

# **Voices of a Revolution: Conversations with Tunisia's Youth**

Findings from focus groups with young Tunisian men and women  
conducted March 11 to 24, 2011

Prepared for the National Democratic Institute  
by Nicholas Collins

in collaboration with

EMRHOD Consulting, Tunis

Copyright © National Democratic Institute (NDI) 2011. All rights reserved. Portions of this work may be reproduced and/or translated for noncommercial purposes provided NDI is acknowledged as the source of the material and is sent copies of any translation.

NDI's public opinion research study in Tunisia was made possible through funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The opinions expressed herein are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NDI, USAID or the United States Government.

National Democratic Institute  
2030 M Street, Fifth Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Phone: 202.728.5500  
Fax: 202.728.5520  
Web: <http://www.ndi.org>



The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

Since its founding in 1983, NDI has worked with local partners in 125 countries and territories, bringing 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 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.

***Citizen Participation:*** Making democracy work requires informed and active citizens who understand how to voice their interests, act collectively and hold public officials accountable. Through the years the Institute has worked with more than 13,000 civic groups. NDI's civic programs — including civic and voter education, get out the vote efforts, issue organizing and advocacy, budget oversight and government monitoring — help citizens engage actively in the political process and serve as a link between citizens and elected officials.

***Democracy and Technology:*** The Internet, mobile phones and social media are helping citizens engage in politics in increasingly innovative and participatory ways. NDI has been a pioneer in the use of technology as an integral component of democratic development. The Institute has helped citizens create and refine tools to advocate, organize and mobilize in ways that encourage governments to be more accountable and create opportunities for citizen-led social and political change.

***Democratic Governance:*** NDI works with legislatures around the world to support lawmakers and staff in strengthening committees, legislative oversight, rules of procedure, public access to information, caucuses and constituency outreach. The Institute helps government ministries and the offices of prime ministers and presidents to function more efficiently, improve public outreach and be more responsive to the public at large. NDI also supports the efforts of provincial councils and local governments to respond more effectively to citizen needs.

***Elections:*** NDI engages with political parties and civic organizations in voter and civic education, electoral law reform and monitoring all phases of the election process. These programs build confidence, accountability and legitimacy of governments. NDI has worked with more than 300 citizen groups and coalitions in 74 countries that have mobilized more than two million citizen election monitors, engaged with hundreds of parties promoting electoral integrity and organized over 100 international election observation missions around the world.

***Political Parties:*** NDI works with its partners on methods of political party building — from internal democratic procedures and candidate selection to polling, platform development and public outreach. The Institute has worked with more than 720 political parties and organizations in more than 80 countries to create more open political environments in which citizens can actively participate in the democratic process.

***Women in Politics:*** NDI has been a leader in efforts to promote the political participation of women. The Institute's creative and wide-ranging programs — in both challenging environments where democracy is just beginning to flourish and in more established democracies — engage women in legislatures, political parties and civil society as leaders, activists and informed citizens. These programs create an environment where women can advocate on matters of policy, run for political office, be elected, govern effectively, and participate meaningfully in every facet of civic and political life.

## Preface

The nationwide protest movement that led to the overthrow of the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 was a first of its kind in the Arab world. Using social networks, predominantly Facebook, young people across the country organized without the guidance of formal structures such as civil society organizations and political parties. Reacting to years of perceived indignity, economic hardship, unemployment and denial of basic freedoms, Tunisian youth representing diverse social, economic and political backgrounds were truly the engine behind the change that swept across the country.

**Purpose.** Recognizing the pivotal role that Tunisian youth played during these historic events, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) led a qualitative study in cities across Tunisia from March 11 to 24, 2011 to explore young peoples' perspectives on their country's past, present and future. The study's findings, summarized below, provide insight into the perspectives of Tunisian youth regarding the recent events, democratic transition, political elites and varying avenues for political participation. The findings of this study will be used to inform Tunisian decision-makers—in transitional government, political parties and civil society organizations—about the nuances behind young peoples' opinions. The information will be critical in ensuring that political elites address the expectations of youth during the fragile political transition underway.

