

CHAPTER 2

Youth Participation, Voice, and Active Citizenship



We must advance hand-in-hand to achieve the aims of the revolution. We must be active in society, working in associations. We must not be divided, for the stakes are very high for our country. People must be woken up, and that is the role of the political class. They have to be aware of the critical phase through which the country is passing, to invest in this organization building, to be less selfish, and to make the goals of the revolution triumph.

Female high school student, Mahdia (coastal Tunisia)

Since 2010, young Tunisian women and men have stood at the forefront of social change, continually expressing their desire to participate actively in the public sphere. Yet, as this chapter shows, as of early 2013, when the data collection for this study was completed, young Tunisians believed that they continued to lack the institutional channels necessary to effectively participate in postrevolutionary Tunisia, and they expressed little confidence in the country's political and public institutions (Parker 2013).

Youth inclusion has direct economic, political, social, and cultural implications, and it requires the availability of institutional channels for active engagement in community and public life. Broadly speaking, youth inclusion includes the ability to make social contributions and to earn recognition and dignity. It also means having confidence and commitment to economic initiatives. Such inclusion is, in effect, active citizenship, which is further defined in box 2.1. In the recent Tunisian context, active

citizenship can be considered social engagement to realize the ideals of the revolution.

The positive interrelationship between the exercise of active citizenship and economic outcomes for youth, particularly for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), is validated by new global evidence. Recent econometric analysis finds that improvement in civil liberties, in addition to economic freedoms such as the reduction in taxation and price stability, leads to a significant reduction of youth inactivity (i.e., NEETs) in the long run. As a consequence of this finding, the World Bank estimates that improving the level of freedom in various developing regions to that of developed countries is likely to reduce youth inactivity by more than half in the Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa or by 30 percent in Latin America (Ivanic and La Cava, forthcoming). Although the quantitative survey data available for Tunisia does not allow for a rigorous assessment of the causal relationship

Box 2.1. Defining Active Citizenship

The European Youth Forum, one of the world's best established and most influential youth advocacy platforms, has defined active citizenship as a legal status and a role. A combination of specific attitudes and institutional arrangements must be in place for individuals to exercise "involvement, participation, and influence." This definition of citizenship also encompasses an individual's relations with others and the labor market, as well as questions of cultural identity, given that individuals belong to and participate in many different communities—social, economic, and cultural. Citizenship defined as status in a political, legal, and social community is based on a set of legal rules that defines membership in the political community. These rules include legal rights—e.g., freedom of speech, thought, and religious belief, and the right to own property—as well as and political rights—e.g., the right to participate and exercise power.

Source: European Youth Forum 2002b.

between civil liberties—which enable active citizenship of the youth—and a decrease in youth inactivity at the country level, the global evidence leads to the conclusion that as civil liberties take root in the country, particularly following the new constitutional provisions, NEETs are expected to substantially decrease.

While prospects for Tunisia appear promising, this chapter shows that young Tunisians still encounter significant barriers to their full exercise of active citizenship. Young people spoke in interviews of disappointments and broken dreams, as they face continuing social injustice, lack of opportunities for civic and political engagement, and unemployment, which they perceive is exacerbated by favoritism and regionalism. The deep divide perceived between the older generation that dominates decision making and the younger one that feels excluded from opportunities and lacks the voice to shape the future is also a critical issue that must be addressed for the long-term stability of the country.

At the same time, the qualitative research shows that, irrespective of gender and region, young Tunisians have developed a set of coping strategies. These strategies combine family and religion as a refuge from instability while focusing on the values of merit, hard work, innovation, self-seeking, and efforts to strengthen their autonomy. The opportunities for participation in community and political processes at the local and national levels, while not extensive, do exist and are expanding. Two key factors that directly affect whether youth engage in society are trust in institutions and the use of social media.

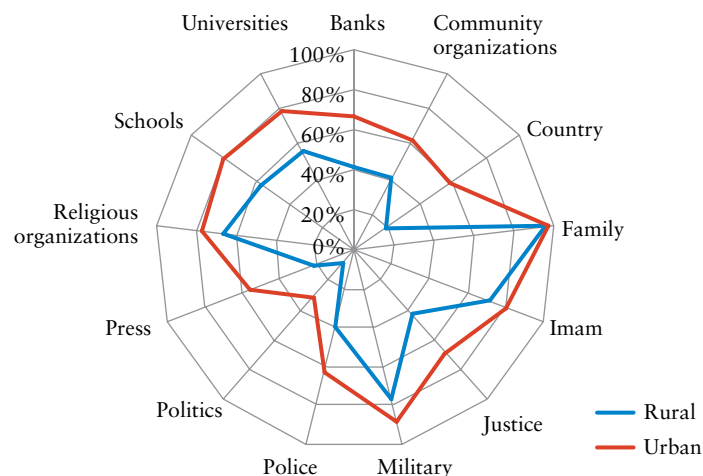
2.1 Trust in Institutions

Active citizenship depends on trust and a willingness to constructively engage with institutions. Without a minimum level of confidence in institutions, such as local politicians, courts, police, and political or religious groups, it is difficult for youth to work constructively with institutions. Trust is an enabling condition for active citizenship and crucial to the engagement of youth in the issues that affect their community or country. Trust must be earned by institutions. Unfair treatment, injustice, or police violence erodes confidence in institutions and without trust, societies tend to resort to confrontation.

