



# NDI

NATIONAL  
DEMOCRATIC  
INSTITUTE

FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

TUNISIA

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS  
GROUPS IN TUNISIA

## **The state of Tunisian Democracy: Citizens express their views**

MARCH 2018



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Conducted February 7 to February 14, 2018

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March 2018

National Democratic Institute



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This report is made possible through funding from the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) under award No. S-NEAAC-15-CA-1042. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of MEPI or the United States Government.

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# PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA

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## NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

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

# PREFACE

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In December 2017, Tunisia marked three years since the first elected parliament, the Assembly of People's Representatives (ARP) began its work. While the ARP has adopted some key pieces of legislation during its tenure, including laws on anti-terrorism law and the creation of the constitutional court, numerous pieces of priority legislation have yet to be finalized. Within the current environment of growing frustration among citizens demanding substantive changes to address the entrenched obstacles of corruption, lack of economic opportunity, poor education, and regional disparities, Tunisia's parliament, government and political leaders must adopt meaningful reforms to facilitate real improvements in citizens' daily lives.

Tunisia is due to hold its first-ever municipal elections in May 2018, with tens of thousands of candidates competing for seats on 350 municipal councils. The elections were mandated in the 2014 constitution, which was passed during the country's transition to democracy following the 2011 revolution. What has been, to date, a highly centralized government is anticipated to devolve power and responsibility to the municipal level over a phased period of several years. Enabling legislation is pending in the Tunisian parliament. The elections, which were supposed to have taken place in 2016, have been postponed a number of times for a variety of technical and political reasons. Finally resolving the uncertainty of a confirmed election date, following a consultation effort with political parties led by the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), the Tunisian president announced through a decree a set date for spring 2018 elections: with military voting to be held on April 29, 2018 and general voting on May 6, 2018.

NDI organized this round of focus groups in early February 2018. Since March 2011, NDI has conducted regular qualitative research in Tunisia to provide political and civic leaders with objective information about citizens' attitudes. This 19th round of research—the eighth organized by NDI since the 2014 elections—sought to gauge the public's evaluation of the performance of the government, parliament and members of parliament (MPs), gather views on some of the more pressing matters facing the country, and assess citizens' awareness of and expectations for the upcoming local elections and decentralization process.

Citizens participated in 12 focus group discussions between February 7 and 14, sharing their views on the following topics:

- The direction of the country and priorities that affect citizens' daily lives;
- The performance of parliament, confidence in it and the extent to which it is seen as fulfilling its key roles;
- How citizens obtain information on the work of parliament, including use of the parliament's website, Twitter account and Facebook page;
- Whether parliament is seen as concerned with the challenges faced by women and youth, whether women and youth feel represented by their counterparts in parliament, and what laws should be prioritized to better address the challenges faced by Tunisian women and youth;



- Perceived expectations and priorities for municipalities in general and preferences across a
- specific list of potential prerogatives for local councils;
- Local and municipal election awareness and voting intentions, as well as related barriers;
- Perceived impact of financial independence at the local level;
- Awareness and perceptions of the ISIE and of domestic election observation organizations;
- The biggest economic, corruption and security problems facing each region.

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

**Focus Group Research :** Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a moderator and following pre-set guidelines. The purpose of focus group research is to understand the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of respondents who are recruited for the exercise. Focus groups are particularly useful in gaining a deeper appreciation of the motivations, feelings, and values behind respondents’ reactions. In addition, the group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas—thus providing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held—that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys. Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of respondents, typically eight to 12 per group. Depending on the situation, however, groups may be slightly smaller or larger. For example, a women’s group in a more isolated area may benefit from a larger guest list because it is likely that one or more of the respondents will refuse to speak at length, even if pressed. Focus group findings are only a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. The conclusions of this report therefore only represent opinions held when research was conducted in early February 2018.

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

**Method :** Before conducting the research, NDI developed a moderation guide that reflected the themes and questions they have come to identify as priorities for their various partners and clients in their day to day work in Tunisia. A test focus group was held on February 5; based on this session, the draft moderation guide was modified to improve discussion flow and to ensure that the topics could be explored within a two-hour session. From February 7 to 14, 2018, NDI held 12 focus groups with a total of 117 respondents in four cities across Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Bizerte, Béja, and Medenine. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI divided respondents at each location into three distinct demographic groups:

- 1) Mixed gender youth (ages 21–34);
- 2) Women 35 years old and older; and,
- 3) Men 35 years old and older.

Each group comprised up to 10 respondents. The final gender breakdown was 52 percent men and 48 percent women. Respondents were selected and pre-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions. Additional detail on respondents' demographic profiles can be found in Appendix A of this report.

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

**Group Locations :** The 12 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in four locations throughout Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Bizerte, Béja, and Medenine (see the map in this section). Locations selected for the study were urban or semi-urban areas. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location, and voting patterns in the 2014 elections.

- Greater Tunis was selected because it encompasses the capital, is the largest city of Tunis and is the national center for public administration and commerce.
- Bizerte is located on the north coast of Tunisia and is known for its economic diversity, including several military bases, year-round tourism and manufacturing.
- Located in the northwest, Béja has some of the most fertile soil of Tunisia which has contributed to significant agricultural richness in the area. Despite this fact, residents of Béja are favorable towards several economic and social reforms.
- Containing nine delegations, including the biggest island in the country, Medenine was selected as representative of the southern governorates for this round of focus groups. Medenine is known for its ports, tourism, fishing, and farming.

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

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

# MAP OF TUNISIA

The locations selected for this wave of focus groups are identified with an “X”.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The findings of this report provide insights into public opinion in Tunisia in early February 2018. Based on 12 focus group discussions, with 117 Tunisian respondents, the report summarizes the public's evaluation of the performance of the parliament and members of parliament (MPs), and views on some of the more pressing matters facing the country (such as the economy and corruption), as well as its awareness of and expectations for the upcoming decentralization process and municipal elections. A summary of the main findings can be found below. The full results, along with selected quotations from respondents, are detailed in the Principal Findings section of this report.

## National Direction

Tunisians were not satisfied with the direction in which their country is going. This sentiment was equally shared among young and old; however, men were more likely to say it was going in the right direction compared to women or youth. From a regional perspective, feelings around the direction of the country were slightly more positive in Greater Tunis and Medenine compared to Bizerte and Béja.

Some respondents were able to admit that things were headed in the right direction. Optimism was mostly supported by: 1) perceived improvements in freedom of speech; 2) the fact that Tunisia is a relatively new democracy and that an adjustment phase is to be expected; and, 3) by the upcoming municipal elections. A few also felt that the economy was improving or going well.

The two major themes most commonly and consistently identified when asked to specify what is going wrong were the economic welfare of Tunisians and corruption.

- Nearly all respondents agreed that unemployment and inflation are significant challenges in Tunisia today. Younger respondents were frustrated with not being able to find a job after graduating and older women described the hardships their children are encountering after graduation. As well, respondents were frustrated that prices continue to increase.
- Many respondents pointed to the nature and extent of corruption as a prime example of why they felt Tunisia was headed in the wrong direction. Respondents seemed to focus mostly on corruption in public administration and in employment practices.

A significant segment of each session was dedicated to gauging respondent sentiment towards parliament and members of parliament. Respondents were specifically prompted to discuss how well their parliament is fulfilling its three key roles.