The Institute commissioned EMRHOD Consulting to organize the study in nine cities across the country. EMRHOD is a marketing and public opinion research firm based in North Africa, with offices in Tunis and Algiers, and a member of the ENSOMAR research group. A qualitative opinion research expert from the Institute's former People's Mirror focus group center in Morocco worked with EMRHOD to coordinate the study. While several quantitative surveys have been conducted in Tunisia since January 2011, this study embodies the first qualitative research on political issues in Tunisia's history, as independent public opinion research was not permitted under Ben Ali. For NDI, which established a presence in Tunisia shortly after the revolution, the study represents a pilot initiative that will inform future rounds of public opinion research that the Institute intends to conduct to provide analysis on Tunisian citizens' attitudes toward the evolving political transition. The focus group findings shed light on how young Tunisians think and feel about the direction of their country and explain why those attitudes exist.

**Method.** From March 11 to 24, 2011, NDI held ten focus groups in nine cities across the country with a widespread geographical representation: Tunis (2), Bizerte, Sousse, Kairouan, Sidi Bouzid, Sfax, Gabès, Nabeul and Le Kef. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location and role in the events of December 2010 and January 2011. To capture the perspectives of those who were most active in the protest movement and most touched by the issue of unemployment, each group comprised between seven and 10 men and women between the ages of 25-35. The gender breakdown was 55 percent men and 45 percent women. Thirty-six percent of participants were unemployed. In its recruitment criteria, NDI also

prioritized participants who identified themselves as frequent users of Facebook. Participants were selected and re-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels and professions.

The sensitivity of both the topics discussed and of the prevailing political climate posed unique challenges to implementation of the project. Precarious security situations in several interior cities necessitated the delay of groups. While ultimately successful, recruitment in the interior regions was particularly complex as the issues discussed held particular importance and sensitivity, given the roles these cities and towns played in the revolution. Such areas also lacked prior exposure to public opinion research, as marketing research initiatives were largely focused on coastal cities. NDI and EMRHOD worked in close partnership to navigate around such obstacles.

**About focus groups.** Focus groups are a qualitative rather than quantitative research instrument and act as a complement to scientific polling which provides a scientific sample of the population. Instead, focus groups reveal a richness of opinion that polls cannot provide. Through facilitated, open-ended discussion, focus groups allow decision-makers to understand the motivations, feelings and values behind participants' opinions. Further, focus group findings are only a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. Given the dynamism of the Tunisian transition, public opinion is in constant flux as citizens respond to unfolding events. The conclusions of this report therefore only represent opinions when research was undertaken in mid- to late-March 2011.

This report reflects the opinions of young Tunisian citizens who participated in the study. General terms such as "youth" and "young Tunisians" are used in this report as a convenience to represent the attitudes of those participants.



*Fig. 1: Locations of focus groups. With the exception of Tunis, where two groups were held, each city held one focus group.*

## Main Findings

Based on a series of ten focus groups conducted in March 2011, this report explores young Tunisians' opinions of the recent events that led to the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime and of the political transition underway. Main findings include the following:

**Tunisian youth are eager to participate in their country's democratic transition, but skeptical about available channels.** Respondents were nearly unanimous in **expressing a genuine desire to participate** in Tunisia's political transition, particularly through voting in the constituent assembly elections scheduled for July 24, 2011. Such participation is seen as the logical next step for young people who are proud of their role in overthrowing the Ben Ali regime and aspire to oversee the ensuing political transition. Furthermore, having only witnessed falsified elections, youth voiced profound excitement over the prospect of electing their representatives. **Young Tunisians are wary, however, about the political process and the role of the current elite. They express concern about individuals, political parties and civil society organizations attempting to profit from the revolution for personal gains.** This reluctance likely stems from a long-standing exclusion of youth, as with most Tunisians, from the political process, a phenomenon that has to a lesser extent extended into the political transition. Political parties, which were co-opted and marginalized under the former regime, have poor standing among youth. While civil society organizations fare slightly better, young people **remain suspicious about lending formal support to any organized institutions.**

