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Youth Voice and Community Engagement across Tunisia: A Review of the Literature

Prepared for

Christine Capacci-Carneal, Senior Education Advisor, Middle East Bureau

Mitch Kirby, Senior Education Advisor, Asia Bureau

Contracting Officer's Technical Representative

Data for Education Programming/Asia and Middle East

USAID / Washington

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20523

Prepared by

AMIDEAST Tunisia on behalf of RTI International

RTI International

3040 Cornwallis Road

Post Office Box 12194

Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANETI	National Agency for Employment and Independence
CSO	Civil society organization
GNRD	Global Network for Rights and Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRI	International Republican Institute
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
MENA	Middle East & North Africa
POMED	Project on Middle East Democracy
RCD	Democratic Constitutional Rally
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SIPHR	Swedish Institute for Peace and Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YLC	Youth Leader Council

Youth Voice and Community Engagement in Tunisia: A Review of the Literature

Background and Approach

September 2016, AMIDEAST began a qualitative assessment of Tunisian youth perceptions toward civic participation and political engagement. The objective was to highlight youth experiences regarding the barriers and assets to youth political voice and participation, and civic engagement. The assessment approved and funded by USAID included two main activities: the completion of 21 focus groups across the country, and a review of the relevant literature. This paper reflects a synthesis of the literature on Tunisian youth, and particularly their political voice and activities (both formal and informal) and their engagement with civil society. As the review and focus groups took place, themes such as unemployment, education, and corruption emerged as being indirectly relevant. The scope of the review was thus expanded to capture existing knowledge on these themes.

Databases including ERIC, JSTOR, Academic OneFile, Gale, ProQuest, and EBSCOhost were searched for reports or academic articles on youth voice and civic or political participation in Tunisia. ResearchGate.net and Google Scholar were also used. The websites of international organizations like the World Bank, ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, OECD, UNESCO, and International Crisis Group were searched for reports written during or after the Revolution. Government documents were obtained from the Ministry of Education's website. (Other government websites were searched, but yielded no meaningful literature). Internal university libraries in Tunis and the National Library were consulted onsite. When a helpful source was identified, its bibliography was searched as well. Finally, members of the research team reached out to their contacts, both those in the academic world and members of civil society groups working on youth or democracy issues. This outreach produced some useful unpublished reports and papers.

In order to be included in the literature review, a report or study needed to have been published during or after the Jasmine Revolution of 2011. Sources needed to be relevant to the stated objectives of the study. In other words, they needed to be directly or indirectly related to Tunisian youth voice, civic engagement, or political participation. A source needed to include original data or an analysis that integrated multiple sources of data. Purely analytical reports were deemed credible if they were either published by known institutions or peer-reviewed journals, or included citations that verified their claims.

Political Voice and Participation

Historical Context

Both formal and informal political participation among youth was very low before the Jasmine Revolution. Political and civic participation was closely monitored by the Ben Ali regime (Khatib,

2013). Freedom of association was severely limited and civil society organizations (CSOs) working on political issues could not legally register. Opposition parties were not allowed to hold public meetings or openly criticize the government. Access to the Internet and to information in general was limited and monitored (Breuer & Groshek, 2013; Euromed, 2012; Honwana, 2011).

In October 2011, Breuer & Groshek aimed to determine the extent to which young Tunisians were helping to build a participatory political culture. They conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with Tunisian bloggers and online activists, which helped them formulate a 34-question web survey that was taken by 610 Tunisian Facebook users. The sample skewed heavily toward the young, the Internet-savvy, the highly educated, and the politically engaged, yet Breuer and Groshek found that 58.8 percent of respondents had “never considered” signing a petition or collecting signatures for a petition before the Revolution nine months earlier. 55.3 percent had never considered writing a letter to a newspaper or a government official. 49.5 percent had never considered working with or starting a citizen initiative (Breuer & Groshek, 2013).

Youth were the main drivers of the Jasmine Revolution, but they largely became disengaged after the Revolution because they did not have the leadership skills, the social and political networks, or the knowledge and experience necessary to have their voices heard in the formal political process during the post-Revolution transition period. There was a lack of formal opportunities for youth to express themselves, which often lead to frustration, and in some cases radicalization. In the early transition period, youth were ignorant about and suspicious of civil society and government alike (Fourati, Ipp, and Prado, 2014).

Formal Political Participation: Voting

In March 2011, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted the first qualitative study on Tunisians’ political attitudes post-Revolution. The final report (Collins, 2011) was based on ten focus groups held in nine cities in Tunisia. The cities (Tunis, Bizerte, Sousse, Kairouan, Sidi Bouzid, Sfax, Gabes, Nabeul, and Le Kef) were chosen based on their roles in the Revolution and in order to represent geographical diversity. There were seven to ten men and women between the ages of 25 and 35 in each focus group.

At the time, the young participants almost unanimously expressed hope for the future and aspired to play a role in the country’s political transformation. They associated democracy with freedom of expression. They felt that the country was headed in the right direction. They were particularly excited about the prospect of voting in a free election, which they had never seen before. They rated voting as the most important means of participating in the democratic process. Most had never voted before because they knew that past elections were not free and fair. But in March 2011, they saw voting as an obligation, and as necessary to ensure that their goals during the Revolution were realized (Collins, 2011).

Despite these positive early signs, when Tunisia’s first authentically free and fair elections were held 7 months later, in October 2011, youth turnout was much lower than expected: only 48 percent of Tunisians between the ages of 18 and 33 voted (compared with 68 percent of Tunisians between 48 and 63) (Lefevre, 2015). Young women were the least likely to vote; focus groups conducted by NDI in 2012 revealed that women aged 18-25 were the only group in which over half of

participants had neglected to vote, mostly due to confusion with the process of registering and/or voting, or with the multitude of parties and candidates, and their positions (Ben Yahia & Borovsky, 2012). Equally disheartening was the International Republican Institute's (IRI) finding that of those who voted in the 2011 election, 14 percent said they would not vote again (IRI, 2013).

