



**DEMANDING TANGIBLE ACHIEVEMENTS:  
TUNISIAN CITIZENS EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS ON THE  
PARLIAMENT, THE RECENT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND  
UPCOMING ELECTIONS**

**FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN TUNISIA  
Conducted September 26 to October 3, 2018**

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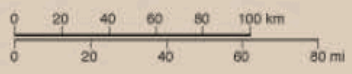
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**TUNISIA**

- ★ National capital
- Governorate capital
- Town, village
- ✈ Major airport
- International boundary
- - - Regional boundary

*The Governorates of Tunisia are named after their Capital*





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### PREFACE

After being postponed numerous times for a variety of technical and political reasons, Tunisia held its first ever municipal elections on May 6, 2018. More than 53,000 candidates, representing 2,074 lists nationwide, competed for seats on 350 municipal councils.

This election represented an important step towards implementing chapter seven of the Tunisian constitution. What has been to-date a highly centralized government will devolve power and responsibility to the municipal level over a phase-in period of several years.

These elections were not only meaningful from a constitutional democratic transition perspective; they also highlighted important trends in voter sentiment towards political parties and democracy in general. Shortly before the field work for this round of focus groups, the ISIE released the final results of the municipal elections. The report revealed new and noteworthy trends in Tunisians' voting behaviors, with independent lists garnering the largest share of the vote (32.2 percent). Furthermore, in accordance with the electoral law in force, these elections led to the highest percentages of women and youth elected in the history of Tunisia, at 47.5 percent and 37.2 percent respectively.

Tunisians now turn their attention to the upcoming Parliamentary year, which will see its fair share of issues to be debated and legislation to be passed. Despite the positive steps achieved by parliament so far, citizen frustration continues to mount while their confidence in politicians and in the ARP continues to wane as they seek tangible achievements that directly affect their daily lives, eager to see any initiative that will result in any form of proactive citizen outreach from their members of parliament (MPs). Against this backdrop, the Tunisian parliament is endeavoring to meet people's expectations by passing pieces of legislation that address their priorities while also dealing with the remaining milestones in the Tunisian democratic transition, that include, among other priorities, electing members of the constitutional court, the election of the ISIE president and the renewal of its third members.

In 2019, Tunisia will also see more landmark elections. For starters, the next phase in the decentralization effort should occur through regional elections, which will establish 24 regional councils responsible for the economy. Also within the next year, the country is expected to hold the next presidential and parliamentary elections. In the wake of these elections, Tunisia is facing numerous challenges that can further fuel citizen disenchantment with the country's political actors. Most notably, there are important divisions between parliamentary caucuses over a range of crucial themes such as the 2019 budget and next steps in the renewal of the electoral body ISIE. There are also internal disagreements within certain political parties and there are planned amendments to the electoral law that could lead to important changes in the political landscape. These issues will continue to evolve in a tense social, economic and political environment in which citizens continue to lament a lack of tangible achievements from their government, parliament and political parties. Citizens may see these upcoming elections as an opportunity to express frustrations that have grown over the past five years by boycotting the

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elections altogether or by voting in ways that can substantially change the political landscape.

## MAP OF TUNISIA

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





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings of this report provide insights into public opinion in Tunisia in late September and early October 2018. Based on 12 focus group discussions, with 120 Tunisian respondents, the report summarizes the public's evaluation of the performance of the parliament and members of parliament (MPs), views on the recent municipal elections and opinions on upcoming regional, legislative and Presidential elections. The research also explores ideas related to citizen outreach, priority issues for the upcoming legislative year and possible amendments to electoral law and the constitution.

### **Tunisia – Before, During and After the Focus Groups**

Various events occurred **just prior to or during the focus groups**, some of which shaped some of the comments provided in the sessions. First, significant rainfall had caused major flooding, damage, injuries and casualties in various parts of the country. Torrential downpours had compelled the *Institut National de la Météorologie* to advise citizens in the governorates of Nabeul, Sousse, Sfax, Monastir, Mahdia, Gabès et Médenine to use prudence in their travels and some focus groups in Tunis were delayed because of rain storms. In politics, debates surrounding a ministerial shuffle had started and the President of the Republic had announced on September 24<sup>th</sup> that the regional elections would be held in December 2019. The Nidaa Tounes crisis was creating stability challenges among parliamentary groups as new parliamentary blocs were being formed, including the newly created National Coalition.

Various events occurred **after the focus groups** and as such, the reader should be advised that the results in this report do not reflect or capture any public opinion resulting from these events. These include a suicide bomber in Tunis on October 29 and the killing by Tunisian security forces of a known terrorist in Kasserine on October 21. The ISIE declared that the legislative and presidential elections would be held from October to December 2019 and Parliament adopted a law on the elimination of racial discrimination. MPs supported the ministers proposed by the head of the government and Parliament kicked-off their review of the proposed Finance Law for 2019.

### **NATIONAL DIRECTION**

- The sense that the country was headed in the wrong direction was nearly unanimous as respondents continued to feel there is nearly nothing going right these days. Among the few bright spots, freedom of speech was the most likely to be mentioned by respondents, although some seemed prepared to give up some of that freedom in exchange for any improvement in their economic situation.
- Respondents felt that unemployment, inflation and corruption were the major problems facing Tunisia these days, all of which were consistent with previous waves of research.

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Issues in education, healthcare, foreign debt, and public administration were also noted during this round of focus groups.

### PARLIAMENT

- Politicians and those “leading the country” were seen as largely responsible for the current state and general direction of the country. Respondents often complained of a lack of leadership, competence and patriotism when describing some of the root causes behind the challenges both they and the country face on a daily basis.
- Respondents were quite vocal about their disappointment and frustration when specifically prompted for what Parliament or their MPs had achieved over the past 12 months regarding any of the three main roles they are expected to play.
  - Nearly all respondents agreed that their MPs do not represent them. Instead, they were seen as working for their own personal interests or the interests of their party.
  - There was some awareness of laws being recently passed, however the general feeling was that they are not addressing the issues that are important to citizens. Furthermore, even if some of the laws passed were relevant, respondents felt that there was a critical lack of implementation.
  - In terms of government oversight, few were aware of any specific actions and, among those aware, there was only lukewarm appreciation for how well Parliament was performing on this role. Many did not believe MPs were asking the right, impactful questions and they struggled to see how these interrogations could lead to any genuine change.
- Given the continually decreasing level of confidence in parliament among respondents, any suggestion that could increase both the amount and form of contact between MPs and citizens was broadly appreciated. When presented with a specific list of possible actions, the three most popular ideas were establishing constituency offices, organizing regional consultations on priority laws and arranging listening tours.
- In terms of propositions and actions that will be debated in parliament over the coming months, respondents were especially supportive of the following:
  - *Selection of members of the constitutional court...*because they valued the importance of the constitutionality of laws being passed and drafted.
  - *The 2019 Finance Law...*because they wanted to know how public funds will be spent and allocated.
  - *Reform of the social security and welfare system...*because some did not want the retirement age to increase while others, especially older respondents, were concerned about the criteria for pension measures.

The issue of inheritance and gender was by far the least important debate priority, mostly because this issue was already being addressed through their religion.

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- Very few respondents had visited the Parliament's website, its Facebook page or felt that they could be convinced to visit them at all. In fact, respondents admitted to becoming increasingly disconnected from politics and political discussion over the years and any suggestion that they needed to play a role as an active citizen was met with resistance.

### MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND GOVERNANCE

- The municipal elections were an important barometer of the public's sentiments towards politics in Tunisia. Those who voted appreciated the importance of voting in general and recognized the value of these municipal elections as a landmark event in Tunisia's young democratic evolution. Those who did not vote explained that their overall frustration with democracy and their deep mistrust of politicians kept them away from the polling station.
- Most believed the results of the recent municipal elections, which were broadly seen as orderly and well-organized. Those most familiar with the presence and role of the ISIE and of civil society observers tended to have the highest levels of confidence in the results. There were only two issues raised in the groups – some felt that the incidence of vote-buying was not negligible (which in turn led some to distrust the results of the elections) and a good number of respondents were reminded of the ballot issues in Gafsa Mdhila, requiring that the entire election in that municipality be redone.
  - Awareness and appreciation of ISIE during the municipal elections was generally positive. Some also specifically noted that these elections were an improvement over the previous ones.
  - Awareness of civil society observers was moderate and appreciation of their role was mixed. While their presence increased levels of trust in the elections for some, it did not have any impact on others, some of whom conflated these observers with those working with specific political parties.

The research explored respondent's views of independent candidates, female candidates and youth.

- Reactions to the actual number of **independent** candidates elected were somewhat mixed. While some felt that independents would be more likely to be citizen-centric in their approach and less focused on the priorities of a political party, there were always a few in each focus group who questioned the genuine "independence" of these candidates.
- Reactions to the proportion of municipal councilors who were **women** were also quite mixed. Some concluded that the ratio was to be expected given list parity. The fact that approximately half of all councilors were women was encouraging news for many, especially women, and disconcerting news for others, most of whom feeling that these individuals had not been elected based on merit but rather based on their gender. Furthermore, there were many respondents, especially but not exclusively men, who did not believe women, were qualified to be on municipal council.