"Voting is a means for our voices to be heard and a sign that the revolution has succeeded."  
(Female, Tunis)

"I feel that I play a role in nationwide democracy."  
(Male, Gabès)

"At this stage, I feel that we need to improve our political consciousness."  
(Female, Tunis)

**Many young Tunisians believe their country is headed in the right direction,** yet many youth are realistic about the potential for back-sliding and **the need for patience** in the short- to mid-term. The overthrow of Ben Ali is viewed as a significant positive step and a major cause for optimism, permitting freedoms and paving the way for a government that listens to the people. Respondents pointed to citizens' newfound power and investment in the country's political processes as a guarantee for a better future.

"If we can overthrow Ben Ali we can continue to build our country. We have men and women who are capable of restoring Tunisia."  
(Female, Le Kef)

“Many things have improved, but most importantly our voice is now being heard.”

(Male, Gabès)

**Such optimism is tempered by a realistic, practical outlook concerning security and the economy**, two main priorities that respondents believe have the potential to improve but have not yet done so. Pessimism is largely attributable to the unstable and fluid situation facing the country only two months following the revolution. In terms of security, young Tunisians deplore the persistent instability and rise in crime stemming in part from the release of prisoners during the revolution. Some voiced concerns that the revolution has crippled the economy and deterred foreign investors. More broadly, some young people are doubtful about the country's democratic prospects due to citizens' lack of experience and skewed understanding of the meaning of democracy and freedom.

“I think the country is going in the wrong direction. The people have no more confidence in the government and protest each time they want something, but this slows down the government's work.”

(Male, Tunis)

“I am a little bit pessimistic: we had a revolution and threw out the dictator, but the problem is peoples' mentality. It's very difficult – people see democracy and freedom a different way and do not understand what it means.”

(Female, Le Kef)

“We are going in the wrong direction, nothing is concrete and we have nothing but promises and wild accusations.”

(Male, Tunis)

**In all discussions, there was universal agreement that youth were the driving force behind the political events**, while divergences of opinion existed about the role of more formal political actors. Corruption, unemployment and political oppression were among the motivating factors for the revolution most-cited by youth. Respondents described their personal involvement in street protests and sit-ins, as well as usage of Facebook to consume and share videos and articles, as the primary means of involvement in the revolution. **Sit-ins and protests were largely agreed to be legitimate, democratic vehicles to achieve political aims**; however some respondents voiced **opposition to those protesting to serve personal interests**, and asserted that sit-ins should not prevent people from returning to work.

“Personally, until January 13, I was disinterested, and was even convinced by Ben Ali's last speech. But the next day I went to protest and became convinced of what I was doing.”

(Male, Sousse)

“When I open my computer and go on Facebook and find videos on the revolution and share them, that means that I am playing a role in the revolution.”

(Male, Kairouan)

“People were boiling on the inside, but they were silent, they were like a volcano... just waiting for a sign to react to.”

(Female, Le Kef)

“Internet and Facebook are the main reasons the revolution happened. Five years ago we had the same problems as today but we could not communicate. If we had organized protests we would be quickly uncovered.”

(Female, Sousse)

**Tunisian youth largely react positively to the idea of democracy and are hopeful about the prospects of the democratic transition.** Democracy is closely associated with freedom of expression and the sharing of opinions. Many young people refer to a political awakening taking place as they digest the political process and learn about the options available to them. Some respondents expressed **concern that citizens misunderstand the meaning of democracy and are acting irresponsibly with their new freedoms.** Across regions, participants described a void of political culture after decades of political repression during which the government encouraged citizens to focus on subjects like music and sports, at the expense of their engagement in politics. Young people recognize that **the transition to a more democratic political system will require the gradual development of a political consciousness in Tunisia.**

“I have noticed that people no longer follow musical TV shows and football, but instead are interested in politics. In the near future the Tunisian people will be more conscious; they will begin to ask questions about their place in the world.”

