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YOUTH POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS IN TUNISIA:

GIVING THE FLOOR TO MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z POST-2011

Zied Boussem

About the Author

Zied Boussen is Research Fellow at the Arab Reform Initiative. He is a Tunisian activist and researcher on governance, public policies and human rights. His research focuses on institutional and legal reforms in transitional contexts. He holds a master's degree in International Law with a focus on post-conflict state-building and reconstruction from the University of Aix-Marseille, France.

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Coverage Image: Tunisian anti-government protesters shout slogans during a protest against alleged police violence in Tunis, Tunisia, 18 June 2021.
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Executive Summary

This study aims to better understand the views of Tunisian youth on politics and the country's democratic transition, as well as their ambitions and priorities for themselves. In order to understand Tunisian youth today, one must distinguish between two different generations: the generation that led or actively engaged in the revolution (millennials between 26 and 35 years old), and the generation that only became of age after the start of the political transition (Gen Z, "zoomers," between 18 and 26 years old). As such, we believe that these two groups of youth show generational differences in terms of their perceptions and interests in politics.

To understand generational differences among the youth, 12 focus groups were organized by the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) across six different municipalities in Tunisia. For Medjez el Bab, Kasserine and Foussana, ARI partnered with the Humetna Association and collaborated with We Start for Kairouan, Hajeb El Ayoun and Shabikah. Youths from each cohort would gather every time to answer questions about what they remember from the pre-2011 and post-2011 periods, about their values and expectations, as well as their priorities and how they assess the services provided by the State.

Key findings showed that the sense of belonging to a single generation does not apply to everyone. Millennial respondents seem to identify to a generational group separate from Gen Z, whereas the latter recognizes little to no differences. The differences highlighted by millennials concern lifestyle, spoken language, cultural references, and even the relationship with new technologies. Nonetheless, both groups agree that these differences are far more pronounced among their parents and elders, more so in socio-economic and geographic factors, than age or generational differences.

In parallel, the study revealed generational differences with the past. While the two groups share their overall negative assessment of the political situation in the country, Gen Z respondents showed some gaps in their memory of pre-2011 Tunisia and the 2011 events. They also associated the Ben Ali era with more positive aspects than what is present today (calm, security, prosperity). In contrast, millennials had more layered perceptions of the past.

Generational differences in terms of social and employment prospects were also detected in the research. Generally, millennials have a bleaker outlook than Gen Z, which is less inclined to leave the country if the opportunity presents itself.

However, generational differences are less visible vis-à-vis current politics. Both groups see the role of political parties and leaders in a negative light, with the exception of some atypical figures, namely Kais Saied. For most millennials and zoomers, democracy remains vague, without real impact on their daily lives or foundation in Tunisian academic programs. The main values mentioned are respect, ethics, justice, and equality among all citizens.

As for priorities for Tunisia, a major challenge identified by both cohorts is the lack of public awareness of key issues. Gen Z and millennials also noted the following priorities:

1. Institutional reform (establishment of the Constitutional Court, implementation or amendment of the Constitution, revocation of laws, parliamentary changes, governmental changes, etc.);
2. Economic issues (economic reform, promoting entrepreneurship, public and foreign investment, etc.);
3. Fighting against corruption and parallel economy (more control on public markets, fighting petty corruption, control on illegal imports, etc.).

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Meanwhile, all groups agreed on the priority of the health sector, given its dilapidated states and major weaknesses. The assessment of the educational sector was more layered, depending on local context. Transportation was positively appraised, with stark disparities between urban and rural zones.

The study not only highlighted several divergences and convergences between Millennials and Gen Z, but also within the same group. Drawing a rigid line on a purely generational basis seems difficult based on the focus groups. The identified differences are far more complex. They stem from geographical, social, economic, and perhaps more than anything individual factors, given the impact of every citizen's experience on their views and perception of their environment and public space. This is likely from the political socialization methods practiced by respondents. Discussions among family or friends, social networks, and social interactions have clearly been the main source of learning about values and democracy, far more than school and university. Some differences were expected in this regard between millennials (who had finished school before 2011) and Gen Z (who had finished after 2011). However, education programmes related to democracy (civic education, philosophy, languages) seem to have undergone little to no change in their content or impact on students with the beginning of the revolution.

The most obvious point of convergence is the negative perception of the current situation in the country. All interviewed youths were very critical of the political landscape. They also agreed on the weakness of vital public services and ineffectiveness of political institutions.

Nonetheless, the key sticking point was the future. Gen Z had a more optimistic view than millennials had. We tried to analyse, understand, and explain this positive future outlook through the experiences of millennials who believe they are a forsaken generation, unlike zoomers who are still sheltered in school and university classrooms.

Methodology

As for most studies on this issue in the region, we have adopted a loose definition of “youth.” We also considered the generation labels, segregating the two age groups: one group of participants between 18 and 25 years old (Gen Z), and another group of participants between 26 to 35 years old (Gen Y).

These groups were later examined through 12 focus groups in six different municipalities, organized by ARI, in partnership with Humetna for Medjez el Bab, Kasserine, and Foussana, and with We Start for Kairouan, Hajeb El Ayoun, and Shabikah. Every time, youths from each group would gather to answer questions about what they remember from the pre- and post- 2011 periods, about their values and expectations, as well as their priorities and assessment of State services.

Each group comprises 8 to 12 youths from the municipality and its surroundings. The focus groups involved 109 young citizens in total, 57 millennials and 52 zoomers. Meetings would last from 1 hour and forty minutes to 3 hours and 10 minutes. They were documented using a voice recorder. A team member asked the questions, facilitated discussions and interacted with participants, while another transcribed the interviews. At the beginning of each meeting, we asked each participant to fill out a sheet with sociodemographic information: age, gender, employment status, level of education, urban resident or rural area resident, possible disabilities. These sheets were anonymous and coded.

All 12 focus groups were organized based on the same questionnaire which drew on literature reviews and contextual analyses, carried out at the beginning of the project. All groups were asked the same set of questions regardless of location (six municipalities) and age (Gen Y and Z). This allowed us to detect the first traces of convergences and divergences as to the position of young men and women in Tunisia and their perceptions on their social and political environment.

Location	Gen Z			Millennials		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Kairouan	4	4	8	5	5	10
Hajeb El Ayoun	5	5	10	5	5	10
Shabikah	4	4	8	4	4	8
Kasserine	4	4	8	4	5	9
Foussana	5	4	9	8	4	12
Medjez el Bab	5	4	9	4	4	8
Total	27	25	52	30	27	57

In parallel to these focus groups, the research teams conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 young aldermen in the six municipalities and one mayor. The findings from these interviews are presented in a separate document.

Focus Group Findings

Section 1: Do you feel that you belong to different generations?

The first question relates to generational differences, based on the statement that there are notable differences in several aspects between 26 to 35-year-old millennials and 18 to 25-year-old zoomers in today's Tunisia.

Some of the notable differences could be summarized with the following: all respondents agreed that the statement would be more valid when comparing youth (18 to 35 years old) to their parents' generation (45 to 70 years old).

