improve." Male, Sidi Bouzid, 41 years old, employed

"There is no room for comparing Tunis to the regions. I am originally from the South where there is no difference between the rich and needy—we all have the same lifestyle. The economic disparity and inequality between social classes in Tunis is significant." Female, Tunis, 45 years old, housewife

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Focus group results reveal dissatisfaction with the status quo and anxiety regarding the direction Tunisia is heading. The findings suggest growing levels of distrust of the coalition government and fatigue with the state of political paralysis, which many believe is fueled in part by opposition parties seeking to build their profiles. Participant responses demonstrate that they believe in the power of citizen participation and have faith that the country can plot a positive way forward if the government can better listen and better respond to its citizens. Tunisia's economic problems will take years to address, but participant responses in this study suggest that greater citizen inclusion in government can increase satisfaction with the economic situation, even independent of a major financial upturn. Respondents demonstrate openness to alternative political ideas and solutions, though they hesitate to support opposition parties as real alternatives to the present government.

Handle Development Issues Realistically and Transparently

Because it directly impacts their quality of life, development is the top concern for participants. Frustration with the slow pace of development is already significant, and high expectations following the 2011 elections for fast-paced political progress increase the likelihood of a largely dissatisfied and disgruntled citizenry. It is unrealistic to expect Tunisia's government to improve economic development in the country to the extent and pace that citizens desire, but out-sized promises or poor communication from the government have exacerbated citizens' lack of confidence that the country can recover economically. Equally concerning is citizens' sensitivity to the distribution of resources intended to promote development. Participants' tendency to compare development in their areas to what they believe others are receiving represents a threat to stability because any perception of unfairness immediately raises the specter of regionalism and political favoritism. Appropriate communication and transparent handling of development decisions can increase citizen satisfaction and defuse a potential trigger for conflict.

Recommendations:

- Communicate honestly about regional development progress by offering realistic timeframes for tangible improvements; publicize and celebrate any progress in development as a step in the right direction.
- Manage development expectations by bringing citizens and government together to discuss development plans and progress, to increase citizen understanding of the development process, and to encourage citizen participation in and contribution to the process.
- Initiate a public discussion about equitable distribution of development-related resources and solicit citizen input on acceptable distribution criteria.

- Establish a reporting mechanism through which the government can demonstrate that it is distributing development resources fairly and transparently and through which civil society organizations and citizens can easily access information related to development distribution in a digestible, understandable form.

Increase Consultation between Government, Elected Officials, and Constituents

More than one year after national elections, Tunisians are more focused on the desire for improvements in their daily lives than on political progress. Participants share a common view that their living standards are deteriorating due to increases in prices for basic goods and reduced purchasing power, which is further hampered by high unemployment rates. Based on the focus group results, citizens place the lion's share of the blame on the interim government and members of the NCA.

When participants in this study cite a responsive government as one of their aspirations for the country, it signals that they expect a different and much closer relationship with their government than Tunisians have known in the past. They value close government-citizen ties because they believe that is the best way to ensure government officials will work hard to improve their quality of life and to increase the chances that government officials will respect citizen views. In addition, participants' optimism toward democratic development, future elections, and a potential constitutional referendum is rooted in their desire to see empowered citizens holding their government accountable and contributing to decision-making. Respondents are confident that they are capable of making valuable contributions to public life and are enthusiastic to help define the country's destiny. Their clear demand that they be consulted on the development of a constitution and be allowed to weigh in on that constitution through a referendum is proof of this belief.

Recommendations:

- Conduct extensive consultations—through elected officials, traditional authorities, media, and other venues—with citizens on all major issues facing the nation, such as development, regionalism, and political systems.
- Undertake a wide-reaching consultation effort around the draft constitution and demonstrate seriousness and respect for citizen views by incorporating their input into the final document.
- Respect citizens' desire to protect their interests by allowing them to participate in the approval of any permanent constitution, whether through a referendum or other means.
- Increase opportunities for citizens or their representatives to meet with elected officials to communicate their concerns and ideas, such as through increased travel and media appearances by elected officials and greater use of SMS and social media to engage wider audiences.

- Support members of the National Constituent Assembly, financially and technically, to allow them to return to their constituencies at regular intervals to hold consultations with citizens and to demonstrate that citizens' concerns are being addressed.
- Create additional mechanisms for citizens to be involved in government decision-making, especially at the local and state level, such as through select engagement with community-based organizations or others on locally relevant issues like development and resource distribution.
- Use the media to dramatically increase government communication with citizens from current levels and to solicit citizen feedback.
- Demonstrate through words and deeds that the opinions of all citizens will be solicited, respected, and considered, regardless of governorate, political party, gender, age, or economic class.