- Most respondents did not believe that parliament is fulfilling its role of passing laws; more accurately, they felt parliament was not passing the right kinds of laws. Generally, respondents felt that parliament passed two types of laws: laws that only benefit the upper class and MPs (e.g., laws to increase their salaries) and laws that do not address the immediate economic needs of Tunisians. Almost all groups mentioned the recent finance law, which they perceived as unfair to the middle class. They noted feeling frustration regarding the poor timing of the increase in taxes, and their overall belief that the law makes the Tunisian financial situation worse.
- Respondents had trouble finding examples or remembering achievements in the area of government oversight. Respondents saw parliament as failing in this role mostly because respondents did not perceive any improvements in the country's economic or social situation. Respondents felt there was a lack of consistency in how government conducted oversight; it was seen as partisan and inconsequential.
- Finally, respondents continued to be particularly vocal and critical of how poorly they believe their elected officials are representing them, a sentiment amplified by the lack of contact or presence by MPs in their constituency and an increasingly entrenched belief that their MPs are using the position for their own or their party's benefit. Admittedly, not all MPs were seen in this light; however, the vast majority were.

There was near-unanimous agreement that the level of confidence citizens have in their parliament is decreasing. In fact, many have disconnected entirely. This shift in confidence has also led to a significant gap in trust between citizens and MPs, and between citizens and parliament as an institution. Many respondents felt the best way parliament could regain their confidence was to implement the laws they pass, focus on what is important to Tunisians, and engage with citizens.

#### **Engagement with parliament**

The discussions consistently revealed that very few Tunisians actually seek out information on the work of parliament in any proactive fashion. In fact, many respondents do not follow parliament through the media at all. Respondents will only do any proactive research if they happen to hear something of particular interest that catches their attention; when this happens, it tends to be an online search.

If they do come across news on the parliament, it is most likely to be something they saw on television, on the Internet, or on the news feed on Facebook. Radio was only rarely used by a few respondents whereas magazines and print newspapers were very rarely used. Parliament's official website and Facebook page were not very well known, and even if advertised, it would not be a very appealing destination since respondents don't feel they would get the full story or because they are just too disconnected from politicians and parliament.

In the sessions held exclusively with women, respondents were asked to weigh in on their feelings about women and parliament. The main results from this exercise included:

- Respondents were split on whether they felt parliament was concerned with the challenges women face.
- While some were pleased with the programs and laws that have been introduced to support and defend the rights of women and their position in society, some felt implementation has been weak or that parliament has not focused on the right priorities.
- There was moderate awareness of some landmark laws that have been recently introduced, including: elimination of violence against women law, amendment to the personal status code regarding marriage to non-Muslims, inheritance law and the law of equality between men and women.
- Women also had mixed feelings as to whether or not female deputies represent them. A few female MPs were identified as standing apart from others in terms of representing women's interests overall.
- Most explained that one of the reasons they do not feel well represented by female MPs is because these MPs don't engage with women directly nor are they seen as focusing on the real problems women in Tunisia face such as employment or economic rights.

In the sessions held exclusively with youth, respondents were asked to weigh in on their feelings about youth and parliament. The main results from this exercise included:

- In their responses, youth expressed their sense that parliament is not concerned with the challenges they face, that they are not adequately represented by young MPs, and furthermore, that they don't know any MPs from their generation.
- Youth reported feeling that their age demographic is underrepresented in the ARP. They felt that MPs don't understand the needs and priorities of Tunisian youth in general and (similarly to frustrations expressed by older Tunisians) they felt that MPs don't engage with them to discuss their problems, especially as they relate to employment.
- There was very little awareness of any law passed to help youth over the past few years. A few mentioned the dignity contract, the law on drugs, and a law to find jobs for youth in poor families. Ultimately, youth respondents did not feel any of these laws helped them.

## Election Credibility and Transparency

As noted in this report's preface, local elections are Tunisia's next step towards elected, representative governance at all levels.

- Nearly all respondents had heard of the upcoming elections, however there was general confusion and uncertainty regarding the date on which they can vote (May 6th).
- Almost all citizens were aware of the municipality to which they belong.
- There was very little familiarity with the term or concept of decentralization.
- Respondents expected that the municipal elections will lead to more immediate and effective solutions to their regional problems, including cleanliness and pollution, and they expect greater regional access to services that previously would have required approval from or a trip to Tunis.
- To get to know the local candidates and candidate lists, respondents would especially like to talk to candidates directly. They also suggested candidates should use the media, the Internet (e.g., party websites), hang posters on public walls or at the municipality and hand out pamphlets.

About half of respondents intended to vote in the local elections, with interest noticeably lower among youth. A lack of trust or confidence in politicians in general and a strong feeling that voting will not have any impact on the direction the country were the main barriers to vote. While some felt they could never be convinced to vote, some believed they can be persuaded if they find out more about the candidates, if young candidates run, if the country starts moving in a better direction, or if candidates engage with citizens in their municipality.

All respondents were asked to imagine they were a candidate in the upcoming municipal elections and to write down the three priorities they would address to attract voters. One priority that stood out among all others was the desire for cleanliness and more garbage cans. This was followed by improving infrastructure, employment opportunities, and the quality of public services and public administration.

Respondents were then presented with a list of potential prerogatives and asked to identify the three they considered the most important for their municipality. One prerogative stood out among the rest: construction and maintenance of roads, sidewalks, gardens, parks and child care, as well as their maintenance that are the responsibility of the commune. This was followed by household waste collection and then by the creation of rainwater management systems.

Respondents agreed that the items listed were all important although some were not convinced their municipality had the skills or the budget to take on all of the prerogatives. A few also felt that the prerogatives lacked some economic and social dimensions.

According to the local “collectivities” code being debated at parliament, the local level will enjoy a certain financial independence and have the authority to choose how funds are spent in their region.

Oversight was the role most felt citizens could play in helping to implement decentralization.

- They also felt transparency, access to information and citizen engagement are all prerequisites for the successful implementation of decentralization.

Respondents, for the most part, believed that central authorities would still need to oversee

- what is happening in the municipalities to make sure everything is running smoothly and that there is some sort of national coordination, direction and oversight.

Respondents were not very familiar with the various types of organizations that work towards ensuring the credibility and transparency of elections in Tunisia. The ISIE was one of the more noteworthy mentions; however, opinions were quite varied in terms of whether this is a trustworthy organization. Not many knew that there were such things as domestic election observation organizations.

## Prerogatives and Priorities

Finally, respondents were asked to identify the biggest economic, corruption and security problems facing their region these days:

- The economy was a topic that all respondents were quite eager to discuss. The most common economic challenges included inflation and unemployment.
- Bribery was the most common form of corruption in all regions, with corruption in employment practices and in public administration high on the list.
- Not all respondents agreed that they have security problems in their regions. Those in Béja and Medenine were most likely to feel that there have no major security problems.

Respondents felt the police were themselves a source of concern, followed by robberies and drug use and addiction.



## PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

This study evaluates Tunisian citizens' opinions of the situation facing the country just over two years after the seating of a new president and parliament, and seven years after the revolution. NDI conducted 12 focus groups with 117 respondents throughout Tunisia in early February 2018. The findings, drawn from respondents' comments, are detailed below.

### I. National Direction

Tunisians were not satisfied with the direction in which their country was going. The majority of Tunisians shared the sentiment that it is going in the wrong direction and this sentiment was equally shared among young and old. Men were more likely to say it was going in the right direction compared to women or youth. From a regional perspective, feelings around the direction of the country were slightly more positive in Greater Tunis and Medenine compared to Bizerte and Béja.