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- **Youth** (those between 24 and 35) being elected to council was widely applauded. Respondents felt that these councilors would be innovative, active, engaged, creative and in touch with the needs of citizens, especially the needs of other youth in the municipality.
- There was some awareness of actions taken by new municipal councils, although a few were under the impression that some of these initiatives predated the elections. A few had also noticed that their council had met a few times and were already discussing priorities for the municipality. Those who had not heard of any meeting or action tended to generally discredit the council and felt like “nothing had changed.” Some of these same respondents also seemed to have unrealistic expectations, thinking that their council would have acted on several action items within months of being elected.
  - When specifically prompted, nearly all respondents were interested in exercising their rights in the administration of their municipalities, although many were not quite sure how they would go about doing that.

### UPCOMING ELECTIONS

- Nearly all respondents were aware that legislative and presidential elections will take place in 2019. Opposition to these elections being postponed was high, with many arguing that it would be unconstitutional.
- Five possible amendments to provisions in the electoral law and the constitution were explored with respondents:
  - Giving the right to military and security forces to vote in the presidential and legislative elections was met with mixed reactions. Those who supported the idea felt that it is their right as citizens to vote while those opposed believed that military and security forces must remain apolitical.
  - Support for horizontal list parity was strongest among women. Respondents opposed to parity stressed that gender should not be a factor in how lists are designed but instead competence and qualifications should be prioritized.
  - Raising the threshold for candidate lists to win seats was also met with mixed reactions, although opinions leaned slightly in favor of it. The general feeling was that weak parties should not be rewarded with seats and that fewer parties in the ARP would lead to less negotiating and fewer alliances. Those opposed to raising the threshold believed in party diversity in the ARP and that large parties should be held in check.
  - Modifying the number of seats in parliament downward was much more appealing than increasing the number of seats. Cutting the number of seats stemmed almost entirely from general frustration with a perceived inefficiency of Parliament and that given the budget challenges faced by the state, money could be saved by paying fewer MPs.

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- Respondents seemed to prefer a proportional system over a majoritarian one although these two electoral systems were not entirely clear to all respondents. Those in favor of a proportional system mostly supported party diversity in the ARP while those in favor of a majoritarian system believed this would bring greater stability to the political process through fewer parties in the ARP. It was also seen as an easier way to keep parties accountable.
- Not many respondents were aware of the regional elections and the moderator often needed to explain what they involved. Most respondents were in favor of the elections and there was a slight preference for holding them before the legislative elections.

### PRIORITIES FOR THE REGION

Respondents noted that if they were a member of the ARP, job creation and development would be a top priority in all regions. Development of the agricultural sector, including better management of state-owned lands, is especially prioritized in Mahdia and Sidi Bouzid whereas greater exploitation of resources like natural gas and oil are prioritized in Tataouine. Infrastructure is also a common theme across all regions, especially roads and irrigation/sewers.

As a municipal councilor, respondents would prioritize cleanliness and infrastructure improvements (especially roads and irrigation/sewage systems). Many would also emphasize organization of the local market and street vendors. Youth recreation and public administration reforms would then make up a second tier of priorities for citizens.

# PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

This study evaluates Tunisian citizens' opinions of the situation facing the country approximately three and a half years after the seating of a new president and parliament, and seven and a half years after the revolution. NDI conducted 12 focus groups with 120 respondents throughout Tunisia in late September and early October 2018. The findings, drawn from respondents' comments, are detailed below.

## I. National Direction

The feeling that the country is headed in the wrong direction was nearly unanimous as respondents continued to feel there is nearly nothing going right these days.

### 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. Among the few bright spots, freedom of speech was the most likely area of progress to be mentioned by respondents, although some seemed prepared to give up some of that freedom in exchange for some modicum of improvement in their economic situation.

Other bright spots noted by a few respondents included:

- Civil society is getting stronger;
- Tourism is improving;
- There are ongoing infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, etc.
- Some municipalities are demonstrating eagerness to improve their area – a few recall seeing the President of their municipality out in the field assessing the situation;
- The municipal elections were held;
- There is some leadership against corruption; and,
- There is better security.

### What is going wrong?

Consistent with many previous rounds of research, respondents were quite vocal about what has been going wrong. Furthermore, respondents often listed more than one area and they could often provide very tangible and recent examples of how these issues had an impact on their life.

There was widespread agreement that the country was facing significant economic challenges, especially in terms of **unemployment and inflation**. Even respondents who were gainfully employed could be heard lamenting the economic situation. On a related note, some respondents explained that there has been a gradual disappearance of the middle class in Tunisia and that society now consists almost entirely of the very rich and the poor.

*“The high cost of living and prices are still going up. We used to be three social levels: rich, middle, and lower class. Now you can only see two social classes: the rich and the poor. Also, there are no investments, there are no job opportunities and factories are closing down.”* (Male, Tunis, 25, Unemployed)

*“We are in a very critical situation especially after the revolution. They are trying to fix things, but they are failing to do them because they don't have the budget to do things properly. In terms of the social life the crime rate is going up, and prices are going up and we have a high cost of living. The government is even considering taking away the price support. This is creating a lot of frustration in young people. Many young people or Engineers are unemployed and if they find a job they get paid 200 dinars. If I take my case, I was lucky to have my family who could help me financially to start my own business, but other people cannot find any financial support from the government. So many people are looking for illegal immigration because they don't find any other options in my country. If you see the mistakes in the books for the sixth graders you will see how bad the situation is.”* (Female, Mahdia, 30, Engineer)

Compared to previous rounds of research, there seemed to be a greater level of awareness and concern regarding **the country's foreign debt**. Respondents were not only concerned about the debt itself, they were also concerned that Tunisia had become subservient to its international lenders when it comes to legislation and policy priorities, especially the IMF and the World Bank.

Concerns with **education and healthcare** were more common during these sessions compared to previous rounds of research. On the education front, most respondents were concerned that there were insufficient reforms and that the current system is outdated while a few voiced concerns with the recent changes that had been made to the curriculum. In terms of healthcare, respondents were mostly concerned with access to services, access to proper treatments and corruption. Respondents in Sidi Bouzid were especially vocal about healthcare.

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*“Education and health care are the main issues but the problem is coming from the government. Our hospital is good if you are admitted but the emergency room is really bad.” (Female, Sidi Bouzid, 43, Education)*

*“There's an absence of discipline and behavior in educational institutions. They have to teach kids how to behave because we have to build that basis. We have to teach them how to be patriotic.” (Male, Mahdia, 55, Restaurant Owner)*

**Corruption** remained an important challenge for the country according to respondents. Specific references to corruption in public administration were frequent. Respondents also alluded to corruption of political leaders as a significant barrier to seeing the country move in the right direction.

*“The economy of the country and corruption. We keep hearing that they are fighting corruption, but we don't see anything concrete.” (Male, Tataouine, 27, Employed)*

**Public administration** was often noted as an area in need of reform and much more oversight. Respondents raised a variety of complaints related not only to blatant corruption, but also to incompetence, inefficiency, and disregard for public service. Examples include long delays to get documentation processed, staff asking for bribes to obtain service or to obtain faster service, staff absent from their posts, unqualified or incompetent employees, and citizens having to return to a public administration office several times to make their requests.

*“Public services are very slow, and they postpone things. I did a training and I wanted to start my own project and I have spent an entire year going back and forth for paperwork. When they finally reply they made it even harder than the beginning until I just gave up.” (Male, Mahdia, 25, Electrician)*

In most sessions, respondents often believed that the root cause of many of the country's economic challenges is **the lack of political will and competence** to effect change. Respondents would go on to explain that there is no genuine leadership of the country overall and that there is no specific leadership on the economic front. Respondents did admit that there are reforms happening in the country and that new laws are being introduced, however the reforms were deemed too shallow and the laws were seen as irrelevant to the everyday struggles of Tunisians. Some respondents argued that those making important decisions for the direction of the country are not adequately qualified in terms of academic qualifications, life experience and being disconnected from the economic reality of average Tunisians.

*“The reason to get to this point and the reason for bankruptcy and for the economic and social situation, is that the main decision makers of the government are weak in terms of knowledge to practice what they are doing. They have a fourth-grade level so how do you want them to be effective? We have*



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*people running the country without any knowledge in politics and they don't even know the meaning of political party, government, or law.” (Male, Tunis, 61, High School Director/Professor)*

*“In my opinion the main reason for the social, political, and economic situation is the absence of the perfect man who can rule and lead this country.” (Male, Tunis, 70, Retired)*

Finally, some respondents explained that **Tunisia is perhaps not ready for democracy**. They went on to explain that their leaders don't know how to lead in a democracy, that the citizens don't know how to “behave” in a democracy and that many have taken their newfound freedoms too far. They believe that the freedoms that were gained through revolution have been misused and that society is now entrenched in a crisis of morality whereby citizens are only thinking for themselves, have become unpatriotic and see little consequences for their actions.

A few issues seemed more prevalent among certain sub-groups, notably:

- Youth were more likely than older respondents to spontaneously explain that reforms are ineffective and that the laws passed are irrelevant to the problems of average Tunisians. They were also more likely to focus on employment and the challenges of starting their own projects. Finally, they also explained that they cannot rely on the government to create jobs, which has led some to try to start their own projects, however this process is full of roadblocks (e.g. cannot get loans from banks, too much paperwork, etc.).
- Women were often more likely to raise concerns about healthcare and education and to some extent about public administration, while men spoke mostly about the economy and state leadership.