Communication between Political Parties and Citizens

Participants clearly view political parties as having an important role to play in Tunisia. They see peaceful competition among parties as critical to the country's democracy, as vital to its ability to devise solutions to improve the country, and as the only way citizens decide among real choices during elections. They note, however, that the ability of political parties to have these positive effects is limited by what they perceive as an uneven playing field. In addition, participants have mixed views on the current group of political parties in Tunisia, primarily because of their failure to convince the public that they are operating in the people's interest and their inability to present a vision for the country that can be understood and articulated by the population. These issues will need to be addressed if parties are to play the role that citizens desire.

While citizens see the consolidation of political parties through mergers and coalitions as a positive development, the current focus on negative political attacks discourages citizen trust in parties. The focus groups reveal a significant interest in and growing demand for alternative political ideas and even new political leadership. A portion of participants who acknowledge that they voted for Ennahda and other ruling coalition partners express regret. While this does not translate into immediate demands for the government's departure, the population feels insecure about their choices at the ballot box, viewing opposition parties and the ruling coalition with equal skepticism. There is a clear opportunity for any democratic personality or force able to engage citizens and outline a clear, low risk, and believable path toward change. For parties to take advantage of the current environment, they must deliver persuasive messages that both acknowledge citizen frustration with the current government and elected officials and offer credible alternative solutions. These contrasting messages must be built around important issues that affect the lives of ordinary citizens, such as quality of life or the economic development of the country.

Recommendations:

- Initiate a discussion on how to strengthen the role of political parties in the political and electoral process.
- Identify opportunities and adopt new rules and procedures to enhance parties' ability to communicate to the public during the election campaign period.
- Undertake political party strengthening programs within all political parties that focus on methods for understanding public opinion and communicating with potential voters.
- Consider options for revising the campaign financing system to level the playing field for political parties that are legitimately contesting the elections while not rewarding political parties that only want to benefit financially from government assistance.

Take Visible and Tangible Steps to Tackle Corruption

The scale of government corruption described by participants, whether actual or perceived, is crippling public confidence in the government's competence. Citizens who are unable to find employment in government without connections feel disenfranchised, and reports and rumors of corrupt recruitment processes increase citizens' impatience with the pace of political reform. Until strong, credible, tangible, and public steps are taken to address government corruption, citizens will not believe any government's claim that development and reform are proceeding apace.

Recommendations:

- Empower independent anti-corruption institutions to address the issue by providing adequate and consistent funding and granting them all the necessary investigatory and prosecutorial powers.
- Increase transparency on financial matters and publicize national, governorate, and municipal budgets so that citizens are better able to hold their officials accountable.
- Enforce existing laws and adopt any necessary additional laws to reduce financial corruption.
- Demonstrate seriousness on financial corruption by publicly identifying wrongdoers and assigning stiff punishments, including dismissal, restitution, and/or prosecution.

Invest in and Provide Time for Voter Education

Participants' responses in this study demonstrate the value of voter education for the Tunisian population: during the elections, many absorbed important lessons about democracy, fairness, and good governance. But the elections also demonstrate the cost of truncated voter education efforts, as some participants labeled the voter registration exercise as unfair because not enough people were informed about the

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process. Future elections and a possible constitutional referendum present even more opportunities for the population to misunderstand or misinterpret the process and for misinformation to spread quickly through rumors. With the likelihood of emotions running high on polling day, insufficient attention to voter education could have severe consequences.

Recommendations:

- Ensure adequate time in the electoral calendar for extensive voter education prior to voter registration and polling to increase the legitimacy and credibility of the vote in the eyes of the public.
- To prevent potentially violent misunderstandings, place an emphasis on educating the public about rules and regulations—especially voter eligibility and a political party code of conduct—to clarify who will be voting and how parties should behave.
- Publicize rules about counting and tabulation procedures to increase confidence in the credibility and legitimacy of the process.

APPENDIX A: Focus Group Locations and Participant Demographics

Participant Profiles

- **121 participants** from Greater Tunis, Sidi Bouzid, Gabès, Monastir

Gender	Count
Female	58
Male	63

- **Fieldwork** conducted from October 30 to 7 November

Age	Count
25-34	42
35+	79

- **Diversity** of ages, professions and neighborhoods within each group

Profession	Count
Employed	86
Unemployed	11
Housewives	13
Students	10

- **Nine to twelve participants** per group