### What is going well?

Respondents were specifically asked if anything in Tunisia was going right. Similar to what was observed during the past few rounds of focus group research, unless specifically prompted for positive elements, respondents tended to focus exclusively on what was going wrong in Tunisia. When probed, some respondents were able to admit that things were headed in the right direction and explained that Tunisians needed to be patient. Optimism was also seen in a few who felt that the economy was improving or going well. Otherwise, those sensing things were going well tended to discuss the following:

- **Freedom of expression** – respondents tended to agree that they have seen improvements in terms of their ability not only to have an opinion, but also to voice that opinion. Similar to what was expressed during previous rounds of focus group research, respondents felt this is one of the more notable outcomes of the revolution. Respondents agreed that they have the ability to express themselves and have the ability to criticize openly.
- **Foundations of democracy** – a few respondents recognized that a country having recently experienced a “revolution” needed time to adapt and adjust. They felt that the basic elements of democracy were in place, and with this, there was some appreciation for the fact that Tunisia will undergo difficult changes and will see challenging times as the country adapts to new systems.

Some also sought solace in the fact that the situation in Tunisia is better than in nearby countries like Syria and Egypt. A few specifically noted that the upcoming municipal elections also served as a beacon of hope (this is discussed later in the report).

"We have more freedom of speech, elections, and we are also going towards decentralization which implies improvement. Even though unemployment and investments are still not good." (Male, Medenine, 45, Qualified Technician)"

"It's not that easy to make a change after the revolution. Things take time to change. When you see the signs, it is true they are really bad but things are improving slowly." (Male, Tunis, 37, Civil Servant)"

"Many indicators and signs that make me believe that Tunisia is improving. One of them is tourism. Also, we need to keep in mind that we have just come out of a revolution and it's normal for things to be slow." (Male, Béja, 34, Employed)"

"In order for you to evaluate what has been going we have to look to past and present. If we compare economy in general, things in the past were bad. Now it's improving." (Male, Medenine, 53, Inspector)"

## What is going wrong?

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

The two major themes most commonly and consistently identified when asked to specify what is going wrong were the economic welfare of Tunisians and corruption. These were also the two major metrics respondents seemed to use to gauge or judge the success or failure of the country and of parliament.

When discussing these two themes, respondents often expressed frustration. These two themes were raised by men and women alike, by young and old, and irrespective of region.

- Economic Welfare of Tunisians – Nearly all respondents agreed that unemployment and inflation were significant challenges. Younger respondents were frustrated with not being able to find a job after graduating, or at least a job that aligns with their credentials and academic training. A few felt they are just studying for the sake of studying and that it will lead to nothing fruitful in the end. Many older women also described the hardships their children were encountering after graduation. Some respondents blamed the education system in Tunisia for the hardships of those newly graduated, some blamed corruption and others simply believed there are not enough positions available. People admitted that they, or friends and family, are travelling outside of their region and sometimes even the country to find employment.

"All my kids graduated in 2011 they still cannot find a job." (Female, Béja, 65, Homemaker)"

"Our education is getting bad and people don't have skills anymore. Even when you apply for a job the employer is not going to hire people who don't have good education. They keep adding Majors and when students choose these Majors they end up not trained properly in that field because it's still new." (Female, Bizerte, 26, Accountant)"

Inflation has been a common topic for many waves of focus groups as well. Respondents were frustrated at the fact that prices continue to increase. Inflation, the lack of employment and the inability of salaries to keep pace were all combining to create a very challenging situation for many Tunisians. Although this was another general issue that touches all Tunisians irrespective of gender, age or region, women were particularly vocal – they often described what they used to be able to purchase at the grocery store or the market with a certain amount of dinars and how that compares to today.

"The high cost of living. We can barely survive to raise our kids with what we have. Everything has become really expensive.

(Female, Béja, 42, Businesswoman)"

"Because there is no sign for improvement. For example, the high cost of living, anything imported is very expensive and currency is very high. Even when you are planning on starting your own project you need to have connections. You cannot survive." (Male,

Bizerte, 22, Pastry Chef)"

"My problem is how expensive things have become and salaries are not enough. The middle class cannot live, let alone poor families. If we start by improving the economy of the country, the political side will improve automatically." (Female, Tunis, 37, Technician)"

● **Corruption** – Many respondents pointed to the nature and extent of corruption as a prime example of why they felt Tunisia was headed in the wrong direction. Respondents focused mostly on corruption in public administration and corruption in employment practices in both public and private sectors where favoritism and bribes seem to dictate who gets hired rather than experience and qualifications.

When discussing the general direction of the country, a few other common sub-themes emerged from the sessions. These sub-themes were in part related to the broader themes of “the economy” and “unemployment,” albeit in a more indirect way. For instance, a few respondents explained that the country lacks political and economic leadership; that there does not appear to be any sort of overall plan to move the country or the economy forward. Many felt there is no overall vision because they also felt that parliamentarians are more interested in furthering their own personal goals than they are in representing their constituents and addressing the immediate needs of average Tunisians.

One or two respondents also noted the following as reasons that explained why they feel the country is headed in the wrong direction :

- Issues with the education system or recent reforms;
- Poor healthcare system;
- Shift in the values of Tunisians – some felt Tunisians have become too self-centered and less concerned with the problems of others and that this, in part, explains the increase in corruption in the country.
- Lack of confidence in democracy overall or in a parliamentary system specifically; and,
- Lack of security and public safety, including criminality, robberies and bribery.

“We cannot deny that there are not good things compared to Syria, Libya, Yemen, and other things. Tunisia is taking the lead in terms of democracy. These are all good things. I can see that they are discussing things in the parliament, the freedom of speech and news. However, what is really bad is how expensive life has become. As a citizen I do not worry about what they have discussed in the parliament, I worry about the how to pay my bills I worry about the rent, about the food, about my family, about the kids. I was reading yesterday we are in debt of 63 percent. When I see this, I ask myself where did this money go? If I want to start a project there's no financial support from the government.” (Male, Tunis, 28, Unemployed)”

“When you see a MP and the president, getting 30,000 dinars when a young person getting 200 dinars and we don't have jobs, that's not fair. They are not defending us.” (Male, Béja, 21, Unemployed)”

“Why did we have the revolution in the first place? Because the politicians and the ruler at that time were not satisfying. We were not happy with the economy and politics in general. Rural areas were bad, and the economy was bad in general. The only thing we have achieved is democracy and freedom. I question many things. How is it possible that they cannot even [open] one factory, just one to provide employment? The new government is not really doing great. They are doing 70 percent wrong and 30 percent is improvement.” (Male, Medenine, 53, Manager)”

“A lot of corruption, education is going down, high cost of living, no security, a lot of criminals. We are living the same way we used to.” (Female, Medenine, 44, Trainer)”