"The previous generation had lived an era of being limited and cornered, unable to speak or even move. They had to think twice about any idea that they had in their heads. This is not the case for us. We were young at the time; but after the revolution, that was the time when one could think, speak, and behave as one likes. You can talk about everything, and often they're issues 30- and 35-year-olds don't talk about in conversation. That is the biggest difference." (Male, 22, Shabikah)

Answers show that millennial participants see more noteworthy differences with younger groups, whereas zoomers see none with their older counterparts. According to Gen Y, these differences center on the language used, clothing, music, or even hobbies.

"We are the in-between generation. We are different from the 18-year olds and the 40-year olds; we grew up under the old regime, which had cultural and social influence on us. The younger generation had a new culture (post-revolution)." (Male, 33, Kasserine)

"There is a difference even in the names: this so-called "generation of the revolution" or "internet generation". There are cultural, social, and economic differences. The youngest, less than 20 years old, are the media generation. They are on Facebook, Messenger,

Instagram. They rely on the Internet. They are neither socially active, nor engaged in their studies. Their way of expressing themselves, of acting, happens through social networks." (Female, 35, Kasserine)

"There are differences in clothing [fashion], in the way we speak. The music to which we listen, the hairstyles, even the ideas are not the same. Youths still feel that they can do it all. I'm stricter. I have to think about the future, and it's not the same for a youngster. They curse a lot. Every generation is different from its predecessor. We can get along, but we will not see eye to eye." (Homme, 26, Medjez El Bab)

Among the participants who do not perceive any noteworthy differences, the following statement was made:

"I don't feel any difference with older or younger generations. The foundation is always the family. In my family, we think alike, age doesn't matter. That's at home and outside, at the municipality, civil society; I don't feel any different. Sometimes, I feel younger than 20-year olds." (Women, 29, Foussana).

However, this question systematically opened a debate. In each group, at least one person raised notable differences. Generally, millennial participants perceive differences in clothing habits (the most recurrent answer) of zoomers. Another hot topic is the relationship to technology, more particularly the use of smartphones and social networks. Millennials have belonged to, or only known an era without these technological extensions that shaped their lives before they were plunged into "internet reflexes." According to them, zoomers were born and raised with the internet. They have never experienced the world differently. They have better adapted to digital developments than their elders.

"Every generation has its own characteristics. The biggest difference here is technology. In our era, if you wanted to have fun, you would play football in the street outside. But today's generation has the internet, they have games. It's been two years since I last saw someone playing football in the neighbourhood, outside of the month of Ramadan, hence the differences in ideas, goals, everything. Before, we had hope that once we finished our studies, we would find work, etc. Now, in schools, they have this idea that school will get them nowhere and they are looking for other solutions." (Male, 26, Kasserine).

Lastly, some striking answers raised the thought that lifestyle differences are not necessarily related to age (resulting from a possible generational clash), but rather, they are the product of social (internal versus coastal areas, rural versus urban

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areas, working-class versus upper-class neighbourhoods, etc.) and economic parameters (household income, civil status, unemployment, the area's economic dynamic, etc.).

“I can be different from my own generation. At Gbolat [known conservative village near Medjez el Bab], they have a super different mind-set from ours, it's a matter of environment.” (Female, 18, Medjez El Bab)

“The age difference does not necessarily show based on age, we could be of the same age and have different opinions. Sometimes you can learn a lot from the young, even more so than the old.” (Female, 22, Hajeb El Ayoun)

“Even us, we are not the same, although we are from the same generation. A girl living in Sousse or Sfax is far more different from me than a teenager from here.” (Female, 27, Medjez El Bab)

Section 2: Views on Politics in the Last 10 Years – Process, Institutions, and Stakeholders

The focus groups enabled participants to express their views on the recent history of Tunisia. A first question asked about their general perception of the old regime, followed by a question on their more, or less positive or negative view of each event from 14 January 2011 to the last presidential and legislative elections in 2019, and the constitutional process, the election of former President Beji Caid Essebsi in 2014, and the first democratic municipal election in 2018.

Evidently, asking for an overall assessment of a historical event, even a recent one, is a challenge at all levels. What exactly do we want to assess? Here, it is a matter of examining how participants perceive the importance of this event or dynamic with regards to the transition of the country. Their feedback also allows us to gauge to what extent participants know about political life and to what extent they pay attention to changes and institutional developments.

Through this section, we were able to review the perception of youth towards public and political life in Tunisia. The questions aimed to assess and discuss the state of the political scene, the level of trust in the institutions in place, and the vision for the role played by different stakeholders

(political parties, associations, unions, media).

Regardless of age, both cohorts have negative views of the public and politic scene. Political players are seen as responsible for the collapse of the country and its institutions. Political parties and leaders particularly, are viewed as the main culprit. Stances of other stakeholders such as associations, media, or unions seem more nuanced. It is to be noted that a significant number of Gen Z participants has refrained from responding to questions on unions due to their lack of knowledge about union action, union freedoms and rights, and the role and activities of professional associations.

Sub-section 1: Perceptions of Pre-2011 Period

Through our interviews, we found a striking first observation about collective memory. For Gen Z particularly, numerous answers given across the six municipalities showed an obvious lack of knowledge of the pre-2011 era. Many respondents do not have a concrete idea of the dictatorship because they were too young to remember. The rare conceptualizations stem from stories told by their parents and other adults in their environments.

“Yes, we were young under Ben Ali. We didn't understand. We were safe, we didn't hear horrible stories on TV. Now, families cannot even gather around the TV. Even though there were bad things happening, they were not seen in my opinion.” (Female 21, Shabikah)

“I didn't really live much under the Old Regime, but I love it. 10 dinars was enough to live; the family unit was solid. You want to talk? Play the big guy? you'll be punished. Ben Ali had compassion for the poor. There was corruption, but as a person, he gave us prestige.” (Male, 19, Medjez el Bab)

This collective oblivion reveals a real “memory gap” that takes shape in the discussions among millennial participants mainly. Several respondents from this group think of the pre-revolution period as an era of calm, security, and prosperity that was subverted by the Revolution. Many admit that this discourse stems from what is relayed by their elders (parents or relatives), more so than from their own experience. The idea of a bygone time of peace is based primarily on comparing the current permanently troubled Tunisian landscape (political crises, social movements, scandals, etc.) with the pre-2011 era. However, the same group recognizes that human rights violations were committed, along with a heavy crackdown on civil action, and the lack of democracy. Nevertheless, they still prefer the previous era to today's turmoil.

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“The situation was better. We lived in safety and security. Poor people could provide for themselves. Education and healthcare are the same since the Bourguiba regime. What was negative in this regime was the absence of freedom across the board, including freedom for the press, media, personal choice, and the freedom to vote...” (Male, 33, Kasserine)

Only one Gen Z participant pointed out the numerous violations perpetrated under Ben Ali – first through personal stories, then via public hearings in the Truth and Dignity Commission as one of the final steps of the transitional justice process.