Like the rest of their peers in the Middle East and North Africa, young Tunisians have little trust in public institutions. According to the Gallup World Poll 2013, with respect to standards of living, life evaluation, social well-being, community attachment, volunteering, and trust in national government, youth perceptions in the Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa score at the bottom when compared with other regions. However, the Middle East and North Africa had more youth reporting worsening standards of living in 2013 compared with 2012 and less confidence in national government than African youth (Gallup World Poll 2013).

Young Tunisians rely on their families and religious institutions. The military, the local Imam, and religious organizations receive the youth's highest trust rating of up to 80 percent, which is nearly the same level of trust given to family (see figure 2.1). In contrast, trust in political institutions was at its lowest during the data collection: only 8.8 percent of rural youth and 31.1 percent of urban youth had trust in political institutions. In urban Tunisia, schools and universities are rated as trustworthy by about 80 percent of youth as public spaces for dialogue. Stark differences exist between rural and urban youth. As a whole, youth in rural areas express substantially less trust in the police, the government, the justice

Figure 2.1. Trust in Public and Religious Institutions



Source: World Bank 2012d; 2012e.

Note: Figure includes all youth aged 15–29.

system, the press, and the country.¹ Across institutions, the trust level in rural Tunisia is, on average, 20 percent lower than in urban areas. The trust levels among youth are independent of work status, both within rural and urban areas (see annex 2, figures A2.1 and A2.2). The trust levels of Tunisian youth in banks and the press are slightly higher among those who are working, but otherwise, they mirror the trust levels among their peers who are NEET.

The overall discontent and the lack of trust in public institutions resonate among young Tunisians through cultural channels, including rap and other musical forms. Since the protests began in December 2010, rap has been the soundtrack to the Tunisian Revolution, while pop, folk, and rock genres have also provided musical accompaniment (see box 2.2).

Like their counterparts in Egypt and Libya, young Tunisians express little trust in the press, which they see as commercial and manipulative. While social media is recognized as having raised awareness and supported social mobilization during the revolution, it is now viewed more ambiguously, as expressed by a young school teacher:²

Facebook played a big role at the beginning of the revolution. Since the revolution, the followers of the different parties have their own pages and publish their programs. It is common to see mutual insults, and instead of serving the revolution, these arguments drag it backwards. Facebook, one of the sources of the revolution's success, has since turned into a space for attacking other parties. Male primary school teacher, Tunis

2.2 Access to Information

More than any other medium, young Tunisians are using the Internet to access information. The Internet is primarily used for entertainment, email, and news, but young men and women also spend part of their time online to study, work, or look for jobs (see figure 2.2). About 50 percent of all Internet users (43.3 percent rural, 53.2 percent urban) use the Internet for education, and many youth use it to look for jobs (45.9 percent rural, 26.8 percent urban). Almost one out of six young Tunisians also uses the Internet for work (14.4 percent rural, 15.9 percent urban).

Box 2.2. Young Artists and Freedom of Speech

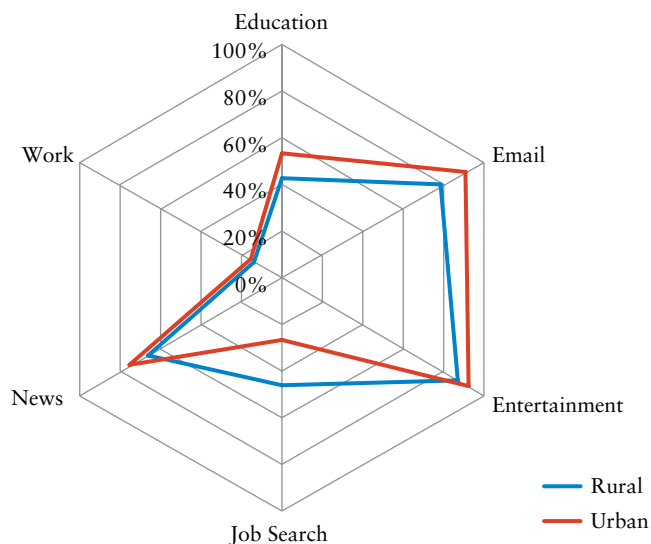
The arts, most particularly rap music, have been used to express young people's anger at unemployment, poverty, and political repression. The rapper El General emerged as one of the revolution's icons. His song “*Rais Lebled*” (Head of State) is regarded as the “anthem” of the revolution.

Since the revolution, rappers have continued to give voice to youth disillusionment. Along with journalists, many musicians fell afoul of the government elected in 2012. They continued criticizing police brutality, expressing their disappointment with the revolution, and advocating for freedom of expression. Seven rappers were arrested in the first six months of 2012. The rapper Weld El 15 received a 21-month jail sentence in absentia on charges of performing songs deemed insulting to the police at a concert in the eastern town of Hammamet. After he surrendered to the authorities, he was retried and received a four-month sentence, against which he appealed. Rapper Klay BBJ was finally acquitted on appeal in September 2013, after being charged and retried twice for criticizing the police.