In 2013, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted a nationwide survey that was meant to inform a strategy to better involve youth in the country's political and social life. The report used surveys delivered to samples representative of the Tunisian youth population to inquire about young peoples' perspectives on the constitutional process, government corruption, and political participation. Youth from all regions and socio-economic backgrounds considered voting to be the most effective means of changing society (64.1 percent), followed by activism through an NGO (37.1 percent) and activism in political parties (21.3 percent).

But a year later, in the 2014 national parliamentary election, youth turnout was even lower than it was in 2011: only 20 percent of youth actually voted (GNRD & SIPHR, 2014), representing only 10 percent of voters (ILO, 2014).

In 2015, a Tunisian CSO called IWatch documented the views of Tunisian youth on democracy and the extent of their involvement in local governance. It was carried out in Mednine, Gafsa, Bizerte, Kairouan, Sousse, Sidi Bouzid, Kef, and Zaghouan. Of those youth surveyed, 38 percent intended to vote in the upcoming 2016 election, 31 percent said they would boycott, and 31 percent had not yet decided. Youth aged between 30 and 35 were more likely to be registered and to intend to vote than younger groups.

When asked in a survey conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in 2015 how likely they would be to vote in the 2016 municipal and governorate elections, 58 percent of 18-34 year olds said they would be very or somewhat likely to vote. 41 percent said they were unlikely or somewhat unlikely to vote. In contrast, those in older demographic groups were 67-75 percent likely to vote (IRI, 2015).

There are a number of explanations for low voter turnout in the literature. In a report following their observation mission to the 2014 parliamentary elections, the Global Network for Rights and Development & the Swedish Institute for Peace and Human Rights blamed the social and economic situation of youth and political parties' failure to engage with youth for their low turnout. Poor economic conditions and high youth unemployment were frequently mentioned by participants. In another study (Pettersson, 2016). Silveira (2015), reported that young people blamed their low voter turnout on the lack of reliable information on the parties and candidates and on their distrust of political parties.

In November 2015, IRI conducted surveys in each of Tunisia's 24 governorates, with a total of 1,207 randomly selected Tunisians, using face-to-face interviews. There was a proportional division by governorate, age group, and gender based on the most recent available data from Tunisia's National Statistics Institute. When asked about the main barriers to young people's political participation, the most common answers were lack of training and coaching (31 percent), lack of money (31 percent), lack of opportunity (30 percent), and lack of support (29 percent). 17 percent said a lack of education. Importantly, only 16 percent felt there was a lack of desire to

participate amongst youth. The data for this question was disaggregated by age and interestingly, the responses of 18-34 year olds were basically the same as the responses of the population at large: Lack of money was the most popular response (32 percent) with lack of training and coaching (30 percent), lack of opportunity (28 percent) and lack of support (28 percent) not far behind. Again, 17 percent said a lack of education. 14 percent said a lack of desire to participate (IRI, 2015).

Formal Political Participation: Involvement with Political Parties

Because Tunisian youth felt that none of the political parties represented them or addressed their needs, and because they generally had a negative view of partisan politics (which they associated with corruption and abuse of power) and were suspicious of institutional avenues for political expression, many deliberately chose not to participate in the formal political process early on (Honwana, 2011). They were wary of lending their support to political parties, which had been co-opted by the state under Ben Ali. Due to the legacy of Ben Ali's authoritarian regime, they were suspicious of all political parties and actors who joined the first transitional government. They were reluctant to formally join any party, campaign for any party or candidate, or to run for office themselves. There was no party or individual that held widespread legitimacy among them (Collins, 2011). Party affiliation was especially low among young women, as they were not perceived as welcoming spaces (Ben Yahia & Bonnefoy, 2012).

In 2015, IWatch found that 53 percent of youth reported being interested in national political affairs, despite an overwhelming mistrust in politicians. But only 6 percent were members of political parties, and only 3 percent were active in their parties. The percentage of those not at all interested in political activities was 77 percent. About 70 percent of those polled could not define participatory democracy—33 percent had never even heard of it.

Only 2.7 percent of youth were involved with political parties by 2014 (ILO, 2014). According to Silveira (2015), many of the young people who had joined parties in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution quickly grew disillusioned by the non-collaborative approach that older party leaders took with them, and withdrew their membership. Young people were not given decision-making roles within parties because they lacked political experience, but they also were not given meaningful opportunities to gain experience.

Laiq's 2013 case studies of the Islamist Ennahda party and the center-left Ettajid, Ettakatol, and Massar parties mostly supported this. In contrast to the bulk of the literature, Laiq found that youth did play a role in forming the new political parties registered post-Revolution, and even had a hand in "resuscitating" and expanding the 8 already-established parties, like Ettajdid and Ennahda. She found that the majority of political parties in Tunisia had youth wings or quotas for youth in their central committees. In many cases these were hard-won victories, with youth campaigning hard from within the party for structural changes that would allow them proper representation. While party structures were rigid, Laiq did not find any structural barriers that were unique to youth. In fact, she argued that the rigidity of party structures could potentially help youth to advance faster within party structures because there were clear processes and procedures to follow in order to "climb the ladder."

However, Laiq agreed with the bulk of the literature that found that youth had not integrated into the “political elite” who make the real decisions. Furthermore, youth from both Islamist and secular parties tended to think that the party structure was rigged in favor of the older political elites and that decisions were made in a top-down fashion that did not allow for youth voices to be heard. A member of Ettakatol said that the priorities of the older generation almost always won out over the priorities of the younger generation whenever they were not aligned. A member of Massar said that after Ennahda won the majority of votes in 2011, younger members of Massar felt that the government was “the problem, not the solution” and were keen to participate in demonstrations. In contrast, older members had more faith in the Ennahda government and wanted to pursue diplomatic solutions to problems. The young Massar activist who was interviewed saw older members’ refusal to protest as a refusal to participate in democracy.