“It’s an *istebédi* (dictatorial) regime. Everyone knows it. They didn’t know the pain of pretending [reacting to other participants who were missing the regime]; everyone knows. Medjez is not like the capital. My sister wore the *niqab*. Police officers snatched it from her face on the street in the down town. In Medjez, we knew nothing. We knew nothing, the news told us nothing. But, when you’re there, when you see it in your own eyes, you’ll see that it’s a dictatorial regime. They said “eat, drink, sleep.” We’re a people who wants just that; we don’t want to be citizens. You couldn’t talk, you couldn’t speak. You criticize, you get arrested. They even showed it on TV, people recounting how the police beat them and sentenced them to death. We didn’t know, because there was no freedom of the press. They didn’t tell us what was happening. Now, we see our real situation.” (Female, 18, Medjez el Bab)

Sub-section 2: Perception of the Transitional Period (2011-2021)

The Revolution (17 December 2010 – 14 January 2011) seems like a distant, sometimes even blurred, event in the memory of focus group participants. It was easier for millennial participants to place themselves when the events happened. Many of them stated having participated in the protests. Most Gen Z respondents had been children or young adolescents. In the majority of cases, they stayed at home and were kept away from news about the turmoil.

When answering how they regarded the various elections organized in Tunisia since 2011, a significant group of participants had negative views on these steps, although they were fundamental to instil democracy. The outcomes of every election was called into question: candidates elected to the presidency or Parliament were seen as incompetent and/or ineffective. Participants pointed out few changes or tangible results in the economy, development, lifestyle, etc.

The whole electoral logic in connection to democracy was relative.

“Yes, it’s good to have elections and choose. But for me, the ones who were elected added nothing to the table. They are selfish. It added nothing.” (Female, 26, Hajeb)

“Democratic processes are good. It’s good to have a debate, our first debate. Democracy is exciting. But the elections, in themselves... Kais Saied, yes, all the young people voted for him, only because he was the lesser of evils. Between the elections and the seats (assuming the position), people change. I expect nothing from him because he is like everybody else.” (Female, 22, Shabikah).

“So far, elections did not lead to good outcomes. No change. We’ve had nothing to gain from the elections or from the winners.” (Female, 24, Kasserine).

These themes were thoroughly discussed and debated by the two cohorts (millennials and zoomers). A trend was detected among some (around a third of participants) believing that democracy – including elections – are a necessary evil given the dictatorial past of the country. The other group also factors in the impact of various political, economic, and social crises incurred by the country since the revolution. In this case, it was not a generational trend. Rather, the groups were aligned based on the socio-professional status. For example, the unemployed, employed, and civil servants had a more negative view of the situation compared to university and high school students.

“A destructive political moment was when the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia became the ‘Assembly of the Representatives of the People’. Both are deplorable. They added nothing. To the contrary; it is embarrassing in front of other countries. They made us regret the people we elected. They don’t represent us. They only represent themselves, their ways, their principles, and their respect (ironic).” (Female, 22, Shabikah).

“The electoral experience was an excellent idea; we became human beings with the right to vote. Ministers however, are not elected by the people. Most of the violations committed currently are perpetrated by ministers.” (Male, 33, Kasserine)

To complement this inference, it is important to point out that the most recent presidential elections (2019) seem to draw special interest through President Kais Saied, whose name was intuitively mentioned in each group. He is seen as different from the other political figures and seems to give hope for ethical rehabilitation. It is discernible in both millennials and Gen Z, despite equally negative criticism targeting him, or more accurately, his mandate and history so far.

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“It’s the lesser evil. If it was a different state, there could have been a lot of problems, given the absence of a Constitutional Court following the death of the previous president. But it went well. The debate went well.” (Male, 24, Shabikah)

“He is not capable of becoming the president of the republic. He can be the mayor of the municipal council, an Arabic professor, a college teacher, a judge, but not the president. A parliamentary system is already ill-suited for Arab states. A presidential, almost dictatorial, system is more effective. Freedom and Tunisians don’t go together. Parliament is plagued with corruption. For instance: [name] is a thief who gives customs promotions instead of cracking down on contraband on merchandise. With all due respect, one must have a certain level of academic and university education to deserve a position in Parliament. Representatives are entrusted with defending citizens and protecting their rights. When someone is not educated, how could they voice the people’s demands?” (Male, 33 Kasserine).

Finally, the Kasserine and Foussana focus groups insisted on the harmful public climate in their region, namely resulting from multiple terrorist attacks in Mount Chambi and Mount Samama, as well as serious tensions among political parties (the Foussana municipal council was dissolved but the same president was re-elected, interferences in Kasserine between the municipal council and the governor, etc.).

Sub-section 3: General Perception of Public Life

In general, we detected a feeling of disappointment in Tunisian institutions currently in place. There is a lack of trust in political actors and their capacity to effectively satisfy key challenges. This shared observation between millennials and zoomers also extends to the exception. Local authorities seem closer to the real daily issues. Municipalities elected in 2018 are perceived as more effective or shown more leniency by most respondents, except the two groups in Foussana, where the council was dissolved in 2019, and then re-elected in the same year as a result of important discords that paralyze it to this day.

A large group of respondents — namely among Gen Z — said that they had no idea about the political landscape and had no desire to learn more about or analyze existing political dynamics. Millennials on the other hand, showed more willingness to take an interest in political issues.

“I see it from afar, so I cannot judge. I would say negative, because from afar, it seems terrible. But, if I were in it, I

would have an interest in engaging.” (Male, 22, Shabikah)

“Politics in Tunisia are not about planning, but about interests. Politics in Tunisia are like Facebook Live. You stream live on Facebook, you succeed. It’s only words. They talk and talk, but do nothing. Ennahdha’s money – if they invested in the country – would solve poverty issues.” (Male, 27, Shabikah)

“Based on what we see in the media, politics in Tunisia are catastrophic: 217 parties, close parties, if we had one party with 90 seats, it would be better. What is democracy going to give us? Democracy in Tunisia will only bring back Abir¹ and Seif.² It’s just electoral bullshit. The only good thing is that the president is elected by 3 million people; you would say he’ll be good and all, but ministries are frozen because he’s blocking everything. The old guy doesn’t care about the state. They just pull stunts to win votes.” (Male, 36, Medjez)

Among the interested respondents, both millennials and zoomers had a unanimous negative view of Tunisian politics across the six municipalities. National political figures are perceived as generally corrupt or ineffective. This view is slightly improved when it comes to local politicians (parties and candidates), who were deemed to be more in tune with citizens and their problems.

“Utterly bad; no one knows where we’re going. Politicians have no respect, not for their political rivals with diverging views, not for citizens whom they should consult, and not for anyone to whom they are accountable. The situation is only getting worse.” (Female, 18, Hajeb El Ayoun)

“Politics in Tunisia serve personal interests, [especially] when it come to the party in power, Ennahdha (and here, if someone grows a beard or wears the veil, it doesn’t mean they are affiliated to Ennahdha, I am not). If we talk about a party that mobilized against Ben Ali, what did they do when they acceded to power? Their only problem apparently was Ben Ali. All Ennahdha partisans in Kasserine work. I know a young Nahdhawi graduate who directly found employment. They only act to serve

1 Abir Moussi, is the president of the Free Destourian Party (PDL), openly advocating for the return of the old regime. She is one of former President Ben Ali’s counsellors. She is also the head of the PDL parliamentary block in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People since 2019.