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

- Crime in general, and a concern that Tunisia is a source of terrorists.
- Taxes are seen as unfair.
- Poor infrastructure – an issue that is especially glaring when there are rain storms: *“Infrastructure is the priority because when it rains it floods everywhere and it's a big problem.” (Female, Tataouine, 35, Unemployed)*
- Regionalism.

### II. Parliament

A significant segment of each session was dedicated to gauging respondent sentiment towards parliament and members of parliament. Having just discussed the direction of the country, many respondents were already explaining that certain aspects of parliament and its members were problematic for the country's progress.

Politicians and those "leading the country" were seen as largely responsible for the current state and general direction of the country. Respondents often complained of a lack of leadership, competence and patriotism when describing some of the root causes behind the challenges both they and the country face on a daily basis. Respondents were quite vocal about their disappointment and frustration when specifically prompted for what Parliament or their MPs have done over the past 12 months regarding any of the three main roles they are expected to play. The following feedback was heard on each key role:

#### Passing Laws

There was some awareness of laws being recently passed and of laws still being debated (e.g. Law on inheritance). Respondents recalled the following (Note: the names of these laws are listed using the terminology used by respondents):

- Law on access to information
- Law on violence against women
- Law on passport (giving the right to women to travel with their children without their husband's consent)
- Law on agriculture
- Law on inheritance / Equality and inheritance
- *Code de collectivités locales*
- Personal information law
- Laws related to loans from other countries
- Drugs Law
- Law of Finance
- Law on assets disclosure

The general feeling was that the laws were not addressing the issues important to citizens. Furthermore, even if some of the laws passed were relevant, respondents felt that there was a critical lack of implementation.

Four laws passed during the most recent parliamentary year that

focused on corruption and employment were presented to respondents to gauge their general reactions.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the list received a lackluster reception, mostly on the basis that the laws were not seen as addressing priority issues for average citizens. Furthermore, respondents will only be appeased once implementation happens and there is proof that the laws are having their intended impact.

- The Startup Act was well recognized by respondents once it was mentioned by the moderator and was probably the one that proved most popular with respondents.
- Another law that was recognized once it was mentioned by the moderator was the law on the denunciation of corruption and the protection of whistleblowers. In fact, this law was the perfect example of legislation for which its implementation was considered lacking by respondents, some of whom provided details about a few recent whistleblowers who had come forward to denounce corruption only to subsequently lose their jobs.

*“There is nothing they have said that has become true.” (Female, Mahdia, 43, Clothing Factory)*

*“Any law that is being passed or going to be passed is in favor of the higher social class.” (Male, Tunis, 61, High School Director/Professor)*

*“I heard about the Startup Act which is going to be a good thing especially for me because I'm a young person. However, I don't agree that when the country is sinking, they are worrying about equality and inheritance between women and men.” (Male, Tunis, 35, Real-estate agent)*

*“The equality and inheritance law. I don't understand why they would worry about that when people don't find jobs?” (Male, Tunis, 25, Unemployed)*

**Government Oversight**

Respondents seemed aware of the role of government oversight however there was only lukewarm appreciation for how well Parliament was performing on this role. More specifically, a few respondents in each session could recall Ministers being

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement between Tunisia and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development for primary education support; Startup act; Law on assets disclosure; Law on the denunciation of corruption and the protection of whistleblowers

summoned and interrogated by MPs; this was for most the only way Parliament was executing on its role of government oversight and they were not aware of any other way this was being done.

Insofar as these interrogations were, in principle, considered the right thing to be doing, respondents felt that their outcome rarely met their expectations. Many felt the efforts on this front were superficial and lacking any meaningful outcome because they do not believe that MPs are asking the right, impactful questions and they struggle to see how these interrogations could lead to any genuine change.

*“In my opinion it is normal to see the parliament’s job getting to this level. There are so many political opinions and people did not know which one to vote for, so it is normal to find this much corruption and it is normal to see the misuse of politics in general. They are distributing the positions between themselves and their family members. So, in my opinion it is so normal to find people against some political parties and some others are for. I wish we had a good behavior and communication. Unfortunately, when there is no transparency in the Parliament, and when you don't see the reports they get behind the scenes, as a citizen you feel happy when you see someone interrogating a government representative with such enthusiasm and energy.”*  
(Male, Mahdia, 44, Bank Manager)

*“The last one was about interrogating the minister of sports and that was a useless session because they were asking about cars and personal benefits. So, they are not really questioning the important things, they are just questioning vague things to show that they are doing something.”* (Male, Tataouine, 26, Photographer)

A few posited that Ministers are politically affiliated and as such, being questioned by MPs from that same party made the exercise seem farcical.

### Representing the People

Nearly all respondents agreed that their MPs do not represent them. Instead, they were seen as working for their own personal interests or the interests of their party. While this general sentiment is very consistent with many previous rounds of focus groups, what did surface somewhat more during this round is a higher level of awareness and frustration around “party tourism.” Respondents explained how the candidates for whom they voted migrated to a different political party, which contradicts their role of “representing the people” since they were elected given a

specific platform and party affiliation. By switching parties, they betray those who elected them.

*“During the elections in the parliament, members are very friendly and they invite you to coffee shops and they are everywhere. As soon as they are elected, they are completely different people.”* (Male, Mahdia, 55, Restaurant Manager)

*“Each one of them is just fighting for their own benefit. I don't trust any one of them and that's why I don't watch them.”* (Female, Mahdia, 47, Homemaker)

*“Department has a very bad habit of members switching from one political party to another.”* (Male, Sidi Bouzid, 47, Inspector)

*“They start with promising projects and then two months later you find them working on a different thing.”* (Male, Tunis, 35, Real-estate agent)

*“I don't follow what they are talking about. They just promise and they don't act. I feel like this is just a waste of time.”* (Male, Tunis, 29, Unemployed)

### *Citizen Outreach*

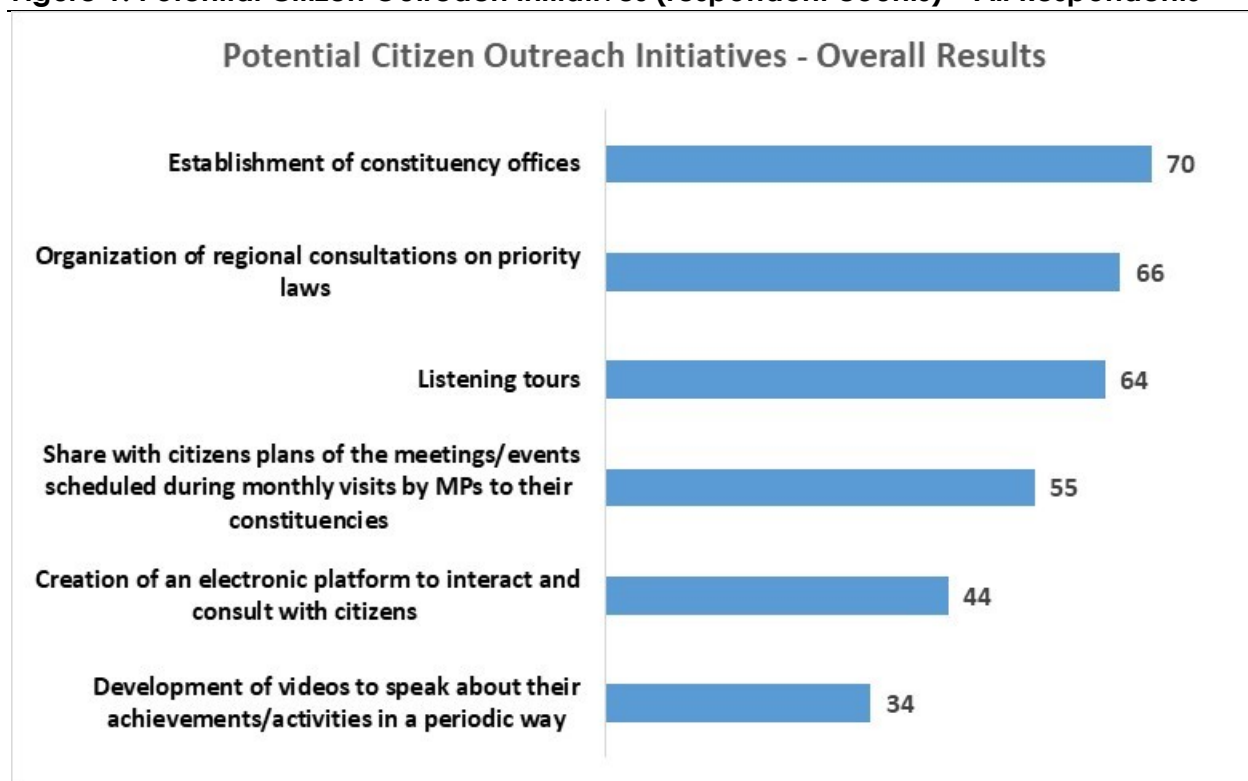
Given the continually decreasing level of confidence in parliament among respondents, any initiative that could increase both the amount and form of contact between MPs and citizens was broadly appreciated.