Within those parties that lacked structural support for youth voices, young activists were choosing not to engage in institutional avenues for participation such as party congresses or policy development. Instead, they were using the party brand to create grassroots networks, or campaign for issues that were important to them.

Ettajdid, a secular, center-left party that was one of Ennahda’s biggest rivals, did not have a youth wing. One young Ettajdid activist posited that her party (like other parties that existed under the Ben Ali regime) was closed to new ideas when compared to new parties or parties like Ennahda, which were operating in exile pre-Revolution. She wanted her party to be more active and to publish policy positions and official statements on the key issues of the day, but she found the older generation who was calling the shots to be less proactive. She felt that the Ben Ali days had trained the older generation to be overly cautious, and also wary of digital communication and social media. Increasing digital communication was a priority for younger members because they felt that it would improve “internal democracy,” but they encountered a lot of pushback from older members on that front as well (Laiq, 2013).

These issues were not unique to Tunisia. Bonnefoy (2014) found widespread mistrust of political parties in all countries that experienced an “Arab Spring.” Young people in those countries believed that the political parties that were established pre-Revolution had remained largely unchanged and that no new political party representing the interests of youth had been established. This perception led to a disillusionment toward the formal political process among Arab youth in general (Bonnefoy, 2014).

Of course, their refusal to engage with the formal political process inevitably means that youth will have less voice in government. As a result of the October 2011 election, there were 217 members of the National Constituent Assembly, which was tasked with writing a constitution. Only 4 percent of the assembly (9 members) were under the age of 30. In contrast, 76 percent were over the age of 50. This situation was at least partly because, in general, youth were uninterested in running for office or even joining political parties post-Revolution (Silveira, 2015).

On the positive side, a new rule governing legislative elections requires that in future elections, at least one candidate under the age of 30 must be included among the top three candidates in each electoral list (Silveira, 2015). A new law that incentivizes the nomination of at least one candidate under 35 also provides a potential opportunity for further youth engagement (World Bank, 2014).

Faith in Democracy

Besides discontent with the available candidates and parties, there is evidence in the literature of a growing disillusionment with democracy in general among youth (Burwell, Hawthorne, Mezran & Miller, 2016). Yahya (2016) found that only 8.8 percent of rural youth and 31 percent of urban youth had any faith in the formal political system. (In contrast, 80 percent had faith in spiritual leaders and religious associations).

In the most recent IRI survey (2015), only 4 percent of respondents believed that Tunisia was a full democracy. 22 percent saw it as a nearly-full democracy, 37 percent saw it as a flawed democracy, and 33 percent did not believe it was a democracy at all. When asked whether democracy or prosperity was more important to them, 64 percent said prosperity was “somewhat” or “definitely” more important.

Yahya (2016) found that while democracy was enticing to them, many Tunisians were not convinced that it was the right system for their country. They valued the freedom that democracy had brought, but doubted whether or not democracy could deliver the safety and socioeconomic security that they also valued.

The ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey (John, 2016), an annual survey designed to assess the attitudes of Arab youth aged 18-24, further supported this finding. The international polling firm Penn Schoen Berland conducted 3,500 face-to-face interviews from January 11 and February 22, 2016 with Arab men and women in 16 different countries, including Tunisia (200 participants were chosen from Tunis, Sousse and Sfax). One interesting finding from the study was that only 24 percent of Tunisian youth believed that they were better off after the Revolution (down from 35 percent in 2015). The survey revealed that in 2016, the majority of Arab youth valued stability over democracy. 58 percent of youth in North Africa (the data on this question was not disaggregated by country) felt that stability should be prioritized over democracy. Only 18 percent felt that democracy should be prioritized. (24 percent were unsure.)

In 2015, International Alert published the results of a study conducted in 2014 in two suburbs of Tunis, Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen, which have high unemployment and high school drop-out rates. 714 unmarried people between the ages of 18 and 34 were interviewed. The sample was designed to be representative of the gender, age, employment status, and educational levels of the governorates of Ariana and Manouba (based on 2010 data from the National Statistics Institute). 46 percent of those interviewed felt that they were worse off after the Revolution. 44 percent said their situation had not changed. The survey revealed that the changes they were most hoping for during the Revolution were access to employment and improved living standards. Government corruption and the absence of institutional means for young people to have their voices heard were also areas that most young people (92-95 percent) felt had not improved since the Revolution. Only 49 percent had faith in elections to improve the situation of young people.

Faith in Public Institutions

According to the World Bank (2014), one of the main reasons for weak participation in public life among youth is a lack of confidence in public institutions. Petterson (2016), who interviewed

politically active youth exclusively, found that while they were disappointed in the post-Revolution governments so far, they still believed it was possible for young people to effect change from within political organizations. But the vast majority of youth, who are not politically active, do not trust public institutions: only 31 percent of urban youth and 9 percent of rural youth said they trusted the political system in a 2014 ILO study.

In a November 2015 IRI survey, 57 percent of respondents said that members of parliament and ministries were doing “nothing” for people like them. 25 percent said they were doing “little.” When asked if the government was promoting policies and programs that helped youth succeed, most people did not believe the government was doing enough. 28 percent said yes or absolutely yes, while 68 percent said mainly no or not at all. This was a significant shift from when the same question was asked only 5 months earlier. In June 2015, the results were more evenly split, with 46 percent saying absolutely yes or mainly yes and 44 percent saying mainly no or not at all. In November, 71 percent of Tunisians agreed with the statement “Politicians do not pay attention to the needs and ideas of young people.”

The International Alert report (2015) found that the overwhelming majority of youth (99 percent) said that politicians are interested in serving themselves. Only 8 percent felt that politicians are also interested in helping the country.

In August 2016, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published the preliminary findings from its case study of youth peacebuilding in Tunisia. The report noted a growing disillusionment with the political process and public institutions post-Revolution and largely blamed a lack of access to basic resources, especially in rural and interior areas and low-income urban areas. The young people interviewed felt initially frustrated and eventually cynical about the political process post-Revolution. A lack of trust between youth and civil servants was also mentioned (Bourhrous & Smith, 2016).