(Male, Nabeul)

“Certain people do not understand what freedom is, it is leading to chaos.”

(Female, Nabeul)

“We have lived through too much frustration and oppression. We cannot achieve democracy with this mentality.”

(Female, Tunis)

**Although some respondents acknowledged improvements in security over the past two months, citizens' ongoing lack of trust in police emerged as a principal concern.** The source of this mistrust stems from the police's historical role as a tool of government repression, as well as police-led violence during the revolution. Despite the mistrust of the police, respondents



worried about the emerging security vacuum and increasing thefts and burglaries. Much of the insecurity facing the country was attributed to the members of the former regime seeking to sow chaos. Some referred to improvements in relations with the police and greater responsiveness to citizen needs. The army was unanimously seen in a positive light, based on their refusal to heed the Ben Ali government's commands to fire on citizens. The dissolution of the political police was also cited as a positive development.

“Before in Gabès we lived in complete security – we could return home at 3 AM without any fear. Now we are afraid.”

(Female, Gabès)

“[There is] too much chaos, confusion—we cannot be confident in the government.”

(Male, Nabeul)

**The economy is a main concern throughout the country.** Although all participants referred to the health of the economy as a priority, certain cities—Bizerte, Nabeul, Sidi Bouzid and Gabès—were more likely than others to voice pessimism over the direction of the economy. The most commonly cited issues concerning the economy were **unemployment, the crisis in the tourism sector, rising prices, frequency of strikes** and the impact of the political and security developments in neighboring Libya. More optimistic youth referred to the removal of the ruling families' networks of corruption as a potential incentive for foreign investment. Tunisia's young and well-educated population was also cited as a positive factor for economic development. Respondents in the coastal cities of Sousse, Gabès and Nabeul stressed the need for increased foreign investment, while those in Le Kef, Sidi Bouzid and Tunis tended to focus on returning to work and ending strikes.

“Extensive protests and strikes threaten the economy and discourage investors. Friends who work for the Chinese told me that after seeing the repeated strikes they decided to close their businesses in Tunisia.”

(Female, Bizerte)

“In Sfax, several businesses closed because of the protests. Everyone is thinking of their personal interests.”

(Female, Sfax)

“In my opinion, there needs to be more emphasis on exports to develop the economy.”

(Male, Sfax)

**Young Tunisians consistently recognize regional disparities and divisions.** Regardless of location, each discussion acknowledged **significant disparities in development between Tunisia's more prosperous coastal cities and interior regions and cited regional inequalities**

**as a leading cause of the revolution.** Respondents from coastal cities like Tunis, Sousse, Bizerte, Sfax and Nabeul referred to these disparities as a pressing issue but would also point out that unemployment and insecurity are affecting the entire country. Those in Sidi Bouzid, Gabès, Le Kef and Kairouan were more likely to invoke an intentional, government-led exclusion of interior regions that has persisted through the revolution. This exclusion has taken the form of severe corruption, neglect of pressing issues like pollution and unemployment, and the imposition of governors from different regions. **Despite divisions, young people demonstrated an exceptional solidarity across regions and a desire to bridge the development gaps that persist.**

“There exists a ‘regional self-interest’ where everyone is preoccupied with their own region. Gabès is the only governorate that does not receive much attention and we need to have our voices heard.”

(Female, Gabès)

“It is important not to support regionalism by saying ‘so and so belongs to Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, etc. so we will not vote for them.’ One should vote for ideas and not for people.”

(Male, Sidi Bouzid)

“During the revolution, someone was gossiping on Facebook about the regions and regionalism, hoping to cause problems. So I copied all of his writings and posted them to reveal them to everyone.”