Sources: Al Jazeera 2013b; Auffray 2013.

Access to basic information and communication technology is widespread. More than 9 out of 10 young Tunisians in rural Tunisia own a mobile phone. In comparison, between one to two-thirds of respondents used the Internet in the previous month (34.3 rural, 60.0 urban; see figure 2.3). About one-quarter of interviewed youth are members of a social networking site such as Facebook, which is primarily used to interact with friends and to read news. Television remains the main source of news (68 percent), followed by the Internet (13 percent), and personal discussion (12 percent). Relatively few relied on radio (6 percent), and even fewer on newspapers (1 percent). Access to the Internet is still limited in many rural areas, which also has implications for accessing

Figure 2.2. Use of Internet to Access Information



Source: World Bank 2012d; 2012e.
 Note: Figure includes all youth aged 15–29. Multiple answers were allowed during survey.

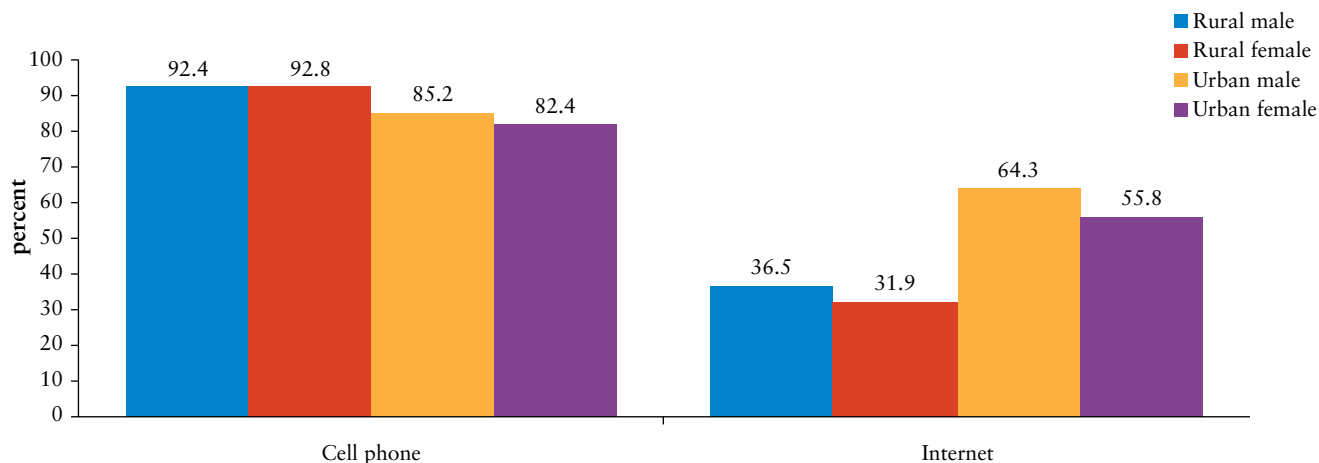
labor market information. However, the relatively high level of connectivity has facilitated the emergence of a “youth culture” with its own styles, spaces, channels of communications, and leisure activities, distinct from the “official youth culture” of the former regime.

Current and former graduate students spoke frequently about the Internet in the focus groups and individual interviews. Young people have a very positive attitude toward information and communication technology, seeing it as a source of information, communication with other youth (virtual networking), connection with the world media and entertainment, and an effective way to find employment. One Master’s student from Sidi Bouzid (Central West Tunisia) called the Internet “a second family” for the young. However, respondents also perceived a spatial dimension to Internet access—a digital divide exacerbating the feeling of exclusion from broader Tunisian society among youth living in the interior of the country.

People in the interior have nothing apart from football, the street, and the café. Students are bored at school, and can’t develop their abilities through creative activities or entertainment. Male student, Gafsa

To find a job, you have to go on the Internet. This must be the one part of the country where there is no employment bureau. As for “Publinet Cybercafés,”³ there are only a few in the center of Médenine, and that is an hour’s journey, costing TND2 [US\$ (PPP) 2.76]. Imagine, for anyone who lives in the villages around here, they have to pay for transport to the center of town,

Figure 2.3. Access to Information and Communication Technology—Rural Versus Urban



Source: World Bank 2012d; 2012e.
 Note: Figure refers to all youth; use of cell phone and Internet in last month.

wait for an hour, and then pay TND10 [US\$ (PPP) 13.79] just to register at the employment bureau. How can someone here get access to information? Male unemployed high school leaver, Médenine

To advance citizenship in a sustainable way, youth must progress beyond “virtual citizenship” to “real” political participation at local and national levels. While youth were enthusiastic about political engagement and associational life, it has yet to be implemented in a fully active manner. In contrast to the idealistic aspirations associated with the revolution, the following youth’s sentiments highlight the potential risk of engaging exclusively in a virtual public space.