2 Seif Eddine Makhoulouf is a lawyer, known since 2011 for defending almost exclusively people charged with crimes of terrorism, glorifying terrorism, and funding terrorism. He is also the head of the parliamentary bloc of Al Karama movement which he leads. It is an Islamist movement considered by many observers as the radicalized version of Ennahdha.

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their own interests and are full of resentment. They try to maximize their profits from their power, because deep down, they know that someday they will meet the same fate as Ben Ali.” (Male, 33, Kasserine)

Based on the biases laid out in the methodology of this report, the focus group composition, including in regards to organizational or political involvement, greatly influenced how public life was perceived and assessed. For instance, in Hajeb El Ayoun, half of the participants in the Gen Z focus group were affiliated to one and the same organization, thus reflecting this bias. This group, for example, had almost a unanimous positive view towards the role of organizations and associations. Similarly, since the partner associations organized the focus groups and invited the partners, this influenced answers regarding the role of associations, and civil society in general.

The other example mentioned below is Foussana where the two groups included many union activists (four out of 12 participants for the millennial focus group and 3 out of 8 from the Gen Z focus group). As such, the group leaned to an almost unanimous positive view of the role of unions. Participants who negatively perceive the role of unions or who do not have a clear-cut position have possibly copied the group just to go with the flow, rather than the position stemming from real conviction.

Sub-Section 4: Perception of Political Parties

National political figures and parties are seen to be accountable for the deplorable state of the country at the social, economic, and cultural levels. In each focus group, some participants named some parties or leaders to identify exceptions, but no trend was discernible in the discussions.

“Impossible to change anything. Those who have the seats are preparing their heirs.” (Male, 30, Hajeb El Ayoun)

“It won’t get better, the fights among the representatives. We even have doubts about the head of the State’s capacities to do something.” (Female, 22, Shabikah)

For many participants, the overall negative assessment of political life in Tunisia seems to go hand in hand with the assessment of parties themselves. Respondents have hard-line views on parties, considering them (in their functioning, objectives, and action) incompatible with the interests of the country and the people. The majority of participants admitted to not having voted in 2019 in national elections (in the presidential or legislative elections).

Sub-section 5: Perception of Associations

Participants were more positive when discussing the role of associations. Almost half of each group were satisfied that civil society stakeholders are fulfilling a satisfying role, especially in terms of implementing cultural, environmental, social, and charitable projects.

“Civil society is the cleanest space relatively, where people want to affect change. I have been part of civil society since I was 9. It’s in the culture. There is a difference between donors, a project they want, but they are not demanding, they’re also entitled to follow the money.” (Male, 25, Kairouan)

We notice here the aforementioned methodological bias reflected by the fact that the groups mainly comprised activists, members, or volunteers in civil society organizations. Gen Z participants also often expressed that they have free time during school and university breaks, hence more time flexibility that allows them to easily join organizational activities and volunteer efforts.

However, questions and doubts were often stated regarding organization dynamics (funding, affiliation to political parties, etc.).

“Organizations could be classified based on their political affiliation. They are currently aligned to more parties in Tunisia. They are affiliated to international organizations, namely in terms of funding. Some organizations want to push forward and add something to the table. But funding is an issue. The target, the project, everything hinges on funding. The State does not provide funding. Grants don’t provide funding. There are donors, set programs, [and] individual freedoms. They are focused on these issues. One must speak objectively.” (Female, 28, Kairouan)

“There are around 30 organizations in Foussana, two of which are active, one tonchot bel tabaa (Tunisian expression meaning that action is limited to stamping documents without any real activity). They don’t read the content. They just put their stamp. Then, at the end, you have 8 signatures but without any real support behind them. They are not active for financial or personal reasons. You’d have to have photo evidence of your actions to show that you’re indeed doing what you say you’re doing with the money.” (Female, 36, Foussana)

Sub-section 6: Perception of Trade Unions

The role of trade unions is more divisive, even though many participants in each focus group refrained from answering or engaging in discussions. Since many millennial and zoomer focus groups in Foussana, for example, included unionists, the general perception floated the strategic role of unions in ensuring social peace and protecting the rights of the workers and the underprivileged against national lobbies and interests (often expressed at the regional level).

“Unions are the best players to show us how to shape the world, how to see what’s happening around us. That’s the upside of unions. The downside is the divisions between unions and the animosity among different groups, sometimes within the same union.” (Male, 22, Hajeb El Ayoun, not a member of a union).

“Great history. Leading role in several areas. Lately however, unions should have defended the people, but they are not doing so. They are entranced by political interest. They’ve been politicized. A new generation of unionists is needed to change it all.” (Male, 27, Shabikah)

Nonetheless, especially among Gen Z, some interventions have pointed to the lack of knowledge about the concept of unions, their objectives, and the importance of such an actor in public life.

Other groups where unionists had little to no involvement, expressed a more negative opinion: unions, namely the Tunisian General Labour Union, are held accountable for much of the dilapidated state of Tunisian administrations and universities.

“The Tunisian General Labour Union has destroyed Tunisia. Workers are recruited based on a recommendation system, which fosters pulling strings for the recruitment of family members and employees through their network of relations. This includes two types of relations: direct relations i.e. people who were recruited by people working in the structure, or indirectly through a chain of relations. Also, a mutual acquaintance between the job seeker and employer, without consideration to professional competencies or qualifications. For instance: my father worked at the Tunisian General Labour Union. He recruited my uncle although he had no proper education. He recruited me as well. I worked in the structure, then quit my job after my father left the Tunisian General Labour Union. They only serve their personal interests.” (Male, 33, Kasserine)

Sub-section 7: Perception of Media

The different focus groups had an overall negative perception of the media. National media (televisions and radios) were considered complicit in the country’s political failures, and were generally deemed as part of the problem, contributing to corruption, clientelism, political manipulation, etc.

“Media outlets broadcast a lot of truths. They’ve highlighted many stories, people, and behaviours. People whom we thought were good, were revealed be bad. For example, I used to think that parliament was some elevated body, but it turned out to be whatever. There wasn’t much coverage about other regions before, and now the media is showing the situation there. The media allows us to express ourselves. We can go on TV and criticize some politician, or talk about a social issue, poverty. That’s good. But in Tunisia, media outlets have their own agendas and regions. For instance, they are not allowed to broadcast what I say if I’m criticizing the owner of the network, some politician who is funding this network, or even his home region.” (Female, 31, Foussana)

“The media is only sharing negative stories about Kasserine. They only talk about mine explosions and criminal activity... but that’s the truth, there isn’t any positive stories to broadcast.” (Male, 33, Kasserine)

Meanwhile, both cohorts shared that they consider social networks to be important sources of information. Even though they noted the risk of disinformation, many participants said that they prefer getting their information from local Facebook groups and pages, exercising so-called citizen journalism, because they are more aligned to their interests and less likely to distort the truth. Similarly, several respondents from both groups commented that since television is a shared item of information, it is often not possible to use it alone to freely choose what one watches.