(Male, Le Kef)

“In Sousse, the behavior of people during the revolution was a bit more timid than other regions like Sfax, Tunis, the south, etc. This is maybe because the majority of investors in Tunisia are from Sousse and are linked to the Ben Ali family.”

(Female, Sousse)

“When I want to receive credit from the bank, they ask me for a guarantee because I am from Sidi Bouzid, but if you are from Sfax or another region, they do not do this.”

(Male, Sidi Bouzid)

**Long repressed under Ben Ali, political parties and civil society associations are little known by Tunisian youth today.** These entities are first and foremost **recognized by the personalities of their leaderships.** When parties were recognized, **much confusion existed regarding their names, platforms and positions.** Upon being asked to spontaneously name parties, the former ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) and the recently legalized Ennahda (Renaissance) Party were the most frequently cited. Although the RCD invoked unanimous condemnation for its affiliation with Ben Ali, discussion of the Islamist Ennahda led to frequent debates about its political role.

At the regional level, though awareness of all political actors was still relatively low, three entities benefited from **higher levels of recognition: the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), Ennahda and the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP)**. The image of two parties comprising the former genuine opposition under Ben Ali—the Ettajdid (Renewal) Movement and the PDP—has been greatly tarnished by their participation in the first transitional government following the revolution, with some respondents saying they were complicit with the former regime. Respondents shared a common **desire for improved outreach from parties through televised debates and visits to the regions**.

“Political parties are concentrated in the capital, they have not tried to visit the interior regions where the revolution started or even other areas.”

(Male, Sidi Bouzid)

“Political parties should come, meet people, put up flyers, go out and visit the governorates.”

(Male, Nabeul)

“No one can give you the name of a political party, because we lack a political culture”

(Male, Sidi Bouzid)

**Young Tunisians do not trust the country's political elites.** Each group voiced cynicism and apprehension about varying political actors identifying themselves as leaders of the protest movement and profiting from the revolution. **Even if political actors are seen as being genuine opponents of the Ben Ali regime, such “opportunism” is perceived as an attempt to steal the revolution from the people who fought for it, especially youth.** In this vein, parties who joined the first transitional government were decried as being motivated by the prospect of gaining visibility ahead of presidential elections. Respondents repeatedly denounced entities with names like January 14 Front and Council to Protect the Revolution, saying they have not earned the right for such titles and do not represent the people. While some groups provoked more positive reactions than others, **no single political actor carries widespread legitimacy among youth, and no group is seen as being representative of the revolution itself.** The focus groups took place shortly following the nomination of interim Prime Minister Beji Caïd Essebsi. Unlike his predecessor, Mohamed Ghannouchi, who evoked largely negative reactions, impressions of Essebsi were more divided, with some respondents praising his qualifications and style and others lamenting his advanced age and affiliations with the Bourguiba era.

“No party represents us. They were living the good life overseas while we were living in agony and suffering. They could have returned to Tunisia.”

(Male, Tunis)

“Normally religious people do not create political parties. The fact that [Ennahda] has a political party means that they are not honest.”

(Male, Kairouan)

**The democratic transition is seen as a closed, elite-led process.** The varying institutions and actors involved in the political transition are widely seen to lack transparency and exclude youth and citizens from outside Tunis. Respondents lamented how political leaders speak in abstract terms and do not make attempts to incorporate youth. Tunisia's interior regions in particular demonstrated a feeling of being **distanced from the transition taking place in the capital.** The former High Commission on Political Reform, now known as the High Commission for Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, was positively perceived for setting Tunisia on a democratic path but denounced as being an unelected, unrepresentative body.

“We didn't choose the political reform commission, the government nominated them.”

(Male, Le Kef)

“Seeing political parties dispute with one another is not enough. Each party should present itself independently of others.”

(Male, Nabeul)

“[Constituent assembly members] should adopt clear and distinct programs and listen to people.”