Lack of trust between youth and the police was especially prevalent throughout the literature. Collins (2011) posited that mistrust of the police was so widespread due to Ben Ali’s use of the police as a political tool and because of violence committed by the police during the Revolution. Human Rights Watch (2012) reported that under Ben Ali, plainclothes police had spied on and threatened activists, and during the Revolution (even after Ben Ali had stepped down), police used live ammunition and other forms of excessive force on peaceful protestors, leading to at least 240 deaths, over a thousand injured, and many falsely imprisoned. But Boukhars (2015), Bourhrous and Smith (2016) and the World Bank (2014) found that young people continue to experience police bribery, intimidation, and abuse. IRI’s 2015 survey revealed that 31% of Tunisians had heard of instances of police brutality that year, and 13% said they had witnessed or been victims of police brutality. Police abuses were particularly prevalent in poor urban areas (Boukhars, 2015) and rural areas (World Bank, 2014). The World Bank urged trust-building activities between youth and police forces because they found that constructive work between the two parties could not be hoped for until the relationship was less fraught.

Political Elites and the ‘Hijacked Revolution’ Narrative

Tunisian youth felt a sense of ownership of the Revolution while it was happening, but they soon came to believe that it had been “hijacked” by the older generation (Bennefoy, 2014; British Council, 2013). Collins (2011) found that youth were suspicious that political elites would attempt to profit from the Revolution as early as March 2011. They said that older political actors, even those who were genuinely opposed to Ben Ali and involved in the Revolution, were being opportunistic during the transition process and trying to “steal” the Revolution from the youth who both started it and were the primary driving force behind it.

Boubekeur (2016) provided further evidence for this narrative. Based on interviews with Nidaa Tounes members, professors from La Manouba University, Tunisian Islamists, unionists and foreign affairs officials, political and civil society activists, and former RCD (Democratic Constitutional Rally) ministers and diplomats, Boubekeur argued that secular political elites and Islamists have been cooperating in what he calls “bargained competition” in order to monopolize the post-Revolution political process. Boubekeur wrote that political elites from the Ben Ali era and leaders of the Islamist Ennahda party worked together for a strong centralized government authority, which pushed youth out of the post-Revolution transition process.

Honwana (2011) found that during the Revolution, despite being incredibly active, the youth were not organized. This lack of organization allowed both institutionalized and newly-established political parties dominated by older politicians to step in to fill the void, despite not representing the interests of the youth. Many of the young Tunisians Honwana interviewed in 2011 felt that the interim government was maintaining the status quo and contained too many members of the former RCD, the ruling party under Ben Ali. They were worried that members of the interim government were not actually interested in dismantling the power structures of the old regime and that youth were not properly represented in the interim government. New political parties were being created (there were only 8 under Ben Ali and 94 had been registered at the time of Honwana’s writing), but none of them were being created by young people.

Kelly, Miller, and Prelis (n.d.) also argued that the culture of exclusivity and elitism that characterized politics in the Ben Ali days has remained intact post-Revolution. Older political elites in the new governments generally had not involved youth in discussion, and instead made unilateral top-down decisions without youth input, they wrote.

Khatib (2013) argued that the parties that existed under Ben Ali were dissolved and their members marginalized (which is in contrast to most of the other literature). She felt that formal political participation was, at least theoretically, open to non-elites, though she warned that the overlap between political and economic elites and the tendency of voters to seek out familiar leaders or institutions in times of instability and uncertainty were huge potential advantages for older, established political elites during times of democratic transition.

Yahya (2016) found that Tunisians still worry that “political elites” are not concerned with securing a better future for them. Young people in particular feel alienated by political elites (Boukhars, 2015). Many young Tunisians feel that they cannot be represented by politicians who are so much older than them. Politicians often make reference to youth and the need to empower

youth, but this is seen as just talk. Many believe that politicians and government officials are manipulating youth for their own personal gain. They say that government officials make decisions that will affect youth without including or even consulting them. They find the way that older politicians speak to youth to be patronizing (Parker, 2013).

Petterson (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 young Tunisians across the ideological spectrum who were engaged in some kind of political activity and found that even youth who were politically active felt actively excluded from politics by older “political elites.” They felt that there was a lack of communication and common interest between youth and elites.

One example from Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is illustrative. Seeking to establish a formalized means for communication with government officials and the skills to communicate effectively with them, SFCG created Youth Leader Councils (YLCs) in 14 governorates across Tunisia that were managed by and for youth. The YLCs are perhaps one of the more successful efforts to facilitate youth participation available in the literature, and an internal evaluation by SFCG of the YLC initiative conducted by Touzri (2014) was generally positive. The YLCs organized a total of 37 public events and/or campaigns, which attracted over 3,200 attendees. Members benefitted from trainings on leadership and conflict resolution. National SFCG meetings brought YLC members together, creating a network of young leaders across the country. But while there were positive instances of collaboration between the Youth Councils and government officials, the report also noted a disconnect between the issues that local and regional authorities were discussing and the issues that were important to youth.

The SFCG evaluation included 12 meetings conducted with youth in the 12 regions SFCG was operating in, and 4 focus groups conducted in Jendouba, Tataouine, Kasserine and Tunis. Questionnaires were used in all regions. Individual interviews were conducted with youth in all regions and with local authorities in 10 regions. Based on the data generated from these efforts, Touzri found that most officials did not view the YLCs as true partners, but as a means for positive publicity. The strength of the relationship between politically active youth and government authorities varied greatly from region to region, but in general young people expressed a lack of confidence in local authorities. They felt that local authorities were not accessible or responsive to them. They expressed that the country’s political transition was supposed to be an opportunity for them to make proposals, but public officials were as inaccessible as they were before the Revolution. Touzri also noted some “apprehension and concern” from local authorities regarding Youth Council members’ awareness of their skills and potential influence, especially when it came to decision-making processes.