“There are no media outlets in Kasserine. There are several Facebook pages that share daily posts about Kasserine stories.” (Female, 27, Kasserine)

“However, networks abide by set agendas, a political platform. They bring someone from the right against 3 or 4 centrists or leftists. It’s ideological, but there are alternative media platforms: Facebook, Twitter. The people created them to find another path.” (Male, 27, Shabikah).

Sub-section 8: Perception of Social Movements

Social movements have generated quite intense reactions. The focus groups organized as part of this project took place between January 2021 and April 2021. This period was marked by night protests pitting residents of working-class neighbourhoods against the police around the anniversary of the revolution in January. Night demonstrations were followed by other protests during the day. They mobilized young activists from the capital's middle classes to demand the release of demonstrators from working-class neighbourhoods. Many queer activists joined these latest demonstrations, which, due to certain staging, fall under an unprecedented type of protests in Tunisia (images of police sprayed with paint, young girl putting on makeup while looking at her reflection in a police shield or even a small dog held up in front of the police, etc.). These demonstrations were really touching, arousing many reactions online.

These daytime or night-time demonstrations also raised lively reactions from the focus group participants. We phrased the question to tackle social movements in general. The conversations either veered towards a comparison between social movements fighting for economic and social rights or for employment in which webinar participants took part. On the other hand, movements in the capital, or towards a direct denunciation of the social movements of the capital, those night protests in working-class neighbourhoods for thefts and looting and those daytime protests in the city centre, for their "lack of respect" to the police or for being openly queer-friendly. In both cases, social movements in the capital were perceived as "disrespectful" by a majority of participants from both generations. An interesting inference here is that these movements bringing together people publicly affirming themselves as queer or advocating for the legalization of cannabis were perceived as specific to the capital. Therefore, they are perceived both as disconnected from the "real problems" of the country, such as unemployment or precariousness, which were deemed as real "causes," but also specific to the norms in the capital and the coasts.

In this context, if millennials expressed almost unanimous rejection, this position could be off-set by remembering police brutality under Ben Ali. For Gen Z, the rejection was stronger, clearly rooted in homophobia for example, but it was compensated by some voices which advocated for an individual's freedom to express oneself as one sees fit.

"I've participated in a lot of social movements. I've slept outside and everything. What we've seen recently

is not respectful. Insults. It's not demonstrations. It's nonsense. They don't have any idea about what they want to do." (Male, 22, Shabikah)

"They don't represent us." (Female, 22, Shabikah)

"By God, they want to legalize cannabis? And they go out with poodles and insult cops? There are people who are hungry in this country and they want to legalize cannabis." (Male, 22, Shabikah)

"In the Old Regime, freedom was limited; it was respectful. Let's take an example: the police. Before, the police were respected, right? Now, it's one word against another, we insult police officers, and they can't do anything. Lastly, Tunis residents, and the gays, they went as far as trying to invade the Ministry of the Interior; how do you want their [security forces] reaction to be? Of course they're going to arrest them, right? If the police try to stop you, you're going to ask: 'why didn't they leave me?' It's natural. It's normal that they defend their organization. The concept of freedom, they [the protesters] misunderstand it." (Male, 28, Shabikah)

Sub-section 9: Perception of the Relevance of a New Revolution

To conclude this section, participants were asked whether a "new revolution" would solve all, or part of the problems in the country. The question has often raised intense debate in the beginning about how to define a revolution.

Several participants from both generations believe that 14 January 2011 was not a revolution in the sense that the dictatorial regime and its parameters (corruption, clientelism, regionalism) never disappeared. On the contrary, they dug their claws deeper. Another issue discussed was the impact of a revolution on stability and development.

"A new revolution will not solve our problems. In the last few weeks, we have seen the repercussions of thugs, thieves, and then 34- days later we returned to square 1. Another revolution would destroy the State." (Male, 24, Hajeb El Ayoun)

"We can't really know if the situation will improve. It's very uncertain." (Female, 18, Hajeb El Ayoun)

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“In response to another participant who said we are launching a revolution against something. Now we need a revolution for something. There was a stretch of time between the revolution and now, young people have learned that there are unions in faculties. There, they learned to be active in civil society and in public life. So now, we know the priorities if we want to overturn the table. Young people have learnt to be diplomatic in debate, they know where they want to go. If the table is going to be overturned, it will be thought out. I feel that this is something that has to happen, that will happen, and will be very very very positive.” (Female, 22, Kairouan)

Section 3: Values and Expectations

This section focuses on the debate around the principles and values that millennials and zoomers and the six municipalities believe are, or should be present in the Tunisian public space. Based on these questions, participants go on to examine the public scene – not through its stakeholders, but through the symbols which make it up or which are lacking from it.

Some daily common translations of tangible democracy were identified (debates with family or friends). They particularly take shape on social networks. Both groups in the six municipalities also mentioned the same values (respect, equality, justice, and morality) as necessary for the improvement of the political environment and situation in the country.

Sub-section 10: Exercise of Democracy

When asked if democracy as a concept is practiced daily by participants, the majority answered no. Several participants consider the very notion to be vague. According to them, it does not translate into daily practice.

For others in the groups, without discernible distinction between generations, democracy generally is exercised in political debates with family (around television programs) and friends (in cafés for male respondents or on social networks). Some mentioned elections as a sign of democracy, but quickly added that parties and candidates only turn to

voters at the run-up for each election (every five years), while ignoring them in between.

“We talk about democracy all the time because we have someone in the family who is interested in it.” (Female, 21, Foussana)

“My mother insults the people who elected Kais Saied. We argue all the time at home.” (Female, 18, Medjez el Bab)

“Now it’s better. Freedom of expression is very important to me. There, I feel as if I had eaten couscous with mutton. Once (under the old regime), as part of a professional training, I was beaten up for defending Saddam Hussein. For me, our Arab brothers envy us for this freedom of expression mashallah (A common religious expression used to call upon God to protect from being jixed by the evil eye). When I go to Algeria, I see that they’re far behind us. Yes, our bellies are not as full as we would like, but it’s good that in our heads we are free. As for democracy and the state, the State is absent here. They give us a bit of agriculture, one or two roads, a court, a little hospital, police and that’s all. But the State is totally absent. What pains me is that in the media, they go to Habib Bourguiba Avenue (main street in Tunis) and they speak on behalf of all the people. They are completely different from us! Why don’t Sigma Conseil (a survey firm) come to us? Why do they marginalize us? Our opinions don’t matter to them. Our opinions do not seem to be good enough to be on TV obviously.” (Male, 35, Foussana)

Another interesting observation is that almost all participants from both generations did not learn about the concept through school or university. Some have recognized that the civic education courses, provided throughout primary and secondary education and constituting an integral part of educational programs, were the first contact with the concept of democracy. However, they did not believe it provided a sufficient basis for the understanding and assimilation of its different components.