(Female, Tunis)

**Expectations of transitional government are high.** Young Tunisians' pride over their predominant role in the revolution translates into high expectations of the transitional government. Respondents expressed hopes that the government will **prioritize job creation and anti-corruption**, and focus efforts on improving communication with the public. Greater transparency and accountability from decision-makers are a priority. Coupled with these high expectations is the sentiment that youth have to exert vigilant oversight on the political transition. **Youth emphasized that constant pressure is required to promote genuine change.**

When asked about the expectations that they will have for the elected constituent assembly, respondents overwhelmingly **called for members to be sincere, honest, accountable, hard-working and just.** Building on complaints that past and current governments have not been responsive to young peoples' interests, respondents requested that members improve outreach practices. Members should place the country and citizens' interests before their own. While participants broadly supported the need for revising the constitution on the grounds that the current text was heavily manipulated to favor Ben Ali, their **advice for members did not concern constitutional reform, but rather priority areas like corruption and unemployment.**

“We want youth voices to be heard. The organizations and associations that exist are managed by old people, as is the case with the citizens’ commission.”

(Female, Gabès)

“The government does not do anything without being pressured.”

(Male, Sfax)

“[The constituent assembly] should not forget what happened to Ben Ali; the Tunisian people revolted once and can do so a second time.”

(Male, Sidi Bouzid)

“[Members of the constituent assembly] should know that the people are watching them. They should create Facebook accounts.”

(Male, Sfax)

**Young Tunisians are divided over Ennahda as a political force.** While Ennahda was the most-recognized political entity among respondents, ensuing discussions, however, **point to sharp divisions among youth concerning the newfound party and reflect the broader debates in Tunisian society at present.** The return of Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi attracted much attention in the country and reinforced the growing awareness of the movement following the revolution. Criticism of the party is largely based on past events in the 1980s and 1990s and fears over a potential retraction of freedoms granted to women under the Personal Status Code. Respondents in Sidi Bouzid and Sousse in particular perceived the party to be hypocritical, extremist and anti-women, and shared concerns over blending religion and politics. They attribute any moderation in rhetoric to opportunism to engage citizens prior to elections. In Bizerte, by contrast, among other cities, respondents suggested the party’s rhetoric has shifted to be modeled on the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP). Supporters of the party argued that they would allow for a return to Tunisia’s values, and that under a new democratic system Ennahda should be allowed to participate. Although respondents’ varied in their beliefs over Ennahda’s true intentions, they were largely **unanimous about the need to protect women’s rights and the social advancements made since independence.**

“We have to apply religion. Tunisia is a Muslim country.”

(Female, Kairouan)

“The positive thing about Ennahda is that they will reintegrate important people into society who had been oppressed under the former regime because they were practicing their faith: doctors, philosophers, researchers.”

(Male, Tunis)

“It is not a good solution for Ennahda to be in the government; it is better that they stay away from politics.”

(Female, Kairouan)

“I want to wear the *hijab* and work at the same time.”

(Female, Sfax)

“Thanks to the revolution Ennahda cannot force us to do anything.”

(Male, Sfax)

**Voting is the most popular means of political participation.** Respondents confirmed that their participation in the upcoming constituent election assembly elections is an obligation toward ensuring that the democratic process continues and that the goals of the revolution are fulfilled. When presented with a list of possible channels for participating in the political transition and the democratic process, each focus group **rated voting in upcoming elections first**. Very few participants reported having voted in any past elections, which the vast majority described as fraudulent. Despite this eagerness, focus groups revealed a **relatively low awareness among participants of the details regarding the election and the mandate of the constituent assembly, reflecting the challenges that bodies like the High Commission have in communicating with the public**. Some participants continued to refer to presidential elections at least one week after the decision to hold constituent assembly elections was made.