In an as-yet unpublished report based on comparative data from Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Palestine, and Yemen, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that youth in MENA countries have less faith in their governments than their parents, which is in contrast to global trends. They too found that, in general, political elites and rigid structures have caused youth to disengage from traditional political processes. However, the report viewed Tunisia as one of the more successful examples in the MENA region of institutionalizing youth political participation based on the rights enshrined in the 2014 Constitution, the representation of youth in local councils, and the Young Parliaments in 2013 and

2014 that encouraged 18-30 year olds from across Tunisia to prepare and vote on resolutions on a number of themes.

A Need for ‘Political Learning’

According to Dickson (2013), a period of “political learning” is needed, as most Tunisians do not have a real understanding of their rights or of what democracy entails, and Tunisian society as a whole has not developed a “collective sense of democratic values.” This should not be surprising given the political climate under Ben Ali in which young Tunisians were raised.

According to Collins, youth in 2011 were already anticipating problems due to the country’s inexperience with and possible misunderstanding of democracy. They said that Tunisia lacked a political culture and citizens lacked a political consciousness after years of the Ben Ali regime encouraging citizens to focus on music, sports, and other non-political pursuits. Some worried that citizens would misuse their new freedoms or that freedom would lead to chaos (Collins, 2011).

Collins also wrote that the young participants in the NDI study, despite their excitement to engage with the political process, were unfamiliar with political parties and actors at both national and regional levels. They hoped that members of political parties would focus on outreach through television and visits to their regions, but did not seem to know how they could inform themselves about the parties or candidates.

The NDI survey took place in March 2011. Later that year, in August, another survey conducted by the International Foundation of Electoral Services found that only 38 percent of Tunisians between the age of 18 and 24 knew the reason for the upcoming election (to elect a constituent assembly) and the reason for electing an assembly (to write a constitution). Many believed that the upcoming election was a presidential election (Hoffman & Jamal 2012).

The Search for Common Ground report noted that youth seemed to have a poor understanding of the administrative procedures necessary to engage with local government officials (they reported finding them time-consuming and tedious) and didn’t know who the local stakeholders in their areas were (Touzri, 2014).

The World Bank (2014) found that most youth do not follow national news or politics.

In its 2015 survey, IRI found that 89 percent of respondents (of all ages) did not know how to contact the office of parliament that represented them. 83 percent did not know how to contact a government ministry to report a problem or concern.

A lack of understanding about the political process came up as a barrier to youth participation in Petterson’s (2016) interviews as well. Most of Petterson’s interviewees agreed that the average young Tunisian did not understand why the transition from an authoritarian to a truly democratic form of government would need to take time, or why all campaign promises could not immediately be put into effect, especially as the government struggles with external challenges such as terrorism.

The OECD report (2016) specifically suggested involving youth in the public budget process in order to help turn campaign promises into real policy, but also to improve financial literacy and understanding of governmental processes among youth. It referenced 2014 efforts in La Marsa, Menzel Bourguiba, Tozeur, and Gabes to involve citizens (particularly youth) in allocating 2 percent of the municipal budgets. It also referenced budget monitoring efforts by a Tunisian CSO called Al Bawsala, which created a website that breaks down the public budgets in layman's terms in order to demystify the process for average citizens and keep them informed about how resources are being allocated by the presidency, parliament, and ministries.

Informal Avenues of Participation

Hoffman and Jamal (2012) found that in “the Arab world,” younger generations tend to express themselves politically through informal means. Young people are more likely than older generations to participate in demonstrations (in fact, 30 percent of the youth who participated in the “Arab Spring” had taken part in a demonstration before), but less likely to cast a vote. According to Khatib (2013), this phenomenon is at least in part because informal political participation through social networks and underground movements was the only means of authentic engagement available under authoritarian regimes, as participation in both civil society and politics was closely monitored.

This tendency has certainly held true in the case of Tunisia, where both before and after the Revolution, informal political participation has been higher among youth than formal political participation. The World Bank (2014) noted that participation in demonstrations was the most popular form of political engagement in Tunisia both during and after the Revolution. A UNDP (2013) report stated that the more informal the medium of expression, the more appealing it is to Tunisian youth. The report also stated that in 2012, 45.7 percent of youth participated in demonstrations, 39.5 percent expressed an opinion on social media, 25.9 percent participated in sit-ins, and 20.6 percent participated in strikes.

Social Media

Using Facebook (and, to a lesser extent, other social media sites) was the most common form of political participation among Tunisian youth during the Revolution. Young people saw Facebook as the most credible source of information and felt that using Facebook to share videos and articles was an important way to participate in the Revolution. They stressed that the Revolution could not have happened without Facebook and the Internet more broadly (Collins, 2011). Facebook was used to discuss political issues with friends, family and strangers, to search for information about the protests, or to find out when and where protests were being held (Breuer & Groshek, 2013). MercyCorp, in their 2016 study of seven MENA countries, found that in general, when youth gain access to a free and open internet, they tend to use it to inform themselves about and express their views on political and civic issues.

Today, young Tunisians are still using the Internet to access information and express their political opinions. As of 2013, over a third of young Tunisians were ‘digital natives,’ meaning that they had been using the Internet for five years or more (OECD, 2016). As of 2014, 9 out of 10 rural youths had a cell phone and about half of Tunisian youths used computers for educational purposes

(World Bank, 2014). UNESCO (2013) found that mastering new technologies and the ability to connect with a larger “youth culture” through the Internet were huge assets for youth. Hoffman and Jamal (2012) found that in addition to being an important tool for youth to counter political repression pre-Revolution, social media has continued to be used as a tool to express political and social opinions post-Revolution. They further found that most youth would prefer to contact local government officials online (Hoffman & Jamal, 2012). It is for these reasons that the OECD, in its report on youth in the MENA region, suggested that governments should be involving youth in policymaking and governance by using digital technology to make government more open and accessible (2016).