*“Even though I don't understand too much in politics, I think these are going to be good to create communication between them and people.”* (Female, Sidi Bouzid, 41, Homemaker)

When presented with a specific list of possible actions, the three most popular ideas were establishing constituency offices, organizing regional consultations on priority laws and arranging listening tours. It should be noted though that support for these ideas was met with skepticism by some respondents who felt that the country is already in debt and because of this, Parliament cannot financially afford all these initiatives. A few also felt they would be better suited for MPs elected in next year's elections since nothing could improve how they feel about incumbent MPs.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 show how respondents voted across the six initiatives they were presented. They were asked to identify the three they liked the most. The numbers shown are vote counts (and not percentages).

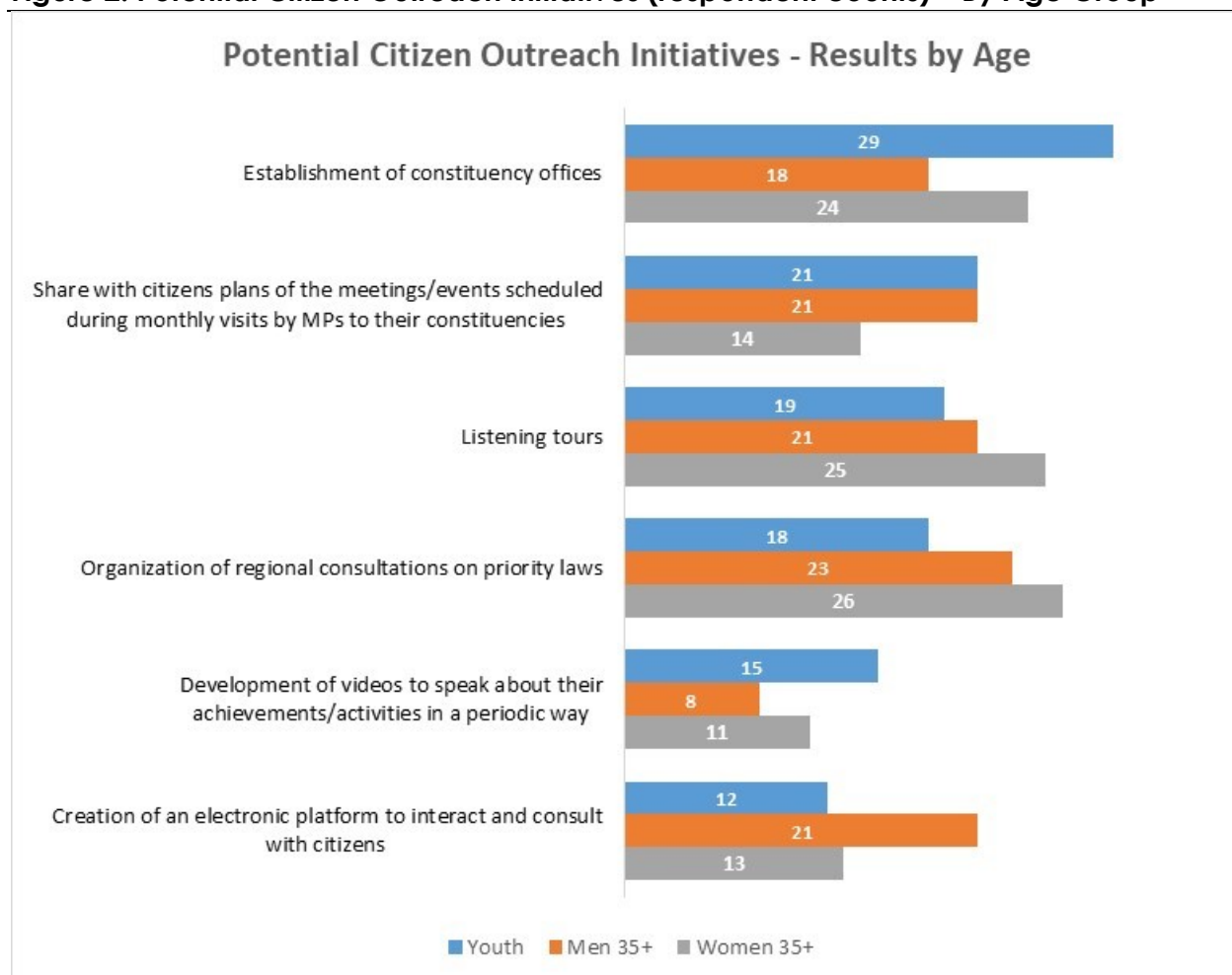
**Figure 1: Potential Citizen Outreach Initiatives (respondent counts) – All Respondents**



**Noteworthy differences across the three main demographic segments** included:

Establishment of constituency offices	More popular among youth and the least popular among men.
Organization of regional consultations on priority laws	Less popular among youth.
Listening tours	Less popular among youth.
Creation of an electronic platform to interact and consult with citizens	Much more popular among men.
Share with citizens plans of the meetings/events scheduled during monthly visits by MPs to their constituencies	Women were less interested in this idea compared to youth and men.
Development of videos to speak about their achievements/activities in a periodic way	Men were less interested in this idea compared to youth and women

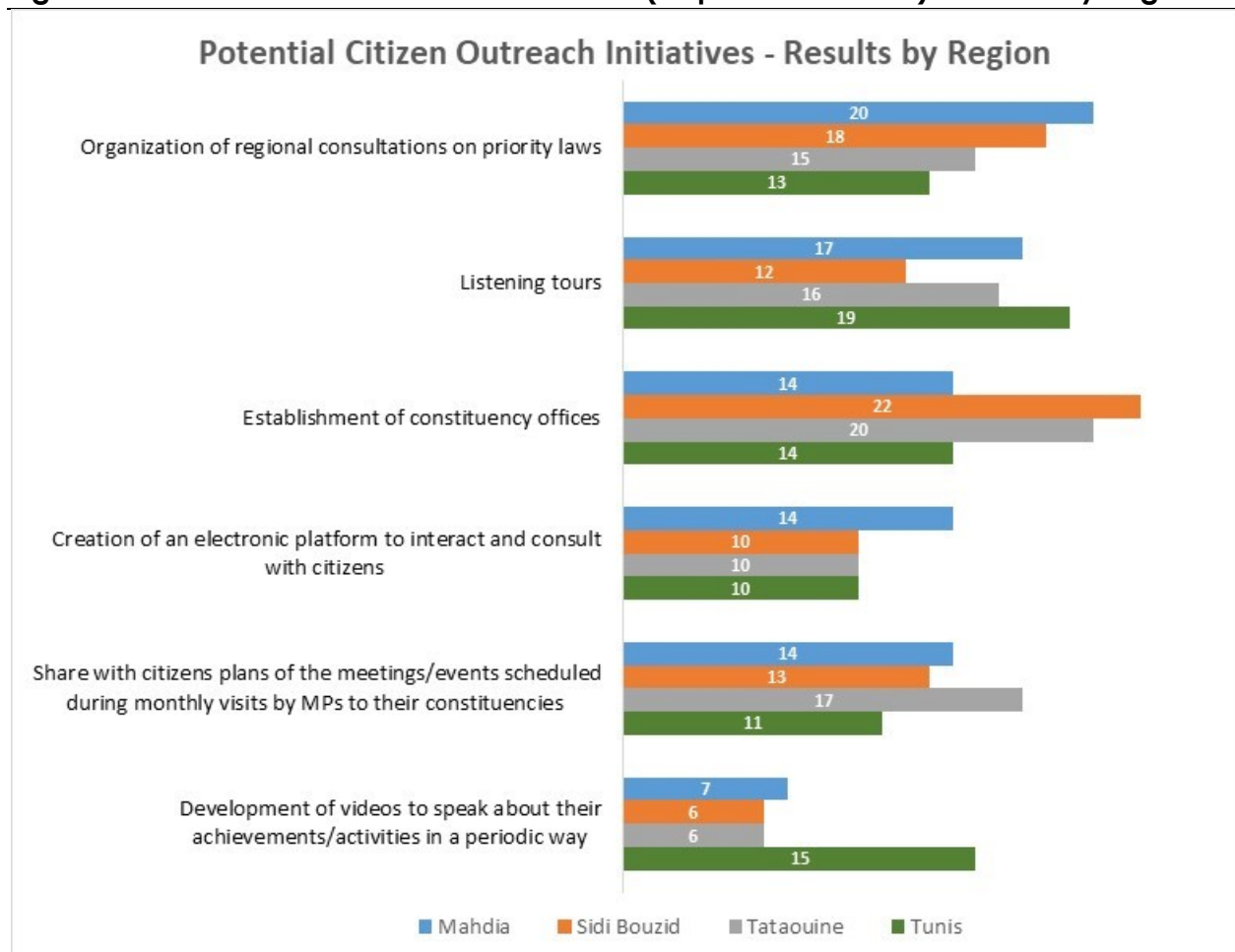
**Figure 2: Potential Citizen Outreach Initiatives (respondent counts) – By Age Group**



**Noteworthy differences across the four regions** included the following:

<b>Establishment of constituency offices</b>	Selected by more respondents in Sidi Bouzid and Tataouine compared to those in other regions.
<b>Organization of regional consultations on priority laws</b>	Most popular in Mahdia and Sidi Bouzid and the least popular in Tunis.
<b>Listening tours</b>	Most least popular in Sidi Bouzid.
<b>Creation of an electronic platform to interact and consult with citizens</b>	Equally popular across the four regions – marginally more popular in Mahdia.
<b>Share with citizens plans of the meetings/events scheduled during monthly visits by MPs to their constituencies</b>	Equally popular across the four regions.
<b>Development of videos to speak about their achievements/activities in a periodic way</b>	Especially popular in Tunis.