“The last time I saw that was in high school, through civic education classes that vanished just before the baccalaureate; although it’s very important and that’s when we need it most.” (Female 24, Hajeb El Ayoun)

“90% of this generation lived and studied under the former Ben Ali regime. At that time, politics were prohibited in schools.” (Male, 21, Kasserine)

Sub-section 11: Perception of Values Needed for Public Life

When asked which values should rule public life today, all respondents had the opportunity to cite the main value or values.

Across all groups, the recurrence of the “moralization” of the public space was remarkable. A theme often linked to that of respect to others, as well as to institutions.

Although no one managed to provide an exact definition of moralization, several participants linked the overall negative situation of the country to an absence of morality and ethics, not only among politicians and public figures, but also among all national and local actors. Based on the commentary, young people seem to agree that moralization involves the fight against corruption, the elimination of false political promises, and tolerance of opposing ideas. A sizable part of the group also identified the more rigorous practice of the precepts of Islam as an element of moralization.

However, Gen Z respondents in different municipalities often mentioned the values of justice and equality among all citizens by linking this to a better distribution of wealth, and more balanced access to services and benefits.

“Justice: Starting with the family, girls and boys, old and young people. Justice begins with the nucleus of the family, then extends to society. The police are unjust: if you are a colleague, or have a connection with the police or the army (you are the son of...), they let you in. If you are a layman, they will fine you. Even people who want to use religion for unjust purposes, God knows they are wrong and justice comes before religion; justice is religion.” (Male, 27, Shabikah)

“Love of country. Everyone wants to advance their own interests. Respect, mercy, and compassion – we don’t have that anymore. The Imam spoke about it on Friday. People no longer empathize with each other. Hearts have been hardened. When you see someone in need, you don’t care.” (Male, 22, Shabikah)

Based on these questions, socialization (debates with family or friends, social networks, social interactions) has been clearly identified as the first medium for learning values and democracy, superseding school or university. Differences were expected at this level between millennials – who completed their schooling before 2011 – and Gen Z, who did so after 2011.

However, it seems that democracy-related programs (civic education, philosophy, languages) have seen little to no change in terms of content and impact on students with the onset of the revolution.

Sub-section 12: Democratic Success and Engagement

In this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to identify priorities for democratic transition. A very wide range of priorities was outlined, ranging from institutional reforms (establishment of the Constitutional Court, implementation or amendment of the Constitution, revocation of laws, parliamentary changes, governmental changes, etc.), to economic issues (economic reforms, promoting entrepreneurship, public and foreign investment, etc.). This even included the fight against corruption and the parallel economy (more control on public procurement, fight against petty corruption, control of illegal imports, etc.).

Awareness was also put forward as a priority issue. It was raised in a systematic way and referred to the significant gaps in terms of understanding the current social, economic, and political dynamics. This matter concerns all political stakeholders (leaders and parties), civil actors (associations, unions), the media, but also the population, according to participants.

Lastly, this question allowed participants the opportunity to put forward sometimes extreme solutions, such as definitively dissolving parliament, the entire political class resigning, or banning the majority of current political leaders from addressing the public. It is interesting to examine these answers as they are an indicator of the deep frustrations resulting from the various political or social crises in the country.

These crises are generating an increasingly serious impact, while also becoming less and less solvable by current leaders. The need to let young people take over has often been mentioned without translating into concrete proposals for joint public action.

“The parliamentary system must be dissolved. A boat can only have one captain; the others can form the opposition. The educated and the skilled must return to Tunisia and we must facilitate their return so that they can invest and create start-ups. For example, during COVID, European countries took in our nurses. They take them and we just watch.” (Female, 26, Shabikah)

“The Constitutional Court will improve the revolution. The fight against impunity and reconciliation. The fight

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against impunity before reconciliation. The law on public procurement.” (Female, 28, Kairouan)

Section 4: Expectations from Public Policies and Perception of Services

In this section, four aspects of economic and social life were chosen to fuel debate: employment (through the socio-professional future); health (based on medical and hospital services); education (including an evaluation of school and university careers); and transportation (meeting the daily needs of respondents).

These four themes have been identified as the key focal points in terms of economic and social rights. They are also the most useful for measuring youth perceptions of their context and of services provided, or which are supposed to be provided by the State. This section examines the realities of daily life and both millennials and zoomers’ assessment of the infrastructure in their municipality or region.

Preliminary study results show millennial pessimism in regards to their socio-professional future – a sentiment less pronounced among Gen Z. A general trend to reject the idea of joining the public service and to be tenured in a function that they will occupy for life was common among participants. As such, entrepreneurship and the private sector (self-employed or employee) seem to appeal to more participants from both generations. On the issue of migration, one would have expected unanimous support for leaving the country, but the groups proved to be much more balanced and fostering more intense debates. As for their views of services, participants shared a consensus on the deplorable state of the health sector. The education system received more layered outlooks. All groups in Foussana and Kasserine had negative views on transportation, in complete contrast with the other groups, thus illustrating how isolated the region is from the rest of the country.

Sub-section 13: Socio-Professional Future

The various interventions of millennial and Gen Z participants show consensus on how difficult the labour market is in Tunisia (difficulties in accessing employment, mismatch

between university courses and market demands, low wages in the public and private sectors, etc.). Regarding the socio-professional future, a general trend emerges across the different groups: millennial respondents are more pessimistic or defeatist about their professional future than Gen Z participants. “Sacrificed generation” was mentioned several times elsewhere. This could be perhaps explained by age: respondents from the millennial groups are already on the job market or already hold a professional position, while Gen X respondents are still almost all in college or high school.

“I am very pessimistic. In Tunisia, we are in an undemocratic State. The State has no prestige: In many sectors, something is issued in the Official Gazette without it ever being enforced. As soon as the government changes, everything falls apart. If it were a democratic state, then there would be social justice. Public service lies at the heart of the issue. Agreements are not respected. We are in a state that does not respect its people, particularly its young people.” (Male, 36, Foussana)

“I’m optimistic because I’m still young. I want to have a publinet,³ I want to do theatre. I almost signed a contract, but unfortunately the circumstances didn’t allow it. I shot a film with Nouri Bouzid [well-known Tunisian director] I became a professional, I work with associations. When I finish my baccalaureate, I will study theatre. Even if there is no job, I can be a theatre teacher in an art centre. I’m not going to stop.” (Male, 20, Shabikah)

“I’m optimistic. I’m not going to wait until I’m 20 to think about my future. At 18, I know that society isn’t going to help me, so I’m going to give it my all. I’m a slammer. I am already paid to slam. I network and take all the contacts when I go to a meeting.” (Female, 18, Medjez el Bab)

Unemployment is undoubtedly the most recurrent subject in debates around the socio-professional future. However, a trend is clearly noticeable within each group: the problem of employment is no longer just about finding, or securing a position, but now entails acceptable pay and working conditions. These two elements are the foundation of a decent life which, according to the respondents, is no longer achievable under current conditions in the public sector as well as in the private sector (entrepreneurship, employment in a company, etc.).