I combed through all the information on Facebook to uncover the weaknesses of the administration. On Facebook, I take a critical stance, I am free and neutral, and what I don’t like, I attack. The Revolution of 14 January is above all a psychic revolution, a transition from one situation to another. We feel liberty after repression, liberty to communicate our ideas. ... After 14 January, the Internet is completely free of censorship. Male unemployed graduate, Médenine, southeast Tunisia

We watch TV. We surf the Internet. We go to check our Facebook pages at Publinet. We contact our friends in Tunis. We follow the news. We know what is going on. I would like to participate, express my views, but I don’t know how I should do it Female unemployed graduate, Mahdia, Central East Tunisia

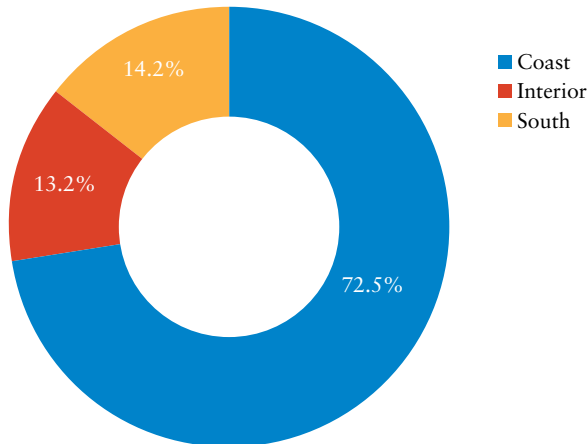
Making the transition from virtual to active citizenship will require new associational skills, which are as important as entrepreneurial skills in building effective agency. Youth can benefit from opportunities to learn how to establish and manage associations, including understanding the legal environment for doing so, managing budgets, being financially accountable and transparent, lobbying effectively, handling public relations and communications strategies, mapping democratic internal processes against effective management structures, and engaging in strategic networking.

2.3 Youth Participation in Civil Society

Since the revolution, religious and other civil society groups have been able to register with the state, and an increasing number of organizations focused on civic engagement have done so. Trade unions and student unions are playing particularly significant roles in civil society (British Council 2013). For example, the National Dialogue between the country’s political factions has been mediated by four influential civil society organizations (CSOs), including the country’s largest trade union. The Center for Information on the Formation, Study, and Documentation of Associations estimates that the number of registered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has increased by almost 50 percent since the revolution, from almost 10,000 to approximately 15,000 (British Council 2013; Khouja and Moussa 2012). In particular, religious welfare organizations have been growing in urban neighborhoods and in the interior regions most affected by poverty and exclusion.

Nonetheless, only a small fraction of young Tunisians are active in CSOs. According to a recent survey, as little as three percent of rural youth participate in CSOs (ONJ 2013). Among the few youth active in CSOs, the most frequently mentioned types of volunteering are for CSOs in the fields of regional development, charity and poverty, religious affairs, and science. Sports and leisure clubs were also frequently mentioned in qualitative interviews. Despite the low levels of participation in associations, 9 out of 10 young Tunisians consider volunteering in CSOs to be important for their communities. In rural Tunisia, about 92 percent of young women and 85.2 percent of young men identify community organizations as important for local development (see annex 2, figure A2.3). Trust levels toward community organizations are relatively lower in rural Tunisia, perhaps reflecting the heterogeneity in quality and the degree of political orientation displayed by existing organizations. Only 40.7 percent of young women and 39.9 percent of young men from rural areas trust community organizations (see annex 2, figure A2.4). Trust is much higher in urban Tunisia, where 63.6 percent of young women and 60.7 percent of young men say they trust community organizations.

Figure 2.4. Distribution of Youth Volunteers by Region



Source: World Bank 2012e.

Note: Figure refers to all urban youth. No data is available for rural youth.

Levels of youth volunteering in Tunisia are very low, however, with less than 1.5 percent of all urban youth giving time to CSOs, pointing to the need to develop more effective public policy to support youth participation in civil society, particularly in volunteering. Volunteering among young urban men (2.12 percent) is almost twice as common as among young urban women (0.89 percent) (see annex 2, figure A2.5). Almost three-quarters of all urban youth volunteers live in the coastal region (figure 2.4). By comparison, only a marginal 13.2 percent of youth volunteers live in Tunisia's interior, followed by 14.2 percent of youth volunteers who live in the southern regions. The low overall level of volunteering and its regional disparities highlight the scope and need to support youth volunteerism in Tunisia, particularly in the interior and southern regions.

Although youth participation in civil society is still limited—particularly if participation is youth led—it should be viewed as a promising area for youth to engage in active citizenship in view of the positive perception associated with volunteering. Youth participation in civil

society, and particularly in volunteering, could be supported as an avenue to promote greater social inclusion, especially at the local level and among disadvantaged youth, who are currently the least engaged. Volunteering should include the less educated; NEETs, including young women; and youth in marginalized regions and in peri-urban areas. Box 2.3 describes a World Bank-supported project that provides incentives for disadvantaged youth to volunteer in their communities while offering opportunities to obtain job-related skills.

Generally, young people say they have limited control over the course of their own lives, including decisions regarding education and work. This may be a reflection of their lack of engagement in civic society or in political affairs. Fewer young women than men report that they have influence on important life decisions. This difference is much more pronounced with respect to work and marriage than with education (see figure 2.5).