**Figure 3: Potential Citizen Outreach Initiatives (respondent counts) – Results by Region**



Respondents had some additional feedback on a few of the proposed initiatives:

- Some felt that constituency offices gave local citizens a place to go in order to get in touch with the MP. Some even felt this should be a “must.” The success of this largely depended on whether the MP would actually use this office.

*“I think the important one is the constituency offices because our representatives are in Tunis and they are not present here in our region. When we have a local establishment of the constituency it’s easier to communicate with them.”* (Male, Sidi Bouzid, 36, Unemployed)

- The listening tours would give MPs the opportunity to explain laws in plain language to average citizens.

*“I think [listening tours are] important because some people cannot understand the technical words and for myself too.”* (Male, Mahdia, 34, Maintenance)



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- The use of video was the least popular method of outreach and communication, in part because it did not involve a physical presence of the MP in the region. Some did see value in the approach nonetheless, partly because video could be used to explain laws and projects to citizens, be prepared and distributed in many ways and be used to hold MPs accountable if this is one of the ways they will announce future projects and plans.

*“They have said that the videos are useless but in my opinion we have heard so many things and promises and we have not seen any actions. I think the videos are important because if they are going to do something and they video tape it, then everyone will be aware of it and know that it's going to happen and you have the proof.”* (Female, Mahdia, 25, Student)

- The democratic value of electronic platforms and videos is limited since not all citizens have a computer or Internet access.

Very few respondents had visited the **Parliament's website** or its **Facebook page** and very few felt they could be convinced to visit them at all. In fact, respondents admitted to becoming increasingly disconnected from politics and political discussion over the years and any suggestion that they needed to play a role as an active citizen is met with resistance. Respondents believed politicians had made them politically passive citizens through their lack of connection and empathy. If MPs wanted citizens to pay attention to their actions, they needed to earn this privilege by connecting more with their constituents and acting on the issues that matter most to Tunisians.



The very few who had visited the website did so for the following reasons: to learn about new laws and draft laws; if there were new consultations; when there is an MP resignation or party tourism; ARP attendance; looking for MP biographies; looking for information on the budget; information on MP salaries; general information on how Parliament works/ how laws are passed; looking for the code des collectivités locales; to get information on a specific commission; to access videos from MPs on important issues and debates.

*“I want to check out the parliament members profiles. I wanted to you know about them and their presence.”* (Male, Mahdia, 31, Mechanical Engineer)

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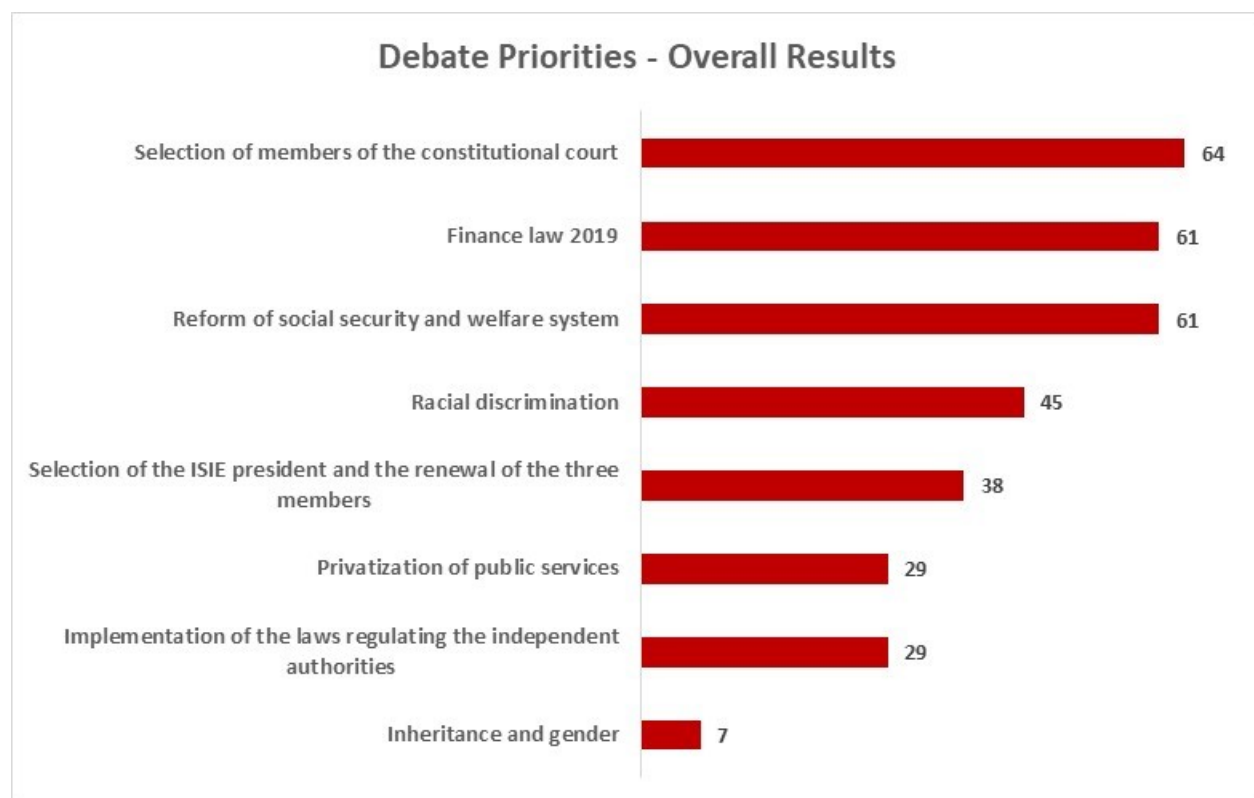
*"I don't go specifically to check but if I see something popping up, I just checked it out of curiosity; especially when it's something related to education." (Male, Tunis, 25, Student)*

### *Propositions and Actions for the New Parliamentary Session*

Starting in October, politicians and parliament will debate various propositions and actions. In each focus group, eight specific propositions and actions were presented to respondents, who were then asked to identify the three that they felt should be prioritized.

Figure 4 shows how respondents voted across eight specific debate issues. They were asked to identify the three they believe Parliament should prioritize. The numbers shown are vote counts (and not percentages).

**Figure 4: Parliamentary Session Debate Priorities (respondent counts) – All Respondents**



Respondents were **especially supportive** of the following:

- o *Selection of members of the constitutional court...*because they valued the importance of the constitutionality of laws being passed and drafted. This issue was more important to men and to respondents in Tataouine and Sidi Bouzid.

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- *The 2019 Finance Law*...because they wanted to know how public funds will be spent and allocated. This issue was less important women and especially important in Sidi Bouzid.
- *Reform of the social security and welfare system*...because some did not want the retirement age to increase while others, especially older respondents, were concerned about the criteria for pension measures. This issue was more important in Tunis compared to other regions.

The **second tier** of priorities, according to focus group respondents, consisted of:

- *Racial discrimination*...although slotting in as a second-tier priority, it was considered an important priority for nearly half of all respondents so this issue certainly does matter to citizens. This is an issue to which many could relate – they believe this is a topic that touches “average Tunisians” although some respondents had a very broad and general interpretation of racial discrimination. For instance, some included regionalism as part of this issue. It was also especially important to youth.
- *Selection of the ISIE President and the renewal of the three members*...so that ISIE can be prepared for the upcoming 2019 elections.

The **issues that were less likely to fall into respondents' top-3 votes** included:

- *Privatization of public services*...among the 29 respondents who considered this issue an important priority for Parliament, many were *opposed* to privatization. This issue was more important in Mahdia and Tataouine compared to other regions.
- *Implementation of the laws regulating the independent authorities*...because it was deemed important to ensure the independence and autonomy of these authorities. This was a priority for a few because of its connection to human rights (i.e. the human rights authority). This issue was much less important to men.
- *Inheritance and gender*...this issue was by far the least important among respondents, most of whom felt it was not a priority and that this issue was already being addressed through their religion. All age groups and respondents from all regions were united in establishing how low a priority this is for Parliament.

### III. Municipal Elections and Governance

The municipal elections were an important barometer of the public's sentiments towards politics in Tunisia. Those who voted appreciated the importance of voting in general and recognized the value of these municipal elections as a landmark event in Tunisia's young democratic evolution. Those who did not vote explained that their overall frustration with democracy and their deep mistrust of politicians kept them away from the polling station.

*"We have voted once so why do we have to talk about this again? We had a revolution and we voted and it didn't work out, why do I have to vote again? I cannot even find the means to buy diapers for my kids. We voted for the municipality - instead of cleaning the streets, they made it even worse. They keep breaking the streets but never finish the construction."* (Male, Tataouine, 32, Truck Driver)

*"It is true that people are frustrated and stressed but voting is the solution. Statistically speaking there is always someone you know on one of these lists. So, you can vote for that person because you know them or you don't vote for them because you know who they are."* (Male, Tataouine, 36, Technician)

Participation in the recent municipal elections also serves as a positive indication for future voter turnout in the 2019 elections. It does not appear that respondents see elections as an opportunity or a mechanism to exert change on the political landscape or to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the status quo. General frustration with politicians and the outcome of past elections seems to be pushing voters away from the polls rather than compelling them to speak with their vote.