## II. Parliament

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

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

Passing Laws	<p>Respondents do not believe the parliament is fulfilling its role of government oversight although there is potentially some confusion over what this role really involves for parliament. Nonetheless, some participants seemed to understand it and their feedback points to three key perceptions of how well parliament is fulfilling this role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Almost all groups mentioned the recent finance law as one of the laws of which they were aware. Nearly all respondents familiar with this law were unhappy with it and believed that MPs should have consulted the public about it more. They believed the law was unfair to the middle class, the increase in taxes was ill-timed and frustrating, it was not a law that was helping the financial situation of Tunisians and, many would argue, it was making the situation worse.</li><li>● Various other laws were mentioned including the law to fight corruption, the economic reconciliation law and the law on drugs - but respondents had very little to say about them.</li><li>● Some respondents were feeling as though with the new laws being passed that women were now more powerful than men. On this topic, respondents referred to the law on the elimination of violence against women, the amendment to the personal status code regarding marriage to non-Muslims, and the law on inheritance.</li></ul> <p><b>"I do remember a lot. They made the women more powerful than men. They're not even equal, women are just more powerful than men. (Male, Bizerte, 30, Worker)"</b></p> <p><b>"There should have been a law to protect the economy but they just came up with the law about the taxes. In my opinion there is no law that protects and fixes the economy. (Male, Tunis, 63, Retired)"</b></p> <p><b>"To be honest I don't remember any good law. (Female, Medenine, 40, Entrepreneur)"</b></p>
Government Oversight	<p>Respondents did not believe the parliament was fulfilling its role of government oversight. Feedback pointed to four key perceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Respondents could not remember seeing any tangible results or improvement in the country's economic or social situation; by extension, the government was not seen as doing its job, from which respondents concluded that there was no parliamentary oversight.</li><li>● There was a lack of consistency in how the parliament plays this role. A few respondents had heard of some of the Ministers being questioned but they believed this was not being done as regularly as it should or that these interrogations were not detailed and thorough as they should be.</li><li>● A few also believed that this oversight was not entirely unbiased and non-partisan. Respondents believed that MPs and ministers were looking out for each other and that if something were to go wrong, they would protect one another rather than punish wrong-doers.</li></ul>

- Finally, some felt this role was inconsequential. Respondents explained that ministerial interrogations were often “toothless” exercises that did not lead to meaningful change or any follow-up.

As has often been the case in previous rounds of focus groups, respondents had trouble finding examples or remembering achievements in this area. Respondents understood and emphasized the role of government oversight that parliament should be playing. However, they believed parliament is accountable for all outcomes and that if government was not following-through on implementation, parliament was largely if not entirely to blame.

**“What I have seen in the parliament is entirely personal interrogations. They investigate people and ministers if it impacts their personal benefits, but it has nothing to do with the general population.  
(Male, Tunis, 63, Retired)”**

**The government is missing skilled people. You find ministers who are running the ministries and they shouldn’t be there. (Female, Bizerte, 53, Homemaker)”**

**“If I see something on Facebook, otherwise I don’t really focus on the parliament and politics. In terms of overseeing the government, I cannot remember any.  
(Female, Medenine, 22, IT Training)”**

## Representing the People

Respondents continued to be particularly vocal and critical of how poorly they believed they are being represented by their elected officials, a sentiment that is amplified by the lack of contact or presence by MPs in their constituencies and by an increasingly entrenched belief that their MPs are using their position for personal or their party’s benefit. Similar to comments heard during previous rounds of focus groups, respondents explained that their MPs were most visible and attentive during election campaigns but that afterwards they “are ghosts.”

Even though most were not closely following the activities of their MPs, the persistent challenges they face in terms of the economy and corruption leaves them with a feeling that MPs were not trying to solve their regions issues.

Some were reluctant to make this generalization to all MPs – a few argued that there are MPs that seemed to be living up to expectations in this role, largely based on their attendance record in the ARP or based on awareness of visits they had made to their regions. Specific role models were rarely mentioned, however.

**“They don’t represent the public. They are benefiting themselves, the government, more than the public. (Male, Tunis, 27, Manager)”**

**“There are some who are really working; for example, the MP who represents Bizerte is working. I see him, he is present on social media, and he has done some work in 27 elementary schools.  
(Male, Bizerte, 45, Trainer)”**

**“I don’t see any of them representing the public because none of them know what’s going on in their regions or even in the entire country. (Male, Tunis, 63, Retired)”**

There was near-unanimous agreement that the level of confidence citizens have in their parliament is decreasing. In fact, many have disconnected entirely – they just don't follow what parliament is doing anymore. This shift in confidence has also led to a significant gap in trust between citizens and MPs, and between citizens and parliament as an institution. Many factors have contributed to this generalized sense of frustration, most of which are consistent with feedback obtained in recent previous rounds of focus groups:

- Respondents felt MPs were in parliament for the wrong reasons and were not focused on the right issues. There was a sense that the laws MPs pass and the efforts they undertake have nothing to do with citizen priorities or with what is important for Tunisia as a whole.
  - Parliament was seen to be passing laws, but many respondents felt no actions were taken afterwards.
  - Some respondents expressed disenchantment over the level of MP absenteeism, with a few sarcastically pointing out that attendance highest when they are voting on their salaries or
  - when French President Emmanuel Macron visited.
- Respondents felt there have been no achievements from parliament alongside a lot of empty promises.

"When I see that they are not doing anything in any of the regions that makes me pessimistic about them. (Male, Tunis, 54, Retired)"

"The parliament members are not really representing the people. Someone actually called them the ghosts, because they are just staying home and they get paid. (Female, Bizerte, 38, Hairdresser)"

Respondents weighed in on how parliament could regain their confidence. Almost all respondents felt the best way to do this was for parliament to pass laws and actually implement them. Along with this, they also wanted their MPs to focus on what is important to Tunisians since, so far, they feel MPs are not creating legislation that is having a direct or meaningful impact on the immediate priorities of Tunisians. Engagement with citizens was paramount; respondents felt MPs needed to involve citizens more than they do today and needed to listen to what citizens believe are the real issues.

I just hope they stop talking and focus on work. They have to be ethical and be honest. That's how they can rebuild their credibility with the public." (Female, Tunis, 55, Homemaker)

"They should make a difference between their personal benefits and the general population. These two things have to be separated." (Male, Tunis, 54, Retired)

"They just promised so many things, but we don't see any action. We want to work, we want to improve our region and town, but we don't have the means." (Male, Medenine, 28, Unemployed)

"Members of parliament have to hear what people have to say and we have to get to know them. We don't just need to see them on TV. They have to be aware of our problems." (Male, Béja, 39, Worker)

## Use of Media to Follow Parliament

In an effort to understand which media sources Tunisians use to follow the work of the parliament, the discussions consistently revealed that very few Tunisians actually seek out such information in any proactive fashion. Their activity tends to be passive rather than proactive – in other words, they might notice a headline while scanning their Facebook news feed, they might hear something while casually watching the evening news on television or they might hear about it while listening to the radio. But very few mentioned that they specifically seek out this information. Respondents will only do any proactive research if they happen to hear something that catches their attention, and when this happens, it tends to be an online search using general search engines or clicking through a link in their Facebook news feed.

Many respondents indicated that they do not like to follow parliament through the media. Some of the more common reasons were:

- Respondents felt analyst and reporter commentary is very negative – in a few sessions, respondents emphasized that the media intentionally builds negative sentiment around the work of parliament and overly dramatizes what is going on;
- Respondents did not feel that the plenaries are interesting to watch, especially because MPs are almost always insulting each other and arguing
- The plenaries they watch are poorly attended
- There are contradictory stories through different channels and different media, and it is hard to decipher what is true from what is false; and,
- A few were convinced that certain media sources are biased in favor of certain political parties and, as such, the news they report is not as neutral as it should be.

From a media consumption perspective, respondents indicated that television was the most common source of information on the work of parliament. In each group there were a few respondents who watched television regularly and would get updates through talk shows or regularly scheduled news programs (most often the evening broadcast). The most commonly watched channels were: El Hiwar El Tounsi, Al Wataniya 2, Nessma, Attassia and, to a lesser extent, Hannibal TV (HTV).

The next most common source was the Internet, especially Facebook and electronic newspapers. Radio was noted by a few respondents in each group, with MosaiqueFM as the most commonly mentioned station. Other stations included: Shems FM, Radio Jeunes Tunisie, Radio Tataouine, and Radio Zitouna.