Young Tunisians do not feel that their voice is heard at the local level. When asked about whether the mayor or governor listens to local concerns, a mere one in eight young rural Tunisia said that politicians listen. Only 11.5 percent of young men and 12.4 percent of young women in rural Tunisia say they feel that local politicians are listening (see figure 2.6). Perceived youth influence on local development is more than three times higher in urban areas, where 38 percent of young men and 38.9 percent of young women said that local concerns matter to the mayor or governor. These regional disparities underscore the intensity of youth exclusion, especially in rural Tunisia.

Young Tunisians believe that they cannot easily influence the political process or the postrevolution transition. Lacking channels to engage constructively with the political process, young Tunisians take their understandable frustrations to the streets in the protests that characterize postrevolutionary Tunis. The café remains the main venue to discuss politics. According to a recent youth survey, 72 percent of those interviewed said they discussed politics mostly in cafés, but politics is also an important topic of family conversation (50 percent) (*Observatoire National de la Jeunesse-Social Science Forum* 2013).

Box 2.3. The IDMEJ Project: Investing in Youth Inclusion in Lagging Regions

Project Design: Following the Tunisian Revolution, the Government of Tunisia launched the IDMEJ youth project to strengthen youth inclusion, with the support of a grant by the World Bank’s Japanese Social Development Fund. IDMEJ means “inclusion and cooperation” in Arabic. The project provides a scalable alternative to existing public works programs. It promotes youth-led community development and participation while providing participants with small stipends.

The project provides emergency income support and short-term employment to 3,000 youth with a secondary education or less—mostly youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs)—in the disadvantaged governorates of Kasserine and Siliana in the central-western region of Tunisia. Implemented by the National Youth Observatory, the project combines skills training with community volunteering, apprenticeships, and self-employment opportunities. The project is relatively cost effective with a per capita beneficiary cost of less than US\$1,000, which could be further reduced through scaling up.

Results: As part of the project, youth aged 15–29 receive training in life skills, including financial literacy. Beneficiaries volunteer for up to five months in community projects managed by local civil society organizations. Initial project results show that over 85 percent find the training useful. New technical and social competencies were acquired by 76 percent and 80 percent of respondents, respectively. These positive results are in line with an assessment of more than 200 international civil service programs, which exhibited an increase in work skills, career options and education, as well as higher self-esteem and sense of civic responsibility (McBride, Sherraden, and Benítez 2003). IDMEJ has indeed led to improved relations between local youth nongovernmental organizations and local governments. Additional funds have already been mobilized by local governments in the Siliana and Kasserine Governorates to replicate and scale up this component based on its success on the ground. Overall, the project benefits youth by helping to break the cycle of inactivity, supporting young women, and promoting social inclusion and trust.

Management and Monitoring and Evaluation: The project is supported by an innovative cost-effective approach to monitoring and evaluation, using an online platform that allows real-time data entry and analysis that is accessible by multiple stakeholders. The project collects direct beneficiary feedback about the quality of services and their impact on employability via mobile phones.

Source: Observatoire National de la Jeunesse-Social Science Forum 2013 and World Bank 2014.

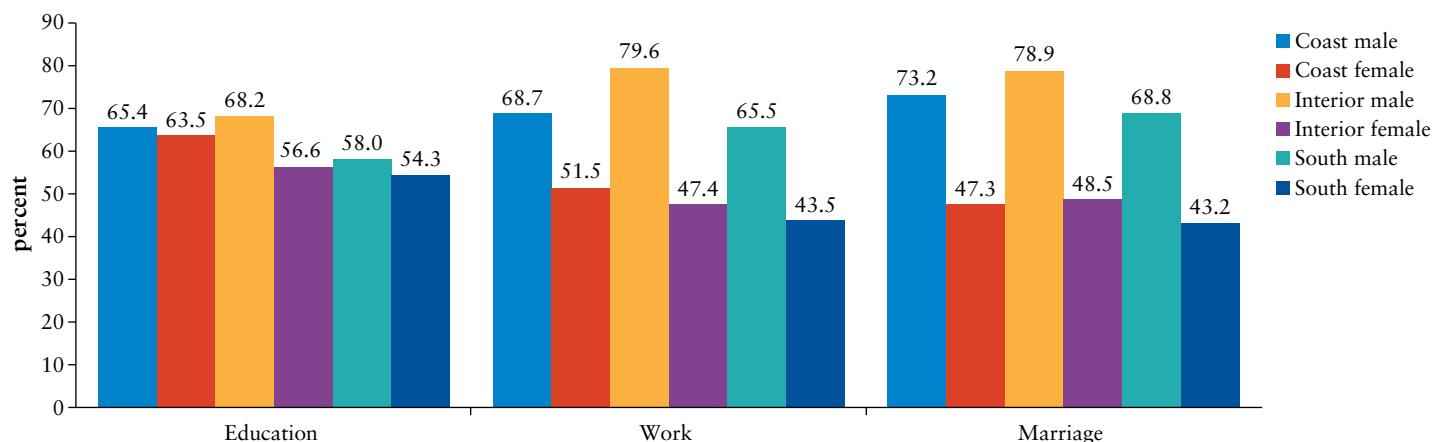
2.4 Political Participation

Political participation is a key pillar of active citizenship. Participation entails taking part in mainstream politics, including voting, joining a party or pressure group, campaigning, or standing for election. Participation encompasses more than elections; it involves participating in the public discourse through organized channels, petitions, and other forms of expression. Nevertheless, participation in elections in postrevolutionary Tunisia is an important indicator of public trust in political institutions

and an exercise of active citizenship by young people, especially given their central role in the revolution.