Most respondents appeared to believe the results of the municipal elections. These elections were broadly seen as orderly and well-organized, attributes that seemed to inspire confidence in the electoral process overall. Furthermore, those most familiar with the presence and role of the ISIE and of civil society observers tended to have the highest levels of confidence in the results.

*"There was an intervention from the court and I think it was good and credible."* (Male, Mahdia, 65, Retired)

*"I participated in the elections and I know it's honest and there's no cheating in that but the problem is what comes after the elections. But technically there is nothing wrong with the observation of the elections."* (Male, Sidi Bouzid, 36, Unemployed)

*"I have seen civil society working really well and I don't think there was something wrong with the election."* (Male, Tunis, 35, Real-estate agent)

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There were a few issues raised in the groups that led some to question the credibility of the election results.

- First, some felt that the incidence of vote-buying was noticeable, leading them to believe that the results of the elections do not necessarily reflect the true voice of the people.

*“If I had to rate them I would say average because in 2014 it was really bad. [This year] there was a lot of corruption and people were buying the votes for 20 dinars.”* (Female, Tunis, 34, Employed)

- In addition, a good number of respondents were reminded of the ballot issues in Gafsa Mdhila, requiring the entire election in that municipality to be redone.
- Some respondents believe that they were informed of the vote results before ISIE released them, suggesting to them that the results were not trustworthy.

### *Perceptions of ISIE and of Civil Society Observers*

Awareness and appreciation of ISIE during the municipal elections were generally good. Some also specifically noted that these elections were an improvement over the previous ones.

*“In my opinion they were successful at organizing the elections.”* (Male, Mahdia, 35, Storekeeper)

*“In my opinion it has improved since the last presidential elections. They are more organized and they are more aware and they know what they are doing.”* (Male, Tunis, 25, Student)

*“There were less mistakes than before.”* (Male, Mahdia, 31, Mechanical Engineer)

Those who questioned the efficacy or credibility of ISIE attributed this sentiment to one of the following:

- ISIE, or rather its members, were not considered entirely neutral and non-partisan.
- Some had recalled how some of ISIE's leaders had recently resigned and that this lack of stability reflected a general weakness in the institution.
- The apparent “vote buying” or the extent to which representatives of political parties were influencing how people voted during the election campaign and on election day led some to believe that ISIE was only

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partially effective in its role of ensuring fair and impartial elections – they were not considered effective at monitoring the campaigns.

*“It's almost non-existent - they have not addressed any election, they have not shared the candidates list, there were no communications about the elections.” (Female, Tunis, 35, Homemaker)*

*“They worked a little bit but not much. They have not checked whatever is going on outside of the election.” (Male, Sidi Bouzid, 42, Employed)*

Awareness of civil society observers was moderate and appreciation of their role was mixed. While their presence increased levels of trust in the elections for some, it did not have any impact on others, some of whom conflated these observers with those working with specific political parties. The fact that there were observers from political parties seemed to taint how some respondents viewed observers in general.

Although they were noticed at the polling stations, those who voted could not easily recall the names of civil society organizations present on Election Day. Some of the ones respondents could remember included: Mourakiboun and ATIDE.

### *Perceptions of Independent, Female and Youth Candidates*

The research explored respondent's views of independent candidates, female candidates and youth.

Respondents consistently underestimated the incidence of **independent candidates**. Reactions to the actual number of independent councilors were somewhat mixed. While some felt that independents would be more likely to be citizen-centric in their approach and less focused on the priorities of a political party, there were always a few in each focus group who questioned the genuine “independence” of these candidates.

Some explained that the popularity of independent candidates was largely attributable to the frustration citizens have with established political parties. A few also explained that voter turnout would have been much lower if independents had not been an option.

Reactions to the proportion of municipal councilors who were **women** were also quite mixed. Some concluded that the ratio was to be expected given list parity. The fact that approximately half of all councilors were women was encouraging news for many, especially women. They believe women are just as capable of holding this sort of position as men and that women effectively represent half the Tunisian population.

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*“The Tunisian population has more women and in education and performance women are doing even better than men so I guess it's their right to be part of this.”* (Male, Tunis, 35, Real-estate agent)

On the other hand, some felt the statistic was disconcerting news, largely believing that these individuals had not been elected based on merit but rather based on their gender. Furthermore, there were many respondents, especially but not exclusively men, who did not believe women are qualified to be on municipal council and are especially not eligible to be council President. The election of female councilors was especially difficult for men in Tataouine to accept.

*“Women don't have the same communication skills as men and, as he was saying, she has more responsibilities at home.”* (Male, Tataouine, 35, Teacher)

*“This is a man's job not a woman's.”* (Male, Tataouine, 42, Guard)

*“I think it's too high. With all due respect to myself, and all other women here, women cannot be very effective in a municipality because they cannot be walking with high heels and a skirt. This is a manly job that needs a lot of fieldwork.”* (Female, Tunis, 35, Homemaker)

Youth (those between 24 and 35) being elected to council was widely applauded. Respondents felt these councilors would be innovative, active, engaged, creative and in touch with the needs of citizens, especially the needs of other youth in the municipality. Respondents believed these councilors would be “motivated” and “dynamic.” They believed that they would have modern approaches to solving problems and introduce new visions for the municipality.

*“With young people we have more motivation and optimism. A 20 or 25 year old are more knowledgeable about what's going on in the world than older people in their 50's because of their knowledge and technology.”* (Male, Mahdia, 44, Bank Manager)

*“Of course it will change because the projects and ideas are going to be different. Imagine an 80-year old person advertising to young people! You will get the information better from younger generations because they will use different technologies and social media and other techniques to spread the message.”* (Male, Tunis, 25, Student)

Respondents, young and old, also felt that having young councilors would encourage youth to be more engaged in politics and in the affairs of the municipality. It may even discourage some from leaving the region or even leaving the country.

### *Impressions of Municipal Councils So Far*

By the time these focus groups were held, newly elected municipal councils had begun their work. There was some awareness of actions taken by new municipal councils, although a few were under the impression that some of these initiatives predated the elections. Some of the more common actions witnessed included:

- Road construction and repairs;
- Street cleaning, organizing garbage collection, and improving cleanliness in general;
- Organizing markets and removing illegal street vendors;
- Field visits by council Presidents to assess priorities for the municipality, while holding monthly meetings open to the public and civil society; and,
- Improvements in the condition of public gardens.

*“Cleaning the streets and providing two trash bins to the schools.” (Male, Mahdia, 34, Maintenance)*

Those who had not heard of any meeting or action tended to generally discredit the council and feel like “nothing had changed.” Some of these same respondents also seemed to have unrealistic expectations, thinking that their council would have acted on several action items within months of being elected.

*“In my opinion the president of the municipality is a bit scared and is not showing that he is strong enough to lead.” (Male, Tataouine, 60, Retired)*

When specifically prompted, nearly all respondents were interested in exercising their rights in the administration of their municipalities, although many are not quite sure how they would go about doing that. This level of enthusiasm is to be expected given the disconnect they have with their MPs, any opportunity to oversee their municipal councilors is welcomed.

Respondents would especially want to be involved in the following issues:

- infrastructure, especially roads, sewage/ draining / irrigation, and public lighting
- cleanliness / garbage collection
- organizing markets / street vendors
- management of the budget overall / overseeing the transparency of how the budget is used / making sure there is no corruption
- healthcare / managing hospitals
- rezoning / city planning in general

Some respondents just want to be informed about what the municipality is planning on



doing in general and want to be given the opportunity to provide their input.

*“First of all the municipality has to inform people about their plans. Second the municipality must take the opinion of the locals about the projects in the plans. For example, they have to ask that neighborhood what they need and what their priority is.”* (Male, Sidi Bouzid, 36, Unemployed)

### IV. Upcoming Elections

Nearly all respondents were aware that legislative and presidential elections will be held in 2019. When the prospect of postponing these elections was raised with respondents, opposition to the idea was swift and clear, with many arguing that it would be unconstitutional. A few others even suggested that there is so much frustration with the incumbent MPs that any suggesting of extending their mandate by postponing the elections might lead to some sort of social upheaval.

*“If it's going to be postponed there's going to be a lack of trust.”* (Male, Tataouine, 35, Guard)

Five possible amendments to provisions in the electoral law and the constitution were explored with respondents:

- **Giving the right to military and security forces to vote in the presidential and legislative elections** was met with mixed reactions. Those who supported the idea felt it is their right as citizens to vote while those opposed believed that military and security forces must remain apolitical.

*“If they are going to vote, they are going to be part of political parties. Security forces and the military have to be independent and neutral”* (Male, Tunis, 56, Retired)

- Support for **horizontal list parity** was strongest among women. Respondents opposed to parity stressed that gender should not be a factor in how lists are designed but instead competence and qualifications should be prioritized.