Violence as a Means of Expression

Unfortunately, in spite of these positive examples of youth voice, political exclusion and socioeconomic marginalization (along with other factors) has led to violent forms of political expression by some youth (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2015; Meddeb, 2015).

Lefevre (2015) noted that there have been instances of young Islamists expressing their political frustrations violently post-Revolution. For example, it is widely believed that the Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution, a network of young Islamists, were responsible for attacks in Tunis and Gafsa on the Union Generale des Travailleurs Tunisiens and in Jerba on Nidaa Tounes. Certainly they often intimidated politicians, journalists, judges, and trade unionists.

The Salafi-jihadist group Shabab al-Tahweed (formerly Ansar al-Sharia, the terrorist group that attacked the US Embassy in 2012) provides another example of how violence has been used by disaffected young Islamists as a means for political expression. Boukhars (2015) pointed out that at its conception, Ansar al Sharia did not advocate violence. In fact, it engaged in much of the grassroots community organizing and activism that is at the heart of a peaceful democratic process. But eventually, as they grew impatient with Ennahda’s gradual approach to reform and political compromises, hundreds of young Islamists turned instead to Ansar al-Sharia or other violent extremist groups like the Militia of Uqba ibn Nafaa (Boubeker, 2016; Lefevre, 2015). Lefevre (2015) argued that the continued success of secular parties could lead to further rejection of the formal political process by young, idealistic Islamists.

Unfortunately, in addition to the obvious danger it presents, political violence or even the potential for violence can also prevent nonviolent youth (who make up the vast majority) from participating in civic and political life. For example, during Search for Common Ground’s YLC program, strikes and large, potentially dangerous demonstrations sometimes prevented youth from participating in YLC activities (Kelly et al., n.d.).

Community Engagement / Civic Participation

Historical Context

Civil society organizations (CSOs) existed under Ben Ali, but they were difficult to register and heavily monitored for signs of opposition. Ben Ali inflated the numbers of CSOs that existed under

his regime in order to give the appearance of a flourishing civil society. In reality, opposition and human rights groups were repressed, and CSOs were often co-opted by the state (Euromed, 2012).

Before the Revolution, there was no dialogue between government leaders and members of civil society. During the democratic transition process, it became clear that the government bureaucracy did not have the institutional knowledge necessary to engage with civil society actors. Furthermore, elected officials did not have experience communicating with or advocating for their constituents (Fourati et al., 2014).

A New Beginning

Post-Revolution, a great number of youth-led CSOs have emerged. 3,000 new CSOs were registered in a single year after a 2011 law (Decree 2011-88) was passed that completely reformed the process of registering an association. Anyone who does not hold a high-level position in a political party is now free to form an association, and the process is quick and efficient. Furthermore, these associations are now guaranteed the right to demonstrate, conduct polls, and publish reports, and the government is required to protect them from recrimination (Euromed, 2012). Deane (2013) called the new law “a ‘to do’ list for CSO reform.”

CSOs now serve a variety of functions, including educating citizens about key issues or about their rights, connecting citizens and government leaders, monitoring government bodies, and influencing policy (Silveira, 2015). A large number of civil society organizations focused on youth engagement have emerged since the Revolution (British Council, 2013). There has been notable involvement from youth in the formation of new CSOs, particularly in the fields of art, culture, and civic education (UNDP, 2013). Thanks mostly in part to the efforts of youth-led CSOs, in the lead-up to the 2014 elections there was a tremendous boom in the number of young people registered to vote (Silveira, 2015), though we know that the high voter registration did not ultimately lead to high voter turnout.

In a November 2015 trip to Tunisia’s “Dark Regions” (Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, and Gabes), POMED researchers were impressed by the number and quality of civil society initiatives being launched by young activists. They found that the initiatives in these marginalized cities offered real opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills and effect change in their communities (POMED, 2015). However, it is important to note that the growth in the number of CSOs has been much more significant in wealthier urban areas (Silveira, 2015).

Regional Disparities

Poverty and a lack of development in the interior of the country (public investment has continued to be largely concentrated in the coastal region,) has meant that youth from the interior and south have been excluded from the political process and discriminated against in a way that makes them less likely to engage in the political process (Brookings, 2013). Most young Tunisians feel disconnected from national politics, but this is especially true in poor rural areas (World Bank, 2014).

In March 2011, when the NDI survey was conducted, youth in all regions of Tunisia were aware of regional disparities in development and investment between the wealthier coastal regions and the interior (Collins, 2011). Not much has changed in the intervening years. In 2016, Yahya noted a “deep-seated” discrimination against the interior of the country and uneven regional development assistance. She posited that this was the legacy of the “networks of privilege” established by Ben Ali’s regime.

In the 2015 POMED study, youth from Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, and Gabes stressed that they had been excluded from the formal political process due to their youth and their location, and many felt disillusioned from years of unfulfilled promises of development from both the national government and international donors. They never saw their elected representatives coming back to their hometowns. They felt unable to influence events in the capital, and therefore they disengaged from national politics. This sentiment is prevalent throughout the literature, and reflects the findings of a larger MercyCorps study on youth civic participation in the MENA region. The MercyCorps report (2016) did not include data from Tunisia, but found that in the seven MENA countries it did study (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Kuwait, Algeria, Yemen, and Palestine), socio-economic status is the biggest predictor of civic engagement, and that Arab youth from rural areas are far less likely to be involved in civil society than their urban counterparts. That said, POMED did find that some youth in Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, and Gabes, while disillusioned with their ability to influence national politics, were committed to local reforms (mostly through CSOs). Ben Yahia and Borovsky (2012) found that due to the paucity of cultural and entertainment venues available in the interior and south, young women in particular were enthusiastic about civic engagement simply because it would represent a diversion for them, though they lacked information about the civil society organizations in their area or how to access them.