The low participation rate by youth in the Tunisian national elections of October 2011 was especially worrisome. Only one-half of under-30-year-olds voted. Participation in urban areas was slightly higher than in rural areas (see annex 2, figure A2.6). The voting rate of young women and men are very similar. Only 17 percent of youth aged 18 to 25 registered to vote, according to a survey by the British Council and the American University of Cairo’s Gerhart Center (Parker 2013).

Figure 2.5. Influences on Youth’s Life, Education, and Work Decisions



Source: World Bank 2012d; 2012e.

Note: Figure refers to all youth. Survey questions: “Does your family have a strong role in decisions about: (1) your education; (2) where and what you work; (3) who you will marry?”

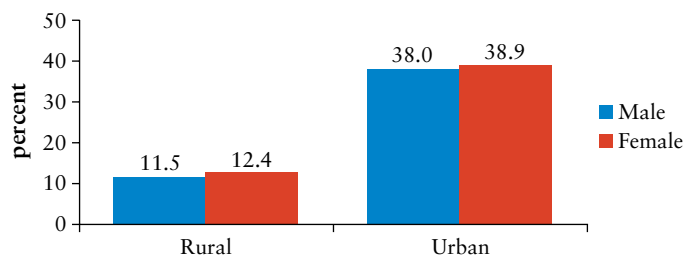
Low levels of political participation by youth reflect the limited space that young people perceive for themselves within established parties. During focus group discussions, young people repeatedly said that the revolution was initiated by the young but co-opted by the “old” and established politicians. Persistent unemployment, worsening social justice, and the continuing patronage and regionalism of the old order have dampened the optimism ignited by the revolution. With scant tangible gains since the revolution, the level of disillusionment for many has intensified to a sense of betrayal. Relatively low participation in the elections was a clear indication

youth of disillusionment and lack of faith in formal political parties, as illustrated in the quote below:

A youth revolution has produced an assembly with very old people. Young Tunisian activist (Parker 2013)

Young Tunisians are extremely underrepresented in the Constitutional Assembly. Only 4 percent of the 216 members of the Constitutional Assembly are aged 30 or younger. While 17 percent of the members are between 30 and 40 years old, the remaining 79 percent of members are more than 40 years old. All parties registering in the 2011 elections had to include youth candidates on their slates. The fact that so few were actually elected proved to young people that the system privileged older people in spite of the law. The revolution represented an explosion of disaffection—especially among the youth—and a rupture with earlier forms of activism. Dissent was amplified through direct horizontal communications, a loose network without clear leadership and operations without hierarchy or organizational structure. However, many youth were quickly disillusioned with the functioning of electoral politics. The lack of openness among established parties and the striking of deals behind closed doors ran contrary to the principles of fairness

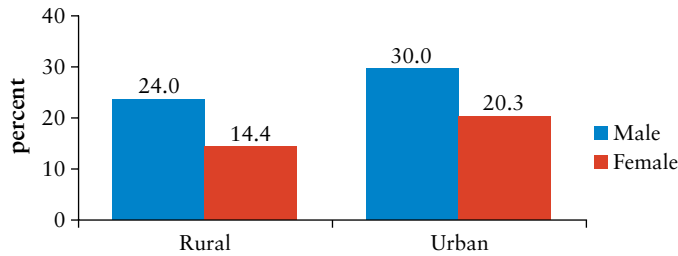
Figure 2.6. Youth Influence on Local Development



Source: World Bank 2012d; 2012e.

Note: Figure refers to all youth.

Figure 2.7. Politically Knowledgeable Youth—Rural Versus Urban



Source: World Bank 2012d; 2012e.
Note: Figure refers to all youth.

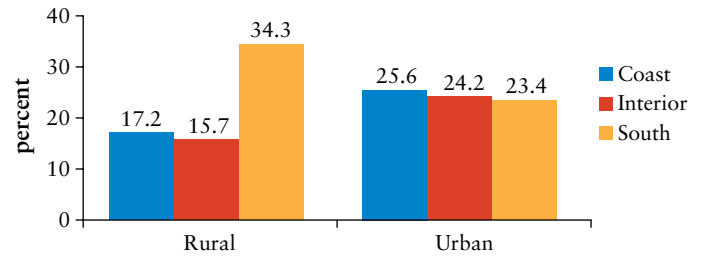
and transparency, excluding the very generation that had brought about political change. A young female activist observed:

I have many friends who joined political parties after the revolution, but just after the elections, they withdrew because they were disappointed in the strategies of these parties, as there was no collaboration between the youth and the elders in the party. Female political activist, Tunis (Parker 2013)

A youth provision in the new electoral law, which incentivizes political parties to nominate young candidates, provides an important entry point for political participation.⁴ Specifically, Article 25 of the electoral law requires every candidate list to nominate among its top four candidates at least one candidate less than 35 years old. Importantly, the youth article affects national, regional, and local elections because it applies to all electoral lists for constituencies with four or more seats. However, the youth provision is not a requirement but instead formulated as a financial incentive. Any electoral list not meeting the youth requirement has half of its public funding withheld.