*“I am against because we shouldn't even be thinking about women and men. We need to be thinking about how qualified the person is.”* (Female, Sidi Bouzid, 31, Teacher)

*“When you find a man and a woman have the same qualifications, they will definitely choose the man.”*  
(Female, Sidi Bouzid, 29, Optician)

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- **Raising the threshold for candidate lists to win seats** was also met with mixed reactions, although opinions leaned slightly in favor of it. The general feeling was that weak parties should not be rewarded with seats and that fewer parties in the ARP will lead to less negotiating and fewer alliances.

Those opposed to raising the threshold believed in party diversity in the ARP and that large parties should be held in check.

- **Modifying the number of seats in parliament** downward was much more appealing than increasing the number of seats. Cutting the number of seats stemmed almost entirely from general frustration with a perceived inefficiency of Parliament and that, given the budget challenges faced by the state, money could be saved by paying fewer MPs. A few also argued that by having fewer MPs, it would be easier to hold those elected accountable. A few also believed that decision-making would be easier if there were fewer MPs.
- Respondents seemed to prefer a **proportional system** over a **majoritarian** one although these two electoral systems were not entirely clear to all respondents. Those in favor of a proportional system mostly supported party diversity in the ARP while those in favor of a majoritarian system believed this would bring greater stability to the political process through fewer parties in the ARP. It was also seen as an easier way to keep parties accountable.

Not many respondents were aware of the regional elections and the moderator often needed to explain what they involved. Most respondents supported the elections and there was a slight preference for holding them before the legislative elections.

## V. Priorities for the Region

To further understand the priorities for citizens, focus group respondents were asked to identify what they would prioritize if they were the MP for their region and what they would prioritize if they were a counselor in their municipality.

**As a member of the ARP**, respondents would prioritize the following:

Tunis	Mahdia	Sidi Bouzid	Tataouine
<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job creation / Encouraging investments / development</li> <li>• Accountability/corruption</li> <li>• Healthcare / Health</li> <li>• Youth / jobs for young graduates</li> <li>• Inflation</li> <li>• Infrastructure: upgrade buildings, sewers, roads, and side-streets</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing salaries</li> <li>• Increasing salaries of retired people</li> <li>• Social / low income housing</li> <li>• Rent control</li> <li>• Cleanliness</li> <li>• Public administration</li> </ul>	<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop or support agriculture / Developing land</li> <li>• Jobs / Create projects / Encourage investment / Industrial development</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Cut MP salaries</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease age of retirement so more youth can work</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• The economy in general</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Social support for children</li> <li>• Decentralization</li> <li>• Public administration reforms</li> </ul>	<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Develop agriculture / better manage state-owned land</li> <li>• Industrial development / planning / create projects / investment</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inflation</li> <li>• Infrastructure – hospitals, roads</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Social reforms, especially to support the poor</li> </ul>	<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs / regional development / Jobs for youth</li> <li>• Exploit resources, e.g. natural gas, oil</li> <li>• Infrastructure – roads, sidewalks, bus stops</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State-owned lands</li> <li>• Transportation / trains</li> <li>• Cleanliness</li> <li>• Reduce regionalism</li> <li>• Public administration accountability</li> </ul>

Job creation and development is a top priority in all regions. Development of the agricultural sector, including better management of state-owned lands, is especially prioritized in Mahdia and Sidi Bouzid whereas greater exploitation of resources like natural gas and oil are prioritized in Tataouine. Infrastructure is also a common theme across all regions, especially roads and irrigation/sewers.

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As a counselor in their municipality, respondents would prioritize the following:

Tunis	Mahdia	Sidi Bouzid	Tataouine
<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cleanliness</li> <li>Infrastructure: paving roads / fixing roads, irrigation/sewers</li> <li>Recreation for youth / cultural centres / community centres</li> <li>Municipality administration in general / accountability</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public gardens / green spaces</li> <li>Organize the markets</li> <li>Inflation</li> </ul>	<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cleanliness / clean the beach</li> <li>Infrastructure: roads, sewer systems</li> <li>Street vendors / organize markets</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industrial planning</li> <li>Youth recreation</li> <li>Urban planning / Address old buildings</li> </ul>	<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cleanliness</li> <li>Infrastructure: roads</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth recreation / Green spaces for youth and schools</li> <li>Organize markets/ street vendors</li> <li>Manage state-owned lands</li> </ul>	<p><u>Common responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrastructure: Public lighting, access to potable water</li> <li>Cleanliness</li> <li>Organize the market / street vendors</li> <li>Support youth / jobs</li> </ul> <p><u>Other responses included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City planning</li> <li>Reduce regionalism</li> <li>Citizen engagement</li> <li>Public administration reforms</li> <li>Green spaces</li> <li>Youth recreation</li> </ul>

Cleanliness and infrastructure improvements (especially roads and irrigation/sewage systems) are high priorities at the municipal level. Many would also prioritize organizing the local market and street vendors. Youth recreation and public administration reforms would then make up a second tier of priorities for citizens.

## APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

- **120 total Respondents** from Mahdia, Sidi Bouzid, Tataouine, Tunis.
- **10 respondents** per group
- **Diversity** of ages, professions and neighborhoods within each group

Gender	Count
Female	59
Male	61
Age	Count
25-34	40
+35	80
Profession	Count
Employed	73
Unemployed	17
Retired	11
Homemaker	15
Student	4
Education	Count
University	68
Secondary	33
Primary	14
None	4

## APPENDIX B: STUDY METHODOLOGY AND BACKGROUND

**Purpose.** NDI organized this round of focus groups in late September and early October 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 20<sup>th</sup> round of research—the ninth organized by NDI since the 2014 elections—sought to gauge the public's evaluation of the performance of parliament and members of parliament (MPs), feedback on the recent municipal elections, expectations of upcoming elections and citizen priorities for the country and their municipality.

Citizens participated in 12 focus group discussions between September 26 and October 3, 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 parliament 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 and Facebook page;
- Reactions to possible initiatives Parliament could consider to improve outreach and communication with citizens (e.g. listening tours);
- Priorities across a list of propositions and actions parliament will debate beginning in October;
- Local and municipal election experiences and barriers to voting;
- The credibility of the local and municipal election results and reactions to the number of elected candidates with specific backgrounds or profiles, such as women, youth and independent candidates;
- Awareness and perceptions of the presence and performance of ISIE and of domestic election observation organizations;
- Awareness and expectations of upcoming elections, including the upcoming legislative, presidential and regional elections; and,
- Priorities for the 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 in 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 late September, early October 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 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 September 24, and 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 September 26 to October 3, 2018, NDI held 12 focus groups with a total of 120 respondents in four cities across Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Mahdia, Sidi Bouzid and Tataouine.

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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 49 percent men and 51 percent women. Respondents were selected and pre-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions. To qualify for the focus groups, respondents also needed to be eligible to vote in the 2018 municipal elections. Additional details on the demographic profile of focus group respondents 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, Mahdia, Sidi Bouzid, and Tataouine (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 2018 municipal elections.

- **Tataouine** is a city in south eastern Tunisia. The city is split into three sections connected by two bridges. It is known for its desert environment which makes it an attractive tourist destination. Tataouine is a conservative society and still suffers from many social and economic problems despite its wealth in certain natural resources.
- **Mahdia** is in the heart of the greater Tunisian Sahel region. It is known as one of the country's first fishing ports. Tourism is becoming increasingly important to the local economy. The city is a tertiary center that has also evolved into a focal point for higher education. In the recent municipal elections, Mahdia was the governorate that elected the highest number of independent candidates (104).
- **Sidi Bouzid** is in the west central part of the country. It is known as the cradle of the revolution, although it is still suffering from the same problems that triggered



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it, namely poverty, marginalization and unemployment. It is among the regions that had the lowest voter turnout in the municipal elections.

- **Greater Tunis** was selected because it encompasses the capital, it is the largest city of Tunis, and it is the national center for public administration and commerce.

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.

## APPENDIX C: MODERATION GUIDE (ENGLISH)

### FOCUS GROUPS ON TUNISIAN POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Sidi Bouzid/Mahdia/Tataouine/Tunis  
September-October 2018

#### INTRODUCTION – 10 minutes

- The moderator will introduce himself, his research institution and the objective of the group's discussion.
- The only objective of this discussion is to better understand the public's opinion about Tunisia's current situation, through social and political perspectives. There is no wrong answer in the discussion. Participants should not be afraid to express their opinions. They have the freedom to express any opinion related to the questions posed by the moderator.
- The identities and opinions of the participants will be kept confidential.
- The discussion will be recorded only to generate material for analysis.
- The discussion will last approximately two hours. There will be no break.
- Please turn off your mobile phones. If you leave the room for any reason, you will not be permitted to re-enter the focus group.

*Let's go around the room. Tell us something about yourself: your first name, family situation, what you do--so that we know enough about each other to have a good conversation.*

#### Notes for Moderator:

- The moderator will create a comfortable, relaxed environment.
- The flow of the discussion shall not be too rigid in following the instruction guide. The moderator will adjust as necessary and explore important and relevant points in the discussion.
- It is estimated that the discussion will last for two hours.

#### NATIONAL DIRECTION – 15 minutes

1. Do you think Tunisia is mostly going in the right direction (COUNT), or mostly the wrong direction (COUNT)?
  - Why so?