³ A private business offering clients paid access to the Internet. Popular across the country, before Wi-Fi access was common in households, publinets still exist in some regions poorly connected to the web.

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“I’m like [another participant]. I’m a physical education teacher, but you can’t just rely on civil service, I want to continue farming. Ohrok, aamel, matebkach berek. (Tunisian phrase meaning roll up your sleeves, get active; don’t just stand there).” (Male, 23, Foussana)
“I want to talk about the situation in general. In the public sector, in 90% or even 95% of the cases, you have to know someone, a connection, even for an exam. When you go to see doctors, engineers, the elite – people who have seen things – they advise you to go away, to leave the country. You won’t ensure decent living; you won’t find anyone who will listen to you. Even someone who studies abroad and comes back to do a project, they will regret it.” (Male, 26, Shabikah)

“Public administration. In the private sector, workers are exploited time wise and money wise.” (Female, 25, Foussana)

Many participants in Foussana, Hajeb El Ayoun or even Medjez el Bab also discussed entrepreneurship presented by the various governments as a solution to the public service saturation, without the State really engaging in these efforts (perpetuation of unclear administrative procedures, corruption, bureaucracy, funding problems, etc.).

“No I am optimistic, there are several opportunities. You just have to believe in it and start with what comes up without expecting anything from anyone. There are those who started selling tomatoes in wheelbarrows and got rich. When I spoke about the 4,000 dinars, it was based on experience. I submitted to many competitions for public service positions to no avail. They suggested I pay to pass.” (Male, 30, Kasserine)

Sub-section 14: Future and Migration

Further to the socio-professional future, the question on emigrating was a very divisive topic for each group. The groups were asked: “If, tomorrow morning, you have a serious opportunity to go work abroad in decent and regulated conditions (for travel and work), would you take the leap?”

We found that the answers to that question varied greatly from group to group.

A majority of millennial respondents veered towards a “yes”, citing the country’s economic and social difficulties. These difficulties included unemployment, financial and administrative barriers, investments, discrimination, corruption, etc.

“There is nothing good in Tunisia; you are not valued.

Those who are worse than you have the power and they put obstacles in your way, etc. I would leave with my eyes closed. I think I will only come back with a project, and I will engage in civil society. I will help people.” (Female, 26, Shabikah)

“I encourage migration. Whoever wants to leave says they can’t live in Tunisia. People want to live with dignity, they want to work, they want money. The question should have been asked differently. Why do you want to leave? Nobody wants to leave Tunisia. I had the opportunity to leave. But because I was hopeful, I did not leave. People want to work, even for not much, they want an income.” (Male, 33, Foussana)

Gen Z respondents seem more divided: half of each group agrees with the previous argument, and the other sees a more certain future in Tunisia. The latter cites the ties (cultural, family, etc.) to the country as a reason for refusing to leave. Each group from both generations had some optimistic exceptions (possibility of building a solid economic, social, and professional future).

“There is work in Tunisia. I work in the cultural field. There are plenty of job offers, but people don’t want to work. People want to know the salary before knowing anything. You have to be patient; people have too high expectations.” (Female, 22, Kairouan)

“I put both, dhre3ek y a 3alef (expression in Tunisian meaning that everyone must fend for themselves to succeed). If you can succeed in Tunisia, then you can succeed abroad. Abroad, you will move to work, to earn a living. The same is possible in Tunisia. Between Tunisia and abroad. With the same situation, I prefer Tunisia. It’s not la vie ne rose abroad. Here at least if it goes wrong, you have a support system.” (Male, 22, Shabikah)

The job market practices, whether in the public service or in private sector employment and entrepreneurship, place millennials before the impossibility or inability to achieve personal fulfilment. Although the questionnaire did not cover this subject, a large part of these same millennial respondents seem to be driven abroad after being disillusioned with the social and economic realities of their immediate environment – a disillusion not necessarily experienced by Gen Z respondents.

Sub-section 15: Youth and Health

Almost all groups from both generations expressed nearly unanimous negative views on health services. They highlighted the remote health structures (particularly hospitals and university hospital centres), the poor

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infrastructure (dilapidation of basic health centres, absence of suitable equipment, etc.), the lack of qualified human resources (doctors, specialists, nurses, skilled workers, etc.), the difficulty of access to care (treatments for chronic illnesses, medicine, etc.), and difficult human relationships (degrading treatment by hospital staff, administrative procedures and bureaucracy, etc.).

“Witness to cases of corruption in healthcare. I have seen hospitals, it’s a disaster. I went to many hospitals everywhere. Doctors don’t have anything to protect themselves. People ask why there are so many deaths, but the government didn’t give anything; they didn’t do anything.” (Female, 22, Kairouan)

“Medication for neurological conditions is gone, babies are dying. It’s the doctors fault, if you give them a bribe it’s ok, but if you don’t give anything they don’t care about you.” (Female, 18, Medjez El Bab)

“We have nothing, we have dentistry, we have two emergency care doctors, we have no maternity ward. We had the Urgent Medical Assistance Service, after a three-day general strike. Since 2016, we have had the assistance but there’s no staff. We had a hospital director who did a study on accidents, on the people who come to us. He said he needed more doctors, more equipment, and they silenced him.” (Female, 29, Hajeb)

Several respondents from both generations and in all municipalities recounted recent examples of critical situations in their families, which required recourse to health services. All of these stories highlighted the critical shortcomings and the few alternatives (travel to greater Tunis or the Sahel for treatment, delivery of medicine from abroad, corruption, etc.) to deal with these situations.

The most striking example is undoubtedly that of the Kasserine region. Respondents of the four focus groups of Kasserine-ville and Foussana denounced the absence of a public hospital forcing resident to travel to receive basic care, and to resort to alternative means (traditional medicine, private doctors, etc.) in order to meet their health needs.

“The health services here haven’t changed. The health protocol is a big joke. We don’t have a hospitality culture; we don’t have receptionists in hospitals. The receptionist is a body Guard. Emergencies take 5 hours to be admitted. They think they can’t afford it, but that’s no excuse. You agree to work in an institution, even if there’s nothing, you have to intervene.” (Male, 35, Foussana)

“There is a woman who had a miscarriage 5 days ago,

and she was in pain. The hospital asked her to buy Perfalgan from an external pharmacy so that they could inject her with the medicine.” (Female, 22, Kasserine)

Sub-section 16: Youth and Education

Through this section, young people from both generations were able to share their views on the education system. Gen Z respondents had a lot to say on the subject, as they are still mostly in high school or university, or have finished their schooling very recently.

Discussions focused on teachers – the cornerstone of the education system. Many also shared personal experiences about teachers who are very attached to their profession, or on the contrary, teachers who are disinterested in the task, stories of verbal and physical violence, or support adapted to specific needs, etc. The education system as a whole is positively perceived, but is drifting towards mediocrity.