Most young Tunisians say that they do not follow domestic politics. In rural Tunisia, less than one-quarter of all males (24.0 percent) and less than one out of seven young women state that they are knowledgeable about Tunisian politics (see figure 2.7). Knowledge about politics is somewhat greater in urban areas, where some 30 percent of young men and 20.3 percent of young women

Figure 2.8. Politically Knowledgeable Youth—Rural Versus Urban



Source: World Bank 2012d; 2012e.
Note: Figure refers to all youth.

say they were current on politics. The relatively small portion of young people who consider themselves knowledgeable about politics—even in such politicized times—highlights the difficulty of following the tortuous daily developments in the political processes and accessing independent political information. Qualitative research also suggests that young people without much political understanding may be vulnerable to manipulation.

Yes, I voted, and noticed two things after the elections: people have their religious beliefs, and they don't really understand politics. Those who voted for Ennahda made a connection between the party and their religion. People who were sincere believers, but not politicized, believed it was the right thing to vote for the triumph of Islam. Male student, Mahdia, East Central Tunisia

Self-reported knowledge about politics is about one-third lower in rural areas compared with urban centers. Young Tunisians from rural areas in the coastal provinces (17.2 percent) and the interior (15.7 percent) have relatively limited knowledge about politics (see figure 2.8). Their counterparts in urban areas report being better informed (25.6 percent in the coastal region and 24.2 percent in the interior region). The exception seems to be young Tunisians in the rural south who report the highest knowledge of politics, where more than one out of three youths considers themselves well informed.

Very few young Tunisians are active in political parties, reflecting the large disconnect between the younger generation and the political establishment. As few as 1.6

Box 2.4. Houkoumetna: The “Our Government” Movement

The movement known as Youth Decides is calling for youth to play a full role in national politics. The use of social media is central to its efforts. In December 2013, Tarec Cheniti, a human rights activist, nominated himself as prime minister by posting his resume on Facebook. Other young Tunisians soon followed suit, including Bassem Bouguerra, the president of Reform, an organization seeking to reform Tunisia’s police force. Bouguerra nominated himself as deputy minister for security reform. Soon, multiple “Youth Decides” subpages emerged on Facebook, with young Tunisians posting their resumes online and volunteering to be part of the government.

The movement is a clear expression of the youth’s frustration at their lack of voice in the new political configuration. All of the prime ministers since the revolution were older than aged 50—one was 92-years-old. Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of the ruling Ennahdha party, is 72 years old, and Beji Caid Essebsi, the head of the opposition Nidaa Tounes party, is 87 years old. Tunisian youth view the current political struggles as merely a resurgence of stale political ideologies and rivalries aligned with vested interests from the old regime.

As Cheniti explained, “There are thousands of young Tunisian men and women who have gained enough education and experience to be able to run our country. These people deserve to be given a chance to lead the democratic transition because, after all, the revolution is theirs.” According to Bouguerra, “It’s about time that the youth started deciding for themselves, instead of being used by older politicians for political interests.”

Sources: Al Jazeera. 2013a; Poetic Politico 2013; Samti 2013.

percent of those interviewed in the rural survey were actively engaged in politics as members of political parties (see annex 2, figure A2.7). Only 11 percent expressed any intention of joining a political party, while the great majority (82 percent) did not even have a preferred political party (ONJ 2013). Only about half of young rural Tunisians (54 percent) intended to vote in the next election, reflecting participation rates in the previous election (ONJ 2013). These findings are consistent with an opinion poll conducted by the National Youth Observatory in April 2013, which showed that youth participation in political life was very low: youth engagement did not exceed 2.7 percent, while preference for a political party did not exceed 19 percent of interviewees (*Observatoire National de la Jeunesse-Social Science Forum* 2013).

Despite this disconnect between mainstream politics and the realities faced by young Tunisians, elements within the younger generation are pursuing innovations to voice distinctively democratic aspirations to rebuild Tunisian society. Shortly after Tunisia’s National Constituent Assembly (NCA) was elected, I Watch, a youth-led NGO established after the revolution, held a “Model NCA” in which 217 youths from throughout the country proposed

legislation for Tunisia’s future. Suggestions were then brought as recommendations to the elected NCA members. Three of the six youth suggestions were reportedly chosen by the NCA members to be implemented (Parker 2013). In addition, a new youth movement is proposing a group of young Tunisians to participate as volunteer members to the new government (see box 2.4).