Youth Perceptions of CSOs

One issue that youth workers and organizations faced in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, as they attempted outreach to young people, was suspicion from youth who had only seen youth clubs and organizations as tools of the state under Ben Ali (Euromed, 2012). This is no longer the case according to some research. Youth are rejecting traditional, hierarchical forms of political participation (through political parties), but they see involvement with CSOs as an informal and indirect way to participate in the political process (British Council, 2013). A recurring theme in the literature is the preference among youth for involvement with CSOs over involvement with political parties or formal political activities. Touzri (2014) noted an “idealization” of CSOs. He often encountered the idea that civil society organizations work for the people and the country, while political parties and government officials work for power and personal gain. POMED (2015) found that civil society organizations and initiatives were seen as active, while political parties were seen as passive. There is a growing sentiment among youth that the real way to effect change in society is through CSOs. Young people prefer them in part because they do not require party affiliation, and so they are seen as being more free and open to dialogue (Silveira, 2015). Furthermore, members of civil society organizations were generally positive about their ability to effect change (80 percent felt they were capable of influencing their communities) (Touzri, 2014).

Youth Participation in CSOs

Yet despite the glowing perception of CSOs among youth when compared to political parties, most young people are not actually involved with any. According to the World Bank (2014), the vast majority of Tunisian youth see involvement in CSOs as important, but few are actually involved in any CSOs at all- only 3 percent of Tunisian youth in rural areas. A 2013 UNDP survey had similar findings: The majority of the youth surveyed (59.9 percent) thought it was necessary to be engaged in civil society, but only 13 percent were actually active members in political parties or civil society associations.

The 2015 IWatch survey reported that only 16 percent of youth were members of an organization or a union (3 percent in leadership positions, 6 percent as active members, and 7 percent as regular members). IWatch found a general lack of trust in the government and media on the part of youth, but a growing trust in civil society (61 percent).

According to the UNDP (2013), the low rate of civic engagement can be explained by the lack of mentorship and support of youth by public institutions. A 2013 UNDP study found that youth were generally aware of the importance of their participation in public life, but they were frustrated by the absence of institutional paths to practice their social rights and effectively participate in the rebuilding of Tunisian society. They also felt that they were victims of regional disparities and discrimination.

Funding and Sustainability

A major barrier for civil society groups is that they lack steady funding and sustainability (British Council, 2013; Bourhrous, 2016; POMED, 2015). Most successful CSOs are run by volunteers or are dependent on foreign donors. Many young activists are worried about the sustainability of their organizations once foreign funding dries up (POMED, 2015). They worry about their organizations being dependent on the expectations of their donors. There is also the issue of foreign-backed CSOs overshadowing independent, “home-grown” organizations that lack the resources of a foreign-funded organization (Silveira, 2015).

Other Barriers to Civic and Political Participation

Unemployment

A lack of employment opportunities for youth, and their subsequent reliance on the informal sector for unstable, underpaid, and often illegal work, has led to a disillusionment with the government’s inability to address their needs. A 2015 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report, which synthesized the major studies carried out on youth to that date, found that employment represented the main challenge for Tunisian youth aged 15 to 29, who represented 24.5 percent of the population. Unemployment among youth between 15 and 29 years increased after 2011, going from 25 percent in 2007 to 33.2 percent in 2013. The same study reported that 18 percent of youths were NEET, which means they were neither studying, employed, nor in training. The NEET

percentage is higher in rural areas than in urban ones and among young women (30 percent) than young men (6 percent). The NEET category is the most worrisome because these youth are disengaged from society, and discouraged. The UNFPA found that generally, youth experienced a long period of unemployment—38 percent of those who were still looking for jobs had been looking for 2 years or more. And unfortunately, because they undergo a long period of inactivity, their reintegration into the job market becomes even more difficult (UNFPA, 2015).

Although employability was not the focus of this literature review, unemployment as a barrier to youth inclusion emerged as a consistent theme within the literature. The pivotal issues with employment were the quality of education, the hiring process, and under- or informal employment. There is a considerable amount of literature on these themes which is not covered in this literature review.

In terms of the quality of education, the UNFPA (2015) found both inadequate academic training and a mismatch between training and market needs. In 2013, a study was conducted by the Institut Arabe des Chef d'Entreprises in order to ascertain the employment situation in Tunisia. Representatives of 460 Tunisian companies were interviewed, and 10,300 recent university graduates were surveyed using an online questionnaire. The report (2016) concluded that 60 percent of candidates did not satisfy the recruiters' needs when hired. The major skills that new recruits lacked were speaking and writing skills (up to two-thirds of candidates). Other highly sought-after skills included mastery of informatics, French, and English, as well as soft skills like creativity, initiative, and teamwork.

For those candidates who were qualified, UNFPA (2015) found that the hiring process was rife with corruption, nepotism, and regional favoritism. In fact, the dysfunction of the recruitment and hiring processes was the main issue that youth raised regarding employment.

Underemployment and informal employment are also huge problems for youth, especially university graduates. Of all Tunisian youths in urban areas, 68.2 percent are counted as underemployed. Youth are also affected by informal employment. Because this type of work is often for a short period and doesn't include benefits like social security, informal employment represents a huge opportunity for exploitation (UNDP, 2013).

One of the solutions that the Ministry of Employment and Professional Training put in place to facilitate the integration of these youths into the workforce was The National Agency for Employment and Independence (ANETI), which has programs like the Actif program and several entrepreneurship programs. However, these programs are only accessible in urban areas. The number of beneficiaries of these programs is very low, which does not give them credibility in the eyes of youth (UNDP, 2013). The ILO recommended that the government put in place reforms to fight against informal work and to improve the services of ANETI, making them more accessible in the interior and the south (ILO, 2014).