Magazines and print newspapers were very rarely used as a regular source of information on the work of parliament. If a newspaper is used, it tends to be Al Chourouk.



Only a few respondents remembered visiting the official website of parliament or the ARP Facebook page. Very few were even aware that these existed. It should be noted though that even if awareness were to increase, many would not have an interest in following parliament through their web page or Facebook because either they don't believe they would get the full story or they are just too disenchanted with politicians to be bothered.

"They don't make you want to visit them. (Female, Medenine, 40, Entrepreneur)"

"At the beginning when the parliament was just formed, when they were talking about new laws and things like that, we were all interested to check them out and follow the news. But not anymore, because I feel like they are always lying to us.  
(Female, Tunis, 26, Accountant)"

When prompted, respondents noted a few items that they would like to learn from the parliament. Some of these items included: what their plan is for the future; what they are doing for their country/region; and news about the projects they are working on. Ultimately, respondents wanted to be informed about what parliament, specifically, is doing and how it will improve individuals standard of living. They wanted parliament to be transparent with them and not hide important details.

"What's new in the financial law, any investments, how is economy going, things like this. Things related to the general benefit.  
(Male, Tunis, 63, Retired)"

"I want to see what they are doing. Their promises have to be applied and acted upon. (Female, Medenine, 50, Secretary)"

## Women and Parliament

In the sessions held exclusively with women, respondents were asked to weigh in on their feelings about women and parliament. Respondents were split on whether they felt the parliament was concerned with the challenges women face. Women in Bizerte and Medenine were generally pleased with the progress that has been made for women, especially compared to the challenges women still face in other Arab countries. They were pleased with the programs and laws that have been introduced to support and defend the rights of women and their position in society. Some did argue, however, that although the laws have been introduced, implementation was not as advanced as it should be. This sentiment was strongest in Tunis and Béja where women tended to feel that important laws and programs to help women were not being implemented or that the laws that have been introduced are somewhat secondary to other, more pressing needs such as legislation related to employment and the economic plight of women.

All groups were able to name at least one law that had been passed for women. Some notable laws mentioned were:

- Elimination of violence against women law
- Amendment to the personal status code regarding marriage to non-Muslims
- Inheritance law
- Law of parity between men and women

While they were able to name these laws, women were not unanimously positive about them. Specifically, this was true for the elimination of violence against women law, as women strongly felt there was no implementation. Other measures that caused some discomfort were the inheritance law and the amendment to the personal status code regarding marriage to non-Muslims, which were both seen as overruling or contradicting religion.

Women also had mixed feelings when it came to whether or not they felt female deputies represented other women. Women in Bizerte felt most positively about female deputies, pointing out that one or two stood apart from the rest when it comes to representing other women. Most groups felt that one of the reasons they do not feel well-represented by female MPs is because these MPs don't engage with women directly to discuss their problems. Nor are they seen as focusing on the real problems women in Tunisia face such as employment or economic rights.

“I think [she] is really open and defends people and talks about women's rights. (Female, Bizerte, 55, Retired)”

“They do not represent us because they used to live abroad. There is one member from the South, but I've never seen her. She is supposed to come visit us and meet with us. (Female, Medenine, 60, Civil Servant)”

“You don't find women as ministers of important ministries. You only find them in the ministry of culture or the ministry of women. (Female, Tunis, 36, Technician)”

Moving forward, women proposed that the following areas should be prioritized to better address the challenges faced by Tunisian women:

- Maternity leave;
- Equal and stable salaries for women;
- Opportunities for women with little or no education;
- Job Creation;
- Financial support for women wanting to start their own businesses; and
- Better laws on violence that are actually enforced.

“They need to talk about women. As I told you earlier, they need to talk about women who are talking agriculture, about women being beaten up by their husbands. You see men sitting in coffee shops all day long while their wives are doing everything, from taking kids to school, raising them, cooking for the family. (Female, Tunis, 60, Homemaker)”

## Youth and Parliament

Respondents in the youth groups were also asked specific questions regarding parliament. There was strong agreement across all groups that the parliament was not concerned with the challenges faced by youth. Youth felt that their age demographic was underrepresented in the ARP, they did not feel that MPs understand the needs and priorities of Tunisian youth in general and, similar to what all other Tunisians tend to say, they felt MPs don't engage with them to discuss their problems, especially as they relate to employment.

“Students say, ‘Okay I am going to graduate; then what? I’ll stay home.’ Education is not going to get us anywhere.

(Female, Tunis, 28, Student)”

There was very little awareness of any law being passed to help youth over the past few years. A few mentioned the Dignity contract<sup>1</sup>, the Law on drugs and a law to find jobs

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<sup>1</sup> Al Karama contract (Dignity in English): aims at facilitating the integration of graduated job seekers by providing them with additional qualifications in line with the needs of private sector.

for youth in poor families. Ultimately, youth respondents did not feel any of these laws helped them. Youth were not feeling represented by young MPs; in fact youth, generally didn't know MPs from their generation. Among those aware of young MPs, their opinions of them tended to be fairly negative. They didn't feel they can trust these MPs any more than any other MP, they see them as inexperienced and, once again similar to all other MPs, they fail to engage with the public, including youth.

**"They only represent youth from their own parties and not all young people in the country. (Male, Tunis, 29, Teacher)"**

To help improve this situation, and make youth feel more represented in the parliament, younger respondents made a few suggestions for MPs:

- Visit the regions;
- Meet with youth across the country to better understand their needs;
- Put themselves in the shoes of youth; and,
- Implement laws that are proposed.

**"They need to talk to adolescents." (Female, Tunis, 26, Student)**

**"They have to go to coffee shops and talk to people. They need to ask what they need and how they live, they need to get closer to them." (Male, Bizerte, 24, Worker)**

Moving forward, respondents believed the following areas should be prioritized to better address the challenges faced by Tunisian youth:

- Employment was far and away the most popular priority. Some youth were worried about the lack of opportunities when they graduate from school and that any law or program that will help youth, educated or not, find employment, will be welcomed. A popular topic in Béja and Medenine was project creation and how the parliament should make it easier for youth to start small businesses through access to financing and through simpler administrative processes.
- Another suggestion was to make it easier for all youth to have an opportunity to attend university, and to reform education to make it easier for students to work and study at the same time.

**The country and the government have to provide jobs. (Male, Bizerte, 25, Decorator)"**

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<sup>2</sup> On May 2017 the parliament amended Article 12 from the law number 92-52 related to consumption of drugs. The amendment gave the judge the discretionary authority to identify the right verdict.

### III. Municipal Elections and Local Governance

#### Awareness and Intention to Vote

As noted in this report's preface, local elections are Tunisia's next step towards democratic, representative governance at all levels. For the first time in their history, Tunisians will democratically elect the municipal councilors whose decisions directly impact their communities. The municipal elections are planned for May 6th, 2018. To launch the discussion around the upcoming elections, respondents were asked if they had heard of the first ever democratic municipal elections and if they could identify the date. Nearly all respondents had heard of the upcoming elections, however there was a great deal of confusion and uncertainty regarding the date. Some of this confusion was largely due to the date being changed and a few participants also were confused with the advance voting day for police and military. Most respondents were able to identify May as the month, while some also referenced March.

Almost all citizens were aware of the municipality to which they belong. If there was confusion or uncertainty, it tended to occur in rural areas or in regions where new municipalities had recently been created.

About half of respondents expressed an intent to vote in the local elections, although interest was noticeably lower among youth. Intentions to vote were mostly pulled down by a lack of trust or confidence in politicians in general and a strong feeling that voting will not have any impact on the direction the country has taken. Since things are perceived to have not changed since the previous election in 2014, some did not see a purpose in voting in the upcoming elections. Furthermore, some have become so disconnected with the democratic system, that they don't anticipate ever voting again.