In January 2014, after the new constitution was approved, some degree of optimism was restored. After two years of work by the Constitutional Assembly, a draft constitution was completed and put to a vote on January 26, 2014. The assembly adopted the document with a majority of 200 to 12 and 4 abstentions. Drafted during a period of turmoil and sporadic violence, the new Tunisian constitution seems to have successfully brokered political differences—including the role of religion in government—to produce a progressive and widely accepted constitution. The new constitution gives Tunisia a decentralized and open government, recognizing Islam as the state religion while protecting freedom of belief. Equally important, Article 8 enshrines youth inclusion along multiple dimensions as a key principle of nation building:

*Youth is a driving force in the building of the nation. The state shall ensure that youth has the necessary conditions for the development of their capacities, their taking of responsibilities, and the broadening and expansion of their participation in social, economic, cultural, and political development.*⁵

2.5 Promoting Inclusive Youth Participation in Public Life

The new constitution opens the possibility of a new phase in Tunisia's political history, including the potential to increase youth involvement in decision making—a civil society space that youth are keen to fill. The time is opportune to consider interventions to support youth aspirations, to foster their participation at the local and national levels, and to rebuild their trust in policy making institutions as they reach toward the roles they have long been seeking and the path that is at last now open to them. The following policy recommendations are therefore intended to offer concrete avenues for supporting youth engagement from the bottom up, starting at the local level.

Provide Incentives for Youth-Led NGOs and Volunteering

While several international organizations are providing youth NGOs friendly grants, the complexity of their requirements often tends to privilege more educated youth from the urban coastal areas. Such efforts can be complemented by providing competitive grant schemes to develop the capacity of youth NGOs at the local level to service and engage young people in peri-urban, rural, and lagging regions. Grant applications should be simplified to allow greater access from a broader spectrum of youth stakeholders. In addition, there should be clear incentives for establishing partnerships with local public institutions, charities, and foundations to ensure the scale and sustainability of youth-led NGOs activities and community-based volunteering. The grant scheme should also offer capacity building with respect to how to manage associations, ensuring their financial accountability and results measurement.

Scale up of Youth-Led Community Development Initiatives

Youth-led community development initiatives have been successfully piloted in Tunisia. Such activities include small physical improvements of local infrastructure, environmental management, eco-tourism initiatives, income-generation activities tailored to young women and men, and activities aimed at improving local governance. The IDMEJ project is one such example, implemented in the Kasserine and Siliana Governorates by the National Youth Observatory (see box 2.3). These activities, which are mainly aimed at inactive youth with a secondary education or less in exchange for a small monthly stipend, are identified and implemented by youth organizations or local youth groups with the support of local NGOs and governments. Among other positive outcomes, IDMEJ has increased trust between youth, local NGOs, and local administrations, despite the rising tensions in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. International evidence on similar programs showed a greater incidence of post-program civic engagement and employability than the labor-intensive public works programs (Cunningham, Puerta, and Wuermli 2010). More specifically, it could be opportune to reallocate financial resources from labor-intensive public works programs toward scaling up youth-led community development initiatives as a more effective and empowering mechanism.

Build Youth-Led Institutions to Strengthen Voice in Decision Making and Human Rights

Tunisian youth representatives have attempted to establish these institutional channels in the past, but these have yet to be formalized and appropriately supported to ensure their long-term sustainability. For example, in September 2012, youth representatives met with the leadership of the National Constituent Assembly and the former Minister of Human Rights and Transitional Justice to convey a report that included recommendations regarding the creation of a Youth Advisory Council. Prepared by 217 youth from all governorates across the country, the report also included results from five working groups: (1) fight against corruption and administrative reform; (2) martyrs and victims of the revolution; (3) planning, development, and finance; (4) premise and

general principles of the constitution; and (5) structure of the constitution. Although the report and the overall initiative were well received by Tunisian high-level representatives, youth leaders point out that there has been no subsequent follow-up (*Actualités Tunisie* News 2012).

Appropriate institutional channels will need to be created to strengthen youth participation in the development and implementation of national youth policy. In most European countries, for example, young people and their representative bodies are recognized as stakeholders in the implementation of national youth policies, a system referred to as co-management. This means engaging a range of youth and student organizations, as well as national- and local-level youth councils that can serve as channels for the voice of youth on critical public policy issues. In Tunisia, the establishment of such youth representative bodies could facilitate the effectiveness and coordination of youth services and other youth-related programs and their articulation with national policy

makers and/or commune or provincial-level authorities. Such a process could also be supported by the European Youth Forum and/or well-established national youth councils through peer learning and exchanges.

Notes

1. “*La justice s’acharne sur les jeunes révolutionnaires tunisiens,*” *Le Monde*, June 16, 2014, reports that young people who participated in the revolution have been continuously accused of and prosecuted for violence and arson against police stations. Following the hunger strikes and pressure exerted by the families of these protesters, an amnesty law was passed on June 2, 2014, covering the period from December 17, 2010 to February 28, 2011. However, confrontations with police continued to occur well after February 2011.
2. These overall findings are confirmed by British Council 2013.
3. Publinet is a subsidized Internet service in rural areas.
4. The Tunisian National Assembly passed the new Electoral Law on May 1, 2014 (Jasmine Foundation 2014).
5. Constitution of the Tunisian Republic, Final Edition, January 26, 2014 (unofficial translation).