Education

Historically, one of Tunisia's assets has been its ability to produce highly educated, literate citizens. This fundamental responsibility of government is threatened as the tide of globalization

changes what kind of citizen and what kind of skills are necessary to succeed in the twenty-first century. The skills mismatch between graduates and labor market needs is well-documented and is a major issue. Provision of training and re-training well known, but a wholesale reform of the education system, both in the schools and higher education is necessary. To date, little effort from the international community is focused on systemic education reform. Inadequate education is a huge barrier for youth.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education published The White Book, a report drafted after a nation-wide assessment of the Tunisian educational system that was carried out in order to plan the necessary reforms for the primary and secondary sectors. The report found that Tunisian schools are failing to provide equal learning opportunities for all students due to the disparities between the different regions at the level of infrastructure, logistics, and human resources. This is in addition to the inability to accommodate different types of intelligence, learning styles, and personality traits.

The report also confirmed that schools have failed to integrate into their economic environment. The slowing growth of vocational training opportunities compared to the growing number of vocational jobs was a main concern. Employment criteria have changed and become based on skills rather than diplomas and classical knowledge. The report concluded that there should be an alternative governance policy to optimize school performance, especially because the curriculum has become void of analytical, independent, and creative thinking skills.

Yahya (2016) wrote that the weakening of the formal education system under Ben Ali facilitated the country's continued reliance on authoritarian mechanisms even after the fall of the regime. She posits that the lack of quality education, compounded by unemployment, has also resulted in a humiliation and stigmatization among many youth that prevents them from participating fully in society and makes them vulnerable to extremist groups.

A UNDP (2013) report stressed the importance of education, which it found to be a main concern among Tunisians. 85 percent of those polled in UNDP's national survey felt that the quality of education and professional training needed to be improved. The UNDP recommended overhauls to the curriculum, the structure, and the teachers. The importance of reforming the educational system was due to the rising costs (direct and indirect) of education, but also because of its importance in improving employability. According to the report, quality education and good governance were the two reforms most needed to improve employability.

Corruption

Corruption and an exclusionary economic system in which one must have connections in order to participate are also significant barriers to inclusion for youth (Burwell et al., 2016). Dickson (2016) noted that youth are frustrated with government corruption and the slow pace of reform, and this frustration has caused them to disengage from the political system. They see politicians as being self-interested, rather than interested in helping the people. They feel that politicians lie to and mislead voters. Furthermore, they feel that there is no party that represents them and no party worth voting for. POMED (2015) noted that during their trip to the south, corruption and the lack of cultural and social activities for youth were major sources of complaint.

In December 2013, a Truth and Dignity Commission was created in order to ascertain the extent of corruption under the Ben Ali regime and to punish those government officials and civil servants who had behaved illegally. But support for the Commission waned after the Nidaa Tounes party came into power and began advocating for reconciliation for the purpose of economic recovery. In July 2015, President Essebsi sent a bill to parliament that would give amnesty to businessmen and government officials who had embezzled money under Ben Ali, close corruption-related legal cases against civil servants, as well as limit the authority of the Truth and Dignity Commission.

Marches and sit-ins led by young leftist activists (who saw the bill as the last stand of the counterrevolution) were held in 11 cities. This movement was called Manich Msamah (“We will not forgive”), and it has been one of the most significant instances of youth engagement in the post-Revolution period (International Crisis Group, 2013).

Kelly, Miller and Prellis (n.d.), in another report for Search for Common Ground, found that the same barriers to youth that helped instigate the Revolution are still present: older political elites who do not engage youth, high unemployment, and government corruption.

Most young Tunisians rely on some form of social services provided by the state (education, health services, and employment bureaus in particular), and this reliance represents plenty of opportunities for petty corruption. A local CSO called Tunisian Association of Public Controllers conducted a study which revealed that 70% of interviewees believed that petty corruption facilitates daily interactions. This opinion was particularly popular among youth aged 18-25 (Association Tunisienne des Contrôleurs Publics, 2015). The OECD (2016) found a particular lack of accountability measures within education. The report also noted the widespread lack of confidence in public institutions, due in part to corruption that is mentioned throughout the literature. However, the report also concluded that Tunisian CSOs like IWatch have a relatively robust track record of monitoring government and increasing transparency compared to other MENA countries, and noted that efforts are currently underway to create whistleblower protection laws.

Conclusion

Overall, there have been a plethora of reports and studies on youth in Tunisia, although most have been qualitative in design. Their focus is typically on issues of employment and, to a lesser extent, political participation. There is a relative dearth of published information on civil society engagement. Issues like civic education and the role of the family, which were recurring themes across the focus groups, received little to no mention in the available literature. Family and community pressure to disengage from civil society, and particularly volunteer efforts, was a common refrain in the focus groups. A lack of quality civic education and a need for major reforms in the educational system in general were major concerns for parents, teachers, and youth workers in the focus groups conducted by AMIDEAST. Both of these issues were absent or almost absent from the literature, and are certainly deserving of further study.

Another striking feature of the available literature as uncovered by this review was that the vast majority of the literature came from foreign NGOs, development agencies, and academics, as

well as international organizations like the World Bank, OECD, and various United Nations agencies. Most sources were published in English. A comprehensive search of French and Arabic sources revealed very little new material. Importantly, there was a real scarcity of documentation from Tunisian government bodies and civil society organizations alike.

However, the literature that does exist paints a picture that is largely reflective of the focus groups conducted by AMIDEAST in September and October of 2016. In general, the picture is of a youth population that is restless and disillusioned with formal, traditional means of political expression. Civil society participation, while slightly higher, is also significantly down from its heights immediately post-Revolution. There are a number of explanations for this in the literature, but they largely fall into two main categories. First is the historical legacy of authoritarianism. The trauma of dictatorship, which stifled even political discussion, not to mention meaningful political action, has left its mark on a citizenry that is suspicious not only of political activity and politicians, but also of civil society entities that were once co-opted by the state. There is a clear need for a period of political learning and civic education for all, but especially for young people. Second is the mistrust in institutions and democracy that are the result of continued unemployment, corruption, and a lack of regional development post-Revolution.

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