"I am not going to vote because I don't trust them anymore. Everyone is just working towards their personal benefits. I don't trust the majority of them. (Male, Tunis, 63, Retired)"

I am boycotting all elections because there is no credibility in the ISIE that organizes elections." (Male, Béja , 59, Employed)

"I am not convinced by the people who are running for elections." (Female, Bizerte, 21, Unemployed)

"I generally don't go to the municipality. My husband will go but I don't. I'm just staying home, he does all these things." (Female, Medenine, 34, Seamstress)

Some respondents admitted there was nothing that would convince them to vote. however others suggested possible ideas that would encourage them to vote:

- Finding out more about/getting to know the possible candidates;
- If younger candidates who understand the situation of Tunisia run for election;
- If there are noticeable changes in Tunisia, then this might reverse their mistrust of politicians;
- Have candidates engage with citizens in their municipality, and,
- A few admitted that if they were paid, then they would vote.

"In my opinion if there are younger people, ambitious young people who are running for election, I will definitely go vote.  
(Female, Tunis, 55, Homemaker)"

"We have to know the people on the list.  
If there is one corrupt person on the list then I won't vote because this person is going to impact the rest of the list.  
(Male, Béja, 52, Worker)"

"If they pay me I will go. (Male, Tunis, 27, Manager)"

## Prerogatives and Priorities

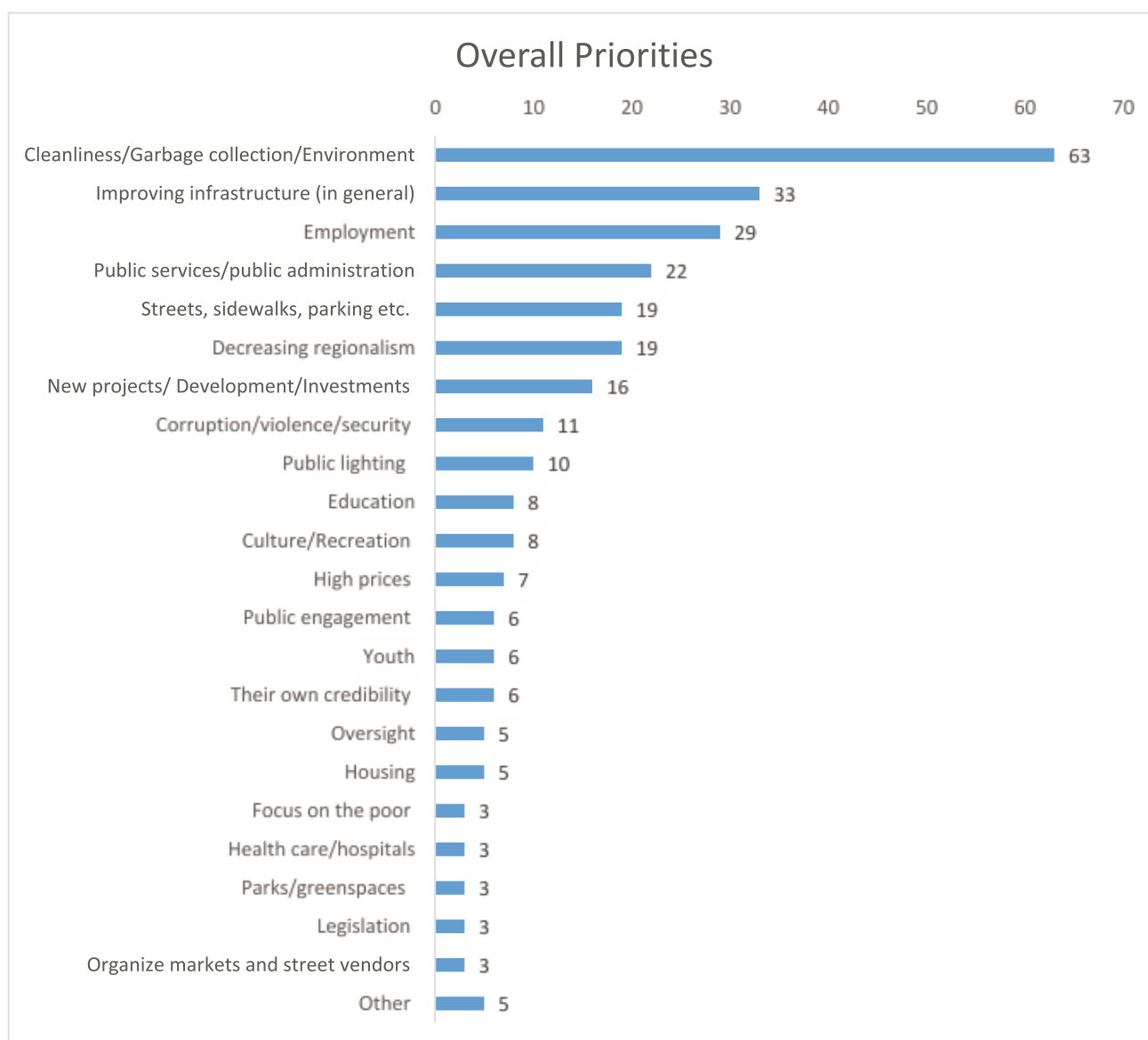
All respondents were asked to imagine they were a candidate in the upcoming municipal elections and to write down the three priorities they would address to attract voters. One priority that stood out among all others was the desire for cleanliness and more garbage cans. While it was the top priority for women, men and youth, this priority was highest amongst women. It was also the top priority in all regions except Medenine.

Other priorities often mentioned by respondents, although distant seconds compared to cleanliness and garbage collection, included improving infrastructure, employment and the quality of public services and public administration. These were then closely followed by focusing on streets, sidewalks and parking spaces, and decreasing regionalism (which largely refers to promoting the development of all regions).

Aside from cleanliness, a few themes specific to certain regions or age groups included:

- Employment was more common in Medenine and Tunis compared to other regions;
- Employment was mentioned often with youth and women (36 and older);
- General infrastructure, improving streets and public services/administration were top priorities for men (36 and older);  
Improving streets, sidewalks and parking was a higher priority for Béja than in other regions; and,
- Decreasing regionalism and new projects were higher priorities for youth than it was for older men and women (those 36 and older).

Figure 1: Top Priorities (respondent counts) – All Respondents



The government has drafted legislation that will create a framework for the decentralization process, and it was submitted to parliament. The Code des collectivités locale [Law on local authorities] is expected to grant new prerogatives to heads of municipalities and to municipal and regional councils. A small part of the discussion in each session focused on this decentralization process.

There was very little familiarity amongst respondents with the term “decentralization.” Some had heard of it before but did not know what it is or what it means in the context of the upcoming municipal elections.

When generally asked what they expect from these elections for their region, three themes emerged:

- There were expectations that there will be greater focus on cleaning up the regions and reducing pollution;
- There were expectations that problems and challenges unique to the region will be addressed; and,
- There were expectations that many services will become regionalized and that this will make it easier for citizens to access certain services that would previously require a decision from Tunis or where the citizen would need to travel to Tunis for a document or a service.

"The head of the municipality will be more confident and won't wait for other parties or administration to confirm his decisions."