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- Right:
  - Wrong:
2. We have discussed various challenges so far but if we wanted to understand priorities, what would you say is the major problem facing Tunisia right now? [**MODERATOR: IN TWO WORDS:** go around the table and get quick answers]
3. I understand that as a country, Tunisia faces a number of challenges, but what is going well in Tunisia these days?
- Have you noticed any changes over the past six months that leave you feeling that some things are taking a turn for the better? Please provide examples.

### PARLIAMENT – 30 minutes

4. Now I would like to ask you questions about the parliament and its members. The parliament has three main roles: representing people, passing laws and overseeing the government. Let's discuss each of these roles and I would like us to focus on what may have happened THIS YEAR.
- Can you give any recent examples of a specific action or achievement of **YOUR MPS** when it comes to representing citizens?
  - Can you give any recent examples of a specific action or achievement of **YOUR MPS** when it comes to passing laws?
  - [**MODERATOR:** explore this point further by asking participants about specific laws related to the economy and corruption]:
    - Agreement between Tunisia and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development for primary education support
    - Startup act
    - Law on assets disclosure
    - Law on the denunciation of corruption and the protection of whistleblowers
  - Can you give me any recent examples of a specific action or achievement of **YOUR MPS** when it comes to government oversight? [**MODERATOR:** try to give more clarification on this point by giving examples of questioning ministers, holding inquiries, etc.]

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5. Let's consider the last parliamentary year from October 2017 to August 2018 - would you say that over the course of that year your level of confidence in parliament went up or down? **SHOW OF HANDS – QUICK COUNT**

**MODERATOR NOTE:** We are asking if there has been a change in their level of confidence (up, down or no change) – we are not asking whether or not they have confidence in parliament.

6. I understand from your comments so far that parliament has a lot of work to do to regain your confidence. I will list some potential actions by parliament. Please tell me whether they could increase your trust. [**MODERATOR - SHOW CARD:** Please read the handout and RANK TOP 3 and then let's discuss]:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of constituency offices</li> </ul>	<p><b>ONCE VOTES ON EACH ARE GATHERED, ASK:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think about the list overall?</li> <li>• Are there any items in this list that you do not like or that you just would not use yourself?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization of regional consultations on priority laws</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening tours</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of an electronic platform to interact and consult with citizens</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share with citizens plans of the meetings/events scheduled during monthly visits by MPs to their constituencies</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of videos to speak about their achievements/activities in a periodic way</li> </ul>	

7. Starting in October, the political debate/parliament will debate the following propositions/actions - please use the numbers 1, 2 and 3 to indicate your priorities - you can only select three items in total!

**Show card and order from 1 to 3 (according to your preference) and then let's discuss**

- Racial discrimination: When a person different from you in terms of race or ethnicity is mistreated, he/she will have a law that compensates him/ her judicially and financially
- Privatization of public services: giving a part or the overall of public institutions to the private sector

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- Selection of the ISIE president and the renewal of the three members: after the resignation of the ISIE president, the ARP should vote for the new president and renewal its three members
  - Selection of members of the constitutional court: which will verify the constitutionality of laws, draft laws, international agreements, and the by law of the parliament
  - Inheritance and gender
  - Finance law 2019: which will set incomes and expenses of the state for 2019
  - Reform of social security and welfare system: increasing the retirement age and the review of the criteria of pension measures
  - Implementation of the laws regulating the independent authorities such as the human rights authority, audio and visual communication authority, protection of personal data authority and sustainable development authority
8. How many of you have...
- ...visited the official website of the parliament or the new civil society platform? **SHOW OF HANDS - QUICK COUNT**
  - ...visited the parliament's Facebook page? **SHOW OF HANDS - QUICK COUNT**
    - **For participants who said YES:** what do you think of the information you get through these different channels? Do you think that this information will help you to better understand the work of the parliament and its members?
9. We discussed parliament's efforts to improve their work and to reach out to you. What about your role as an active citizen? What role do you have...
- ...in seeking information?
  - ...in engaging with the parliament's work?
  - Have you ever reached out to your MPs or met with them?

**Municipal Elections and Governance – 30 minutes**

As you may know, Tunisia held its first democratic municipal elections a few months ago.

10. Did you vote? **SHOW OF HANDS - COUNT**

**FOR NON-VOTERS:**

- If not, why not?

**FOR VOTERS:**

- What motivated you to vote?

11. Let's discuss the results from the municipal elections. Generally, do you believe the results?

- What makes you feel this way? **EXPLORE “YES” AND “NO” SEPARATELY:**
  - What was it about these elections that leads you to believe the results?
  - Why don't you believe the results?
- In terms of the municipal councilors who were elected...
  - ...did any of you notice how many **independent candidates** were elected? Do you want to guess what percent of your municipal councilors are independents? It turns out it is X% - what are your thoughts on that?
  - ... did any of you notice how many were **women**? Do you want to guess what percent of your municipal councilors are women? It turns out it is X% - what are your thoughts on that?

**PROVIDE DETAILS, SPECIFIC TO THE DISTRICT, ON THE NUMBER/PROPORTION OF WOMEN AND INDEPENDENTS ELECTED:**

Name of Governorate	Percentage of independents	Percentage of women
Tunis	30%	54%
Mahdia	44%	47%
Sidi Bouzid	43%	47%
Tataouine	58%	48%

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- ... did any of you notice how many were **youth**, by this we mean they were between 24 and 35 years old? What are your thoughts on youth being elected to your municipal council?
- Is the election of more youth and women a positive trend for democracy in Tunisia? Would you hope for a similar sort of outcome for the next elections?
- The ISIE is responsible for organizing credible and transparent elections in Tunisia elections.
  - How many of you are aware of ISIE and their role? **COUNT**
  - How well did ISIE perform in organizing these elections? Did they do a good job or not?
- Civil society was also involved; for instance, associations sent observers to polling stations.
  - How many of you were aware that civil society sent observers? **COUNT** If you voted, did you notice them?
  - How well did these civil society groups perform in observing these elections?

12. Newly elected municipal councils are now beginning their work.

- Has your municipal council taken any actions or had any achievements thus far?
  - **IF YES:** What have you seen, read or heard about this?
- Are you aware that, under the newly adopted Code of Local Authorities, citizens have the right to actively participate in the work of municipal councils? This is called a participatory democracy.
  - Are you interested in exercising these rights in the administration of your municipalities?
    - **IF YES:** On what particular issues would you like to be involved?

### Upcoming Elections – 15 minutes

I'd like to discuss with you the upcoming elections in our country:

#### Legislative and presidential elections

13. Do you have any idea when the upcoming legislative and presidential elections are supposed to take place? [**MODERATOR:** after getting answers, clarify that according to the constitution, elections should take place in late 2019.]

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- There has been some talk about postponing the elections to a later date. What do you think about that?
14. Some parliamentary groups and political parties are calling for amending the following provisions in the electoral law and the constitution:
- Voting for military and security forces: It means giving the right to these individuals to also vote in the presidential and legislative elections as they did in the municipal elections and the upcoming regional elections.
    - Does this amendment matter to you? **COUNT**
    - What are your thoughts on this?
  - Adopting a horizontal in addition to the current vertical parity: Requires alternating men and women at the head of lists. (Political parties with more than one list should have parity between men and women in the top lists.)
    - Does this amendment matter to you? **COUNT**
    - What are your thoughts on this?
  - Raising the threshold for candidate lists to win seats: This is the minimum percentage of votes obtained below which a list is not included in the seat distribution.
    - Does this amendment matter to you? **COUNT**
    - What are your thoughts on this?
  - Modifying the number of seats in parliament: The number of seats is currently 217 -some are calling for an increase and some a decrease.
    - Does this amendment matter to you? **COUNT**
    - What are your thoughts on this?
  - Changing the electoral system (majoritarian vs. proportional):
    - **The majoritarian:** method of voting that grants the seat or the seats to the candidate or to the list having obtained the majority of the votes.
    - **The proportional:** Each political party presents a list of candidates. The seats are allocated to each of the lists by dividing the number of votes obtained by the electoral quotient (number of votes required to obtain a seat)
    - Does this amendment matter to you? **COUNT**
    - What are your thoughts on this?
15. What would need to change to make you more likely to participate in the next elections?



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16. Are you aware of the regional elections?

- **[MODERATOR:** Give explanation about the gradual decentralization process, and the plans for elected regional councils. The regional elections are an important step toward the gradual implementation of the decentralization process; after those elections we will have 24 regional councils responsible for the economy.]
- What do you think of this plan?
- Since national elections are due to take place in 2019, in your view, when should regional elections be held?
- Do you think these elections are a priority?

### PRIORITIES FOR THE REGIONS – 10 minutes

17. I'd like to understand what you see as priorities for your region – let's first imagine you are each **a member of the ARP from this region** – what would you focus on the most / what would you prioritize for your region?

18. Now imagine that you are **the municipal council for your municipality** – what would you focus on the most / what would you prioritize for your municipality?

### CONCLUSION – 5 minutes

One final exercise and we are done. In front of you there is a grid containing a list of political parties (with name, logo, name of leader, picture of leader) in front of each name. For each party, please write down:

- The first word that comes to your mind
- Positive aspects of the party
- Negative aspects of the party
- Whether or not you would vote for this party, if elections were held tomorrow