After the act of voting, **the most popular channels for political participation were use of social networks for sharing political opinions and participation in public forums**. Facebook was widely perceived as a credible source of information, followed by word of mouth and some television channels. Youth demonstrated a **common reluctance to formally joining political parties and civil society organizations, or to run as candidates or support campaigns**. The act of sharing political opinions with friends and family also emerged as a popular choice for becoming more involved, reflecting the strength of familial ties in Tunisia and the importance of informal communication.

“Voting does not require a deep political and historical culture, it is sufficient to know the goals and principles of political parties.”

(Male, Sidi Bouzid)

“Family and friends are a part of democracy.”

(Female, Kairouan)

“Civil society organizations serve everyone – they are apolitical.”

(Male, Sousse)

“I need to organize my opinions by joining a political party.”

(Male, Tunis)

“The idea of participating in elections makes us feel that we have produced a change for our country.”

(Female, Gabès)

\*\*\*

## Conclusion

Focus groups conducted by NDI in Tunisia in March 2011 bring to light the profound eagerness of young Tunisians to participate in the current democratic transition. The political elite now must determine how the energy displayed by youth during the revolution can be channeled into the political process. Young people are clearly open to examining avenues for participation but remain skeptical of several available choices, particularly those that involve adherence to political parties and civil society organizations.

As the political space continues to open in Tunis, leadership of political parties and civil society organizations would be wise to consider strategies to attract youth and capitalize on their talents. A growing demographic that has taken on new importance since their role in the revolution, young Tunisians represent a considerable opportunity for political parties to mobilize support ahead of upcoming elections. Incorporating youth in their structures is not only in parties' immediate strategic interests but is also a means of assisting young people in expressing their opinions and grievances through formal mechanisms, not street protests. Focus group findings illustrate that many young people first want to be shown that they are being listened to and that their opinions are valued. Online networks such as Facebook should be coupled with offline, in-person efforts to maximize results in engaging young people.

The findings also show that improvements to the security and economic situation are priorities to youth. Having committed themselves to addressing these questions, transitional governing bodies must now show citizens that they are willing to deliver on their promises. Tunisian youth want to see political leaders develop clear, innovative responses to these policy issues. Proposed solutions must incorporate strategies that include Tunisia's regions, particularly those marginalized under Ben Ali. Findings from the focus groups reveal that young people, whether from Sousse or Le Kef, feel a strong sense of national unity and solidarity, as demonstrated by marches led by youth from Tunis to Sidi Bouzid to thank them for initiating the revolution.

Political issues such as constitutional reform, political party maneuvering and upcoming elections are currently less important among youth than security or economic concerns, but are rapidly attracting interest. The current democratic transition represents a significant opening for the political elite to promote greater awareness of these issues among youth. For example, the High Commission's decision to require that political parties each nominate one young representative to the body represents a positive first step in this direction. Given the heavy favoring of voting as a means of political participation, the upcoming elections will provide an opportunity for youth to begin playing a more active role in political life.

Overcoming young peoples' cynicism about politics, which was long reinforced under the Ben Ali regime, will be no easy task. Tunisian youth are proud and largely hopeful about the



achievements made in recent months, but remain cautious about the future and the role that the political elite will play. As governing institutions are put into place, political leaders should invest heavily in constituent outreach to respond to pressing needs, and be wary of speaking in the name of the revolution. Instead of over-promising, politicians will have to articulate realistic platforms and explain to young people why certain issues take priority over others. Such behavior would serve to begin to convince youth that political leaders seek power not to fulfill personal interests but to benefit their country.

**APPENDIX A**

Background Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

City	Count
Tunis 1	9
Tunis 2	10
Bizerte	7
Sousse	10
Kairouan	9
Sidi Bouzid	8
Sfax	10
Gabès	8
Nabeul	9
Le Kef	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88</b>

Sex	Count
Male	49
Female	39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88</b>

Age	Count
25-30	56
30-35	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88</b>

Status	Count
Employed	56
Unemployed	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88</b>