(Male, Béja, 30, Farmer)

"If there's a problem they will find a solution and the solution would be appropriate for the region." (Male, Medenine, 53, Inspector)

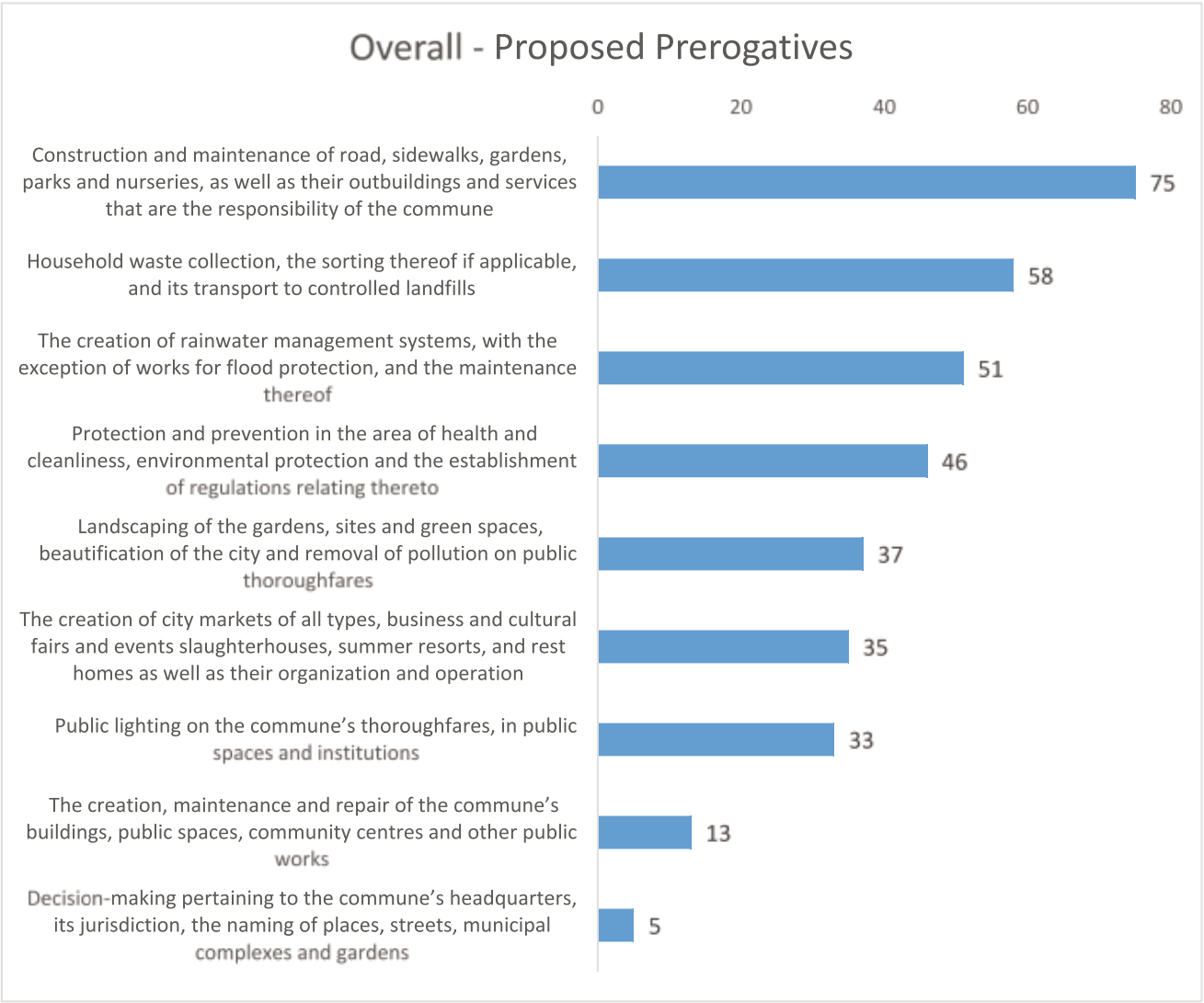
Respondents were presented with a list of potential prerogatives and asked to identify the three they considered the most important for their municipality. One prerogative stood out among the rest: Construction and maintenance of roads, sidewalks, gardens, parks and child care, as well as their maintenance that are the responsibility of the commune. This was the most popular prerogative across all ages, and all cities, with the exception of Tunis.

Other noteworthy differences across the four regions included the following:

Construction and maintenance of road, sidewalks, gardens, parks and nurseries, as well as their outbuildings and services that are the responsibility of the commune	Seen as a far greater priority among respondents in Bizerte and Medenine compared to those in Béja and Tunis (although this was still a top priority in Béja).
The creation of rainwater management systems, with the exception of works for flood protection, and the maintenance thereof	Selected by more respondents in Tunis compared to all other regions.
Protection and prevention in the area of health and cleanliness, environmental protection and the establishment of regulations relating thereto	More important in Medenine and Tunis than in Béja and Bizerte.
Household waste collection, the sorting thereof if applicable, and its transport to controlled landfills	A more popular priority in Medenine compared to respondents in all other regions.
Public lighting on the commune's thoroughfares, in public spaces and institutions	A much higher priority in Béja and Tunis compared to respondents in Bizerte and Medenine
The creation of city markets of all types, business and cultural fairs and events slaughterhouses, summer resorts, and rest homes as well as their organization and operation	A greater priority in Medenine, it was moderately important in Béja and Bizerte and far less of a concern in Tunis.



Figure 2: Top Prerogatives (respondent counts) – All Respondents



Some noteworthy differences across the three main demographic segments included the following:

The creation of rainwater management systems, with the exception of works for flood protection, and the maintenance thereof	Relatively more common priority among youth.
Landscaping of the gardens, sites and green spaces, beautification of the city and removal of pollution on public thoroughfares	Relatively less common priority among youth.
The creation of city markets of all types, business and cultural fairs and events slaughterhouses, summer resorts, and rest homes as well as their organization and operation	Relatively less common priority among women.
Household waste collection, the sorting thereof if applicable, and its transport to controlled landfills	Relatively less common priority among youth.
Public lighting on the commune's thoroughfares, in public spaces and institutions	Relatively more common priority among women, moderately common among men and less common among youth.

Respondents felt optimistic about the list of prerogatives and almost all agreed that they were all important for their region. A common hesitation that was seen in all groups was related to implementation. Respondents agreed that these prerogatives were great but could only hope that their municipality could implement the list.

"I think this list would be really good if it's going to be applied. (Female, Tunis, 42, Homemaker)"

"They touch on the real problem. (Male, Tunis, 63, Retired)"

"Some of the things mentioned here are applicable only for certain areas in the country but not in others. They just talked about roads and constructions but they have not talked about social issues. (Female, Tunis, 37, Technician)"

Although most respondents felt the list was quite comprehensive, and largely reflected what their municipalities manage today, a few felt that the prerogatives lacked some economic and social dimensions. More specifically, respondents would like to add the following types of prerogatives to the list:

- Economic development and employment;
- Social issues, i.e. housing, elderly, police in remote areas;
- Overseeing or improving public administration and simplifying procedures;
- Clean up the regions;
- Animal control; and,
- Easier building permits.

When presented with the idea of holding municipal elections without a code of local collectivities, most respondents did not seem to fully grasp the significance of this possibility. There were, however, some strong opinions voiced on this issue; while some felt the elections should not be postponed for the sake of a code and that municipalities already have responsibilities, others felt that the code essentially defines the role of the municipality and that it would be unfair to hold elections if citizens and candidates did not know the parameters of the power of the municipality.

