

CHAPTER 2

Youth Participation, Voice, and Active Citizenship



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.

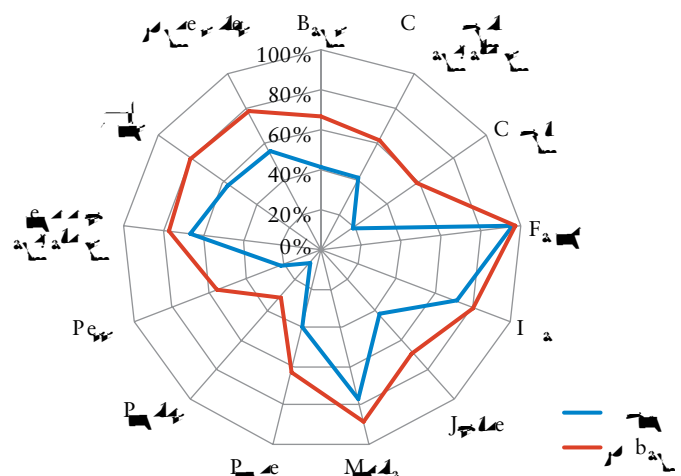
2.1 Trust in Institutions

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

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

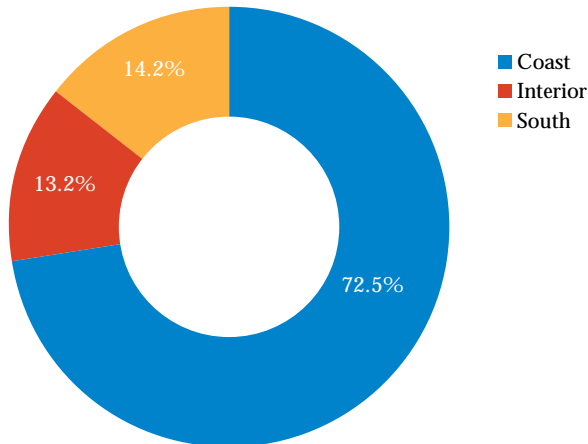
Making the transition from virtual to active citizenship will require new associational skills, which are as important as entrepreneurial skills in building effective agency. Youth can benefit from opportunities to learn how to establish and manage associations, including understanding the legal environment 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 in-

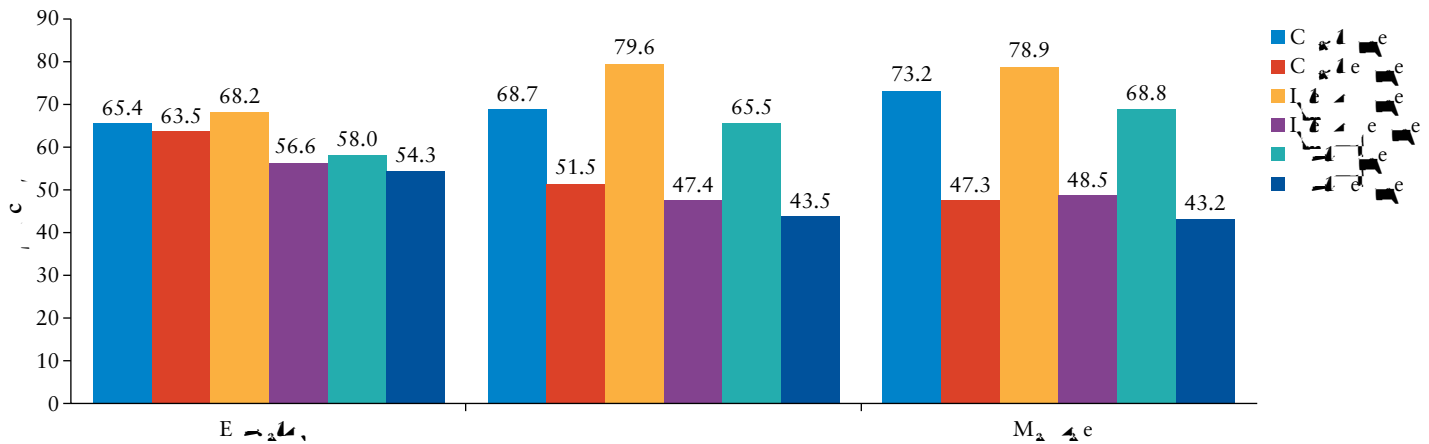
2.4 Political Participation

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

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?”

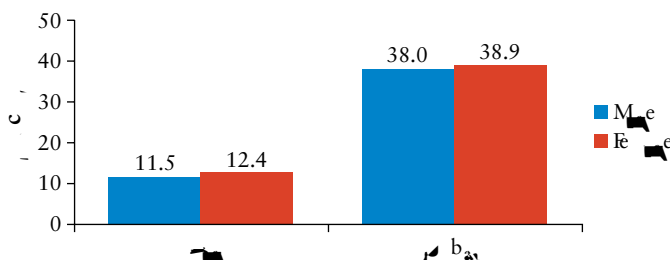
Low levels of political participation by youth reflect the limited space that young people perceive for themselves within established parties. During focus group discussions, young people repeatedly said that the revolution was initiated by the young but co-opted by the “old” and established politicians. 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.

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 po-

*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

Scale up of Youth-Led Community Development (Tw) (T)

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.