“It’s basically a matter of generational conflict. There are educational sciences to train primary school teachers. But as is the case in all fields, there is no connection between theory and practice. Old people refuse pedagogical innovations, while we know new things. [There are] a lot of new educational approaches. [The system] is stuck in a 4th generation approach, while we are in the eighth or ninth. The young people of my generation try to foster educated people. The old wanted to change things but we didn’t let them; we are motivated because that’s what we studied. I argue a lot with the school principals who embody the aforementioned generation. I do everything in theatre to teach the students, yet the principal argues with me every day; he is from the pen and paper generation.” (Female, 22, Kairouan)

“I have a lot of reservations about the education system. It is imported while those abroad have already given up on it. Schooling based on assembly line work, staging the class. It is a mistake. We are in 2021, yet the educational level is in 1960. You have to choose the teachers carefully; some teachers do not keep up with the times. A teacher normally gives a bonus; he doesn’t have to say everything like that. Teachers in Germany and in developed countries encourage children in difficulty, they push them forward. Here the teacher calls you a donkey. It impacts your subconscious. (Male, 31, Kairouan)

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As such, millennials especially believe that the system has fostered informed citizens and constitutes a social lift for many segments of the population. They often cite their own experience or their peers' to draw this conclusion. They have a more negative view of Gen Z potential. However, the perception tends to change when the assessment focuses on the current system which, according to the respondents of the same generation, no longer meets the needs of the labour market, nor even the need to educate the youngest.

“My wife works in the education sector. I remember myself when I was going to school. I used to walk 5km to get to school, and they had one afterwards, where the lessons were split into two levels per class. Well, that brought out some good people. My wife works, but she doesn't get paid. The state doesn't give her anything. Her students are dropped off by their parents on bicycles and motorbikes. The teachers buy them snacks. There is nothing in education that allows students to study and graduate [in order] to work in good fields. Children want to become soldiers because they are nothing. It is a rural area, either you are a farmer or a soldier.” (Male, 36, Medjez)

The education of younger generations was particularly discussed by Gen Z participants, although aged between 18 and 26. They believe that minors/children today are poorly educated (inappropriate remarks, insults, early delinquency, etc.) and associate this to the disintegration of the school structure, among other reasons.

“Students no longer have values and principles. They just want to pass. No respect for the school. Even the flag, they do not salute it seriously. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. We lack clubs to promote awareness. They are not patriots; they lack patriotism as [another participant] said. Students have psychological problems; it has an impact on their personality.” (Female, 19, Shabikah)

“We talk about so-called education, but that's nonsense. In public vocational training, teachers are useless and the programs are useless: boat welder for example. So you look to the private sector, you go to class, you don't, you pass either way. The training is over. The director of my school insulted me, I responded, and no one accepted me in any school anymore. (Male, 19, Medjez El Bab)

Sub-section 17: Youth and Transportation

The last topic discussed in this section is the perception of transport services by focus group participants. Responses varied greatly between municipalities and varied little between the two generations in each location. Indeed, in the municipalities constituting the seats of the governorates (Kasserine, Kairouan) or medium-sized towns (Medjez el Bab), participants mostly expressed ease in transportation and the availability of bus lines, even if the majority of respondents indicated that they preferred private means of transport (taxis, rentals, etc.).

“Kasserine is a small area, getting around is quite easy. Taxis are available and with 500 millimes a seat.” (Male, 29, Kasserine)

“I took the two sheets. Compared to other places, at least the places between them are linked, connected. There is transport but it depends on the schedule.” (Male, 28, Kairouan)

“When I was commuting, I always found a way to get around.” (Male, 22, Hajeb El Ayoun)

The other groups indicated greater difficulties in travelling for professional or domestic reasons due to the weak public and private networks, especially in rural areas (Foussana, Shabikah, Hajeb El Ayoun). Respondents also singled out the failing transportation system between major cities as it does not observe any rules of punctuality or comfort. Those from Kasserine and Foussana cited the railroad linking Tunis to Kasserine, which has not been used for more than fifteen years, to indicate the complicity of the authorities and part of the population (carriers, motorists, rentals, taxis, etc.) in the deterioration of the networks and in the attack on the freedom of movement.

“I come from a rural area and the lack of road infrastructure makes it more difficult to get around. Public transport is expensive. Tariffs are relatively high compared to other governorates. We don't always have the means to do all our shopping by taxi, we have to walk. It's worse during back-to-school or holiday seasons.” (Female, 28, Kasserine)

“Transport services have their pros and cons. Now, there is transportation in rural areas. But to get to the center, it is lacking. We had to take two taxis here. The city has grown. We don't have the right information. Students wait a long time for buses, they miss school if they miss the bus. If someone gets sick in X village and it rains, you

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can't do anything. The train before was like traveling. During the holidays, to return from Tunis, you need connections (intermediaries)." (Male, 30, Hajeb)

"Shabikah is a strategic place. They could establish a bus line between Kairouan and Shabikah, which would pass every two hours. But the car rental companies refuse, because it's close and a lot of people take this trip. Monday, Tuesday, there are people but no rentals. In the afternoon, there are rentals and no passengers – and it is not even worth talking about school buses." (Male, 24, Shabikah)

In all the municipalities, participants finally noted the differences between their regions and the coastal areas,

particularly in terms of ease of travel and freedom of movement with developed urban and interurban bus networks, rural transport benefiting from more numerous permits, tram and train lines, etc. This aspect of regionalism was a recurrent theme in discussions but was particularly pointed out during the talks on transport services.

"My transport success story: to go to Tunis it took me 5 hours. We have three lines: Kairouan, Tunis and Sousse, that's not enough." (Male, 22, Hajeb El Ayoun)

"In rural areas in Tunisia, there is no transportation. On the other hand, in Sousse and Kairouan for example, you get around more easily. It is unfair." (Male, 35, Kasserine)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to always remember the value of documenting the views of Tunisian youth directly, by offering them the floor and the opportunity needed to reflect, without trying to spew theories or handle them as study subjects. Unlike what international romanticism wants to believe, the youth are a very large demographic group characterized by nuanced geographic, social, economic, cultural, and political diversity. The focus groups organized in the framework of this study have poked holes in the notion of millennials versus zoomers. Even though the cohorts have indeed shown some points of convergence, the groups have mostly agreed or disagreed based on socio-economic factors, rather than generational classification. Following several discussions, two main themes have been deduced for the project's next steps. Firstly, fighting the isolation of regions. The youth from both groups in Kasserine primarily, and in Kairouan as well, foster negative sentiments towards the country and the political situation. This discontent draws from the geographic (intra and international transportation), cultural (poor recreational activities), and economic (marginalization and poverty) isolation incurred by the regions.

Millennials and zoomers evidently agree on the priorities of justice, respect, equality, and the challenges of institutional reforms. However, more than anything else, the youth have agreed on the need of older politicians to give them the space that they need to take action and effect change.

About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.



contact@arab-reform.net
Paris - Beirut - Tunis