## Financial Independence

According to the “collectivities” code being debated at parliament, the local level will enjoy a certain financial independence and have the authority to choose how funds are spent in their region. When asked how citizens could help implement decentralization, one major theme was evident from all groups: oversight. As well, citizens want to be informed and consulted and they insist on transparency in all of the municipality’s activities. They want to be able to access information to which they do not feel they have access today, especially budgets and how they are spent.

“Municipalities are not going to have the magic wand to do things. We, the citizens, have to be active too. Associations are not doing anything and they are always just waiting. Citizens are just passive waiting for the job to be done - they need to be more active.”

(Male, Tunis, 35, Supervisor)

“The citizen has to participate and be active and provide ideas. (Male, Tunis, 63, Retired)”

“They have to make it public and they have to say in social media what’s going on and update people on their budget.

(Female, Tunis, 60, Homemaker)”

“The citizen has to be conscious and aware of all these things. (Male, Béja, 33, Employed)”

In a scenario where the local level will enjoy a certain financial independence and have the authority to choose how funds are spent in their region, respondents, for the most part, believed that central authorities will still need to oversee what is happening in the municipalities to make sure everything is running smoothly and that there is some sort of national coordination, direction and oversight. There was some concern, however, that central authorities may overreach and interfere.

## Candidate Outreach

When asked how they would like to get information about candidates and how they would like to access candidate lists, respondents tended to rely on how they have obtained this information in the past rather than describe what they would ideally like to see.

**“The information will get to us... they will hang the lists on the walls like what they did in 2014 (Male, Bizerte, 45, public servant)”**

During the campaign, respondents would especially like to talk to candidates directly, they would like them to come to meetings, public gatherings, cafés, etc. to introduce themselves and present their platforms. Many also suggested they use media, such as TV, radio, social media and the Internet (e.g. party websites, municipality website) to inform citizens. A few respondents thought it would be beneficial to hang posters on public walls or at the municipality and to hand out pamphlets and brochures.

**“ They have to have meetings with people (Male, Medenine, 34, unemployed)”**

**“ electronic platforms, flyers and social media (Female, Tunis, 21, student)”**

## Election Credibility and Transparency

Respondents were not very familiar with the various types of organizations that work towards ensuring the credibility and transparency of elections in Tunisia. The ISIE was one of the more noteworthy mentions; however, opinions were quite varied in terms of whether this is, in fact, a trustworthy organization. Last year's resignation of the ISIE president, unfamiliarity with the new president, many internal disputes and a belief among many that members are not politically independent all weaken the public's confidence in the ISIE. Some do not trust the ISIE simply because they do not believe that anyone in power in Tunisia is completely trustworthy.

Not many knew that there were such things as domestic election observation organizations and even fewer could name specific ones. Most referred to ATIDE; others included Mourakiboun, LET, Sigma Conseil, Chahed Observatory, Al Bawsla and I-Watch. Just as with the ISIE, views were quite mixed in terms of whether these are trustworthy organizations. The discussion also revealed that some respondents may be confusing these observers with those from political parties.

Other than the ISIE and these election observation organizations, respondents noted a few other types of organizations that they believe could guarantee the credibility and transparency of elections, including:

- The army,
- Civil society,
- UGTT, (General Union for Tunisian Workers)
- The governorate, and,
- The ministry of the Interior.

## IV. Priorities of the Regions

Respondents were asked to identify the biggest economic, corruption and security problems facing their region these days.

### Economy

The economy is a topic that all respondents were quite eager to discuss. As has been noted earlier in this report, Tunisians felt that the dire state of their economy is one of the reasons, if not the main reason, they feel their country is headed in the wrong direction. The most common economic challenges included the following:

High prices: Almost all groups mentioned high prices as being one of their region's biggest economic problems. They felt that the main causes of inflation are:

- Increasing taxes,
- The decreasing value of the dinar,
- Monopolies,
- The parallel economy, and,
- Lack of government oversight over price increases.

Unemployment: Respondents in all regions identified unemployment and a general lack of investment into regional projects as a problem. They listed the main causes of unemployment as follows:

- Lack of projects in their region,
- Lack of vision and leadership to attract investment into the region to take better advantage of regional strengths (agriculture in Béja, the beaches in Bizerte, the coastline in Medenine, etc.);
- Insufficient financial support to encourage youth to start their own businesses,
- State control over local land,
- Education requirements for basic employment are increasing, and,
- Corruption in local hiring practices.

"If you want to work you have to get a loan to use it as a bribe to get the job. (Female, Medenine, 34, Seamstress)"

## Corruption

Bribery was the most common form of corruption referenced in all regions. Respondents felt that there is no proper punishment for those who are caught asking for bribes. Respondents also admitted that citizens are partially responsible for supporting this form of corruption by being active respondents – not only do they accept bribes but also willingly pay them out. Bribes were said to be especially common with the police and in the public administration.

“Even if you work you’re going to hate it because police will ask for bribes, and whatever you make that day you will give it to them.  
(Male, Medenine, 28, Unemployed)”

The problem of bribery also led to discussions about favoritism and public administration. Most argued that with more oversight within public administration and the proper and consistent implementation of anti-corruption laws, the challenges related to bribes and corruption could be handled. Many were not convinced, however, that this is something that parliament could fix because they were seen as actively involved in corruption themselves and part of the problem.

## Security

While respondents all agreed that they had important corruption and economic problems in their regions, they were not all convinced that they had security problems in their regions. Respondents in Béja and Medenine were most likely to feel that there are no major security problems in their regions.

**Police:** In most groups, respondents mentioned the police were themselves a source of the security problem. Respondents complained that there is a lack of patrols, and strongly believed that the police have a very poor relationship with citizens, they ask for bribes and will sometimes arrest citizens for no reason.

**Robberies:** Robberies and theft were also a common challenge for a number of respondents. Some respondents suggested that this is largely due to poverty, weak laws and poor law enforcement.

**Drugs:** Lastly, a few groups mentioned drug addiction as a security problem. Similar to some of the other issues, this is result of lenient laws and poor enforcement.

“They use people who don’t know the law and they have to make the laws really strict (Male, 56, Béja, farmer)”

# APPENDIX A :

## FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- **117 total respondents**  
from Tunis, Bizerte, Béja, Medenine.
- **Up to 10 respondents**  
per group
- **Diversity** of ages,  
professions and neighborhoods  
within each group

Gender	Count
Female	56
Male	61
Age	Count
25-35	48
+36	79
Profession	Count
Employed	67
Unemployed	12
Retired	8
Homemaker	20
Student	10
Education	Count
University	57
Secondary	35
Primary	24
None	1



## APPENDIX B :

### LIST OF POTENTIAL PREROGATIVES

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#### The prerogatives:

1. Construction and maintenance of road, sidewalks, gardens, parks and nurseries, as well as their outbuildings and services that are the responsibility of the commune.
2. Landscaping of the gardens, sites and green spaces, beautification of the city and removal of pollution on public thoroughfares.
3. Household waste collection, the sorting thereof if applicable, and its transport to controlled landfills.
4. Public lighting on the commune's thoroughfares, in public spaces and institutions.
5. The creation, maintenance and repair of the commune's buildings, public spaces, community centres and other public works.
6. The creation of rainwater management systems, with the exception of works for flood protection, and the maintenance thereof.
7. The creation of city markets of all types, business and cultural fairs and events slaughterhouses, summer resorts, and rest homes as well as their organization and operation.
8. Protection and prevention in the area of health and cleanliness, environmental protection and the establishment of regulations relating thereto.
9. Decision-making pertaining to the commune's headquarters, its jurisdiction, the naming of places, streets, municipal complexes and gardens.



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