A stylized map of Tunisia composed of a grid of dots. The dots are mostly grey, but several are colored red, highlighting specific geographical areas within the country's outline.

Coping with Frustration

A Self-Assessment of Tunisian Youth

FES MENA Youth Study: Country Analysis Tunisia

JULIUS DIHSTELHOFF

February 2018

- Tunisians between the ages of 16 and 30 years – represent approximately one third of the entire Tunisian population. Furthermore, they are frequently perceived as the principal drivers of the events of 2010/2011, during which they positioned themselves against hopelessness and inequality in Tunisia and demanded political, social and economic change.
- The following study presents a survey of the self-assessments of Tunisian youths conducted between summer 2016 and the beginning of 2017. This survey arrived at the following conclusions: First: The events of 2010/2011 are viewed negatively by a majority of Tunisian youths as a »stolen revolution«. Second: The youth's dissatisfaction with the results of the revolution manifests itself in 9 different, and to some extent overlapping, areas of perceived frustration.
- The multifaceted frustrations of Tunisian youths could well contribute to a destabilisation and delegitimization of the transformational process currently occurring in the country, as well as deepening the selective exclusion of youths from society. Nonetheless, those questioned evinced sufficiently positive expectations of the future, and sufficient confidence in Tunisia's socio-economic and socio-political prospects and progress, that the negative effects described above could be dampened.
- All in all, Tunisia's youth exists in a state of deep uncertainty. But this uncertainty carries with it a central danger; a pronounced and growing willingness among this section of the population to emigrate. This can only be prevented by reducing their myriad frustrations.



Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. The Survey Sample	4
3. Self-Assessed Disappointment: The Frustration of Tunisian Youth in the Context of Social and Political Transformation	4
3.1 Instability of the Tunisian Political System	4
3.2 Increase in Violence in the Tunisian Transformation Process	4
3.3 Crisis of Employment Security and a Lack of Money	5
3.4 Disturbances in the Relationship Between Citizens and the State	7
3.5 Lack of Access to Participation in Public and Political Life	7
3.6 Social Tensions in Public Space	9
3.7 Disparity in the Importance and Guarantee of Fundamental Constitutional Rights	9
3.8 Limitations in the Possibility for Personal Development	10
3.9 Insecurity in Certain Areas of Life	12
4. Confronting Frustration: Future Expectations of Tunisian Youth	12
4.1 Optimism of Tunisian Youth	12
4.2 Hopes and Fears of Tunisian Youth	14
5. Conclusion	14
References	17

1. Introduction

Tunisia has a total population of around 11.3 million people¹ and its demography is characterised by a strong youth presence. Based on a survey carried out by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) during summer 2016 and early 2017,² this article defines »youth« as the age group between 16 and 30 years of age. Around 30 per cent of all Tunisians fall into this category, with about half of the total population younger than 30.³ Tunisian youth played a key role in what is commonly referred to as the »Arab Spring«, the tumultuous events that played out in the MENA region during 2010/2011. According to the Arab Barometer of 2013,⁴ a third of all those who participated in these events were under 24 years of age – which certainly helps to explain why international research and public opinion surveys frequently depict these as »youth uprisings«,⁵ predominantly driven by young people. Indeed, young people provided the backbone of the mass protests that drove the Arab Spring in Tunisia. These protests first broke out in marginalised rural areas after the self-immolation in December 2010 of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old vegetable merchant, but they soon spread across the country, including to the capital city of Tunis, and finally to the entire MENA region. With their demand for »*shughl, hurriyya, kar-ama wataniyya*« (work, freedom, national dignity), protestors agitated for political and socio-economic change in their everyday lives, in the face of prevalent hopelessness and inequality.

The unrest led to the collapse of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's 23-year dictatorship. The ensuing reconfiguration of Tunisia's internal structure has manifested as a period

of democratic consolidation⁶ and a new, more participatory model of society. This was perhaps most evident in October 2011 with the first free elections to a Constitutional Assembly, as well as an inclusive constitutional process that resulted in the adoption of a new democratic constitution in January 2014. In 2014, this ongoing democratisation process was deepened through parliamentary and presidential elections, which resulted in the formation of a government under Prime Minister Essid (February 2015–August 2016). However, this was later replaced by a »Government of National Unity« under the leadership of Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, which ensued from the Carthage Agreement. This new government has facilitated an expanded power-sharing format between political parties and civil society groups.⁷

But how have young people in Tunisia perceived these events and the transformational processes they unleashed? The results of the data collected indicate that only 13 per cent of the youth surveyed for this study refer to the Arab Spring, while 40 per cent use the term »revolution«. ⁸ Furthermore, the data show that the surveyed youths hold an overwhelmingly negative perception of the outcomes of this revolution: 76 per cent agree with the statement, »The events were started by the youth and then hijacked by others«; 65 per cent assert, »The events did not change anything«; and 66 per cent of young people surveyed express dissatisfaction with the ramifications of the revolution. Moreover, 58 per cent endorse the statement, »The events are continuing«.

Given this, it might be assumed that the optimistic expectations of improved living conditions resulting from the post-2011 changes in Tunisia have not been fully met. Consequently, the diverse and widespread frustration of Tunisian youth can be observed in the context of social and political transformation.

But what are the dimensions of this self-perceived frustration five years after the revolution? And what kind of future are Tunisia's young people fashioning in its shadow?

1. Statistiques Tunisie, Population's estimation, 2017; available at: <http://www.ins.tn/en/indicateur-cle> (accessed 22.6.2017).

2. This survey, consisting of quantitative data collected in summer 2016 and qualitative data collected in early 2017, was part of a regional study covering eight countries in the MENA region. The regional results are published in English as: *Coping with Uncertainty: Youth in the Middle East and North Africa* (Saqi Books, London 2018). The complete regional and country-specific data is available at: <http://www.fes.de/lnk/youth-study>.

3. EUROMED, *Le travail de jeunesse en Tunisie après la Révolution*, 2013; available at: <http://www.onj.nat.tn/pdf/p2.pdf> (accessed 22.6.2017).

4. Arab Barometer, Arab Barometer Survey Wave 3, 2013; available at: <http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/arab-barometer-iii-0> (accessed 22.6.2017).

5. Alcinda Honwana, *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia*. London: African Arguments, 2013.

6. Wolfgang Merkel, *Systemtransformation: Eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung*, 2. Auflage. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2013: 95.

7. Julius Dinstelhoff and Katrin Sold, *The Carthage Agreement Under Scrutiny*. SADA, Carnegie Endowment, 2016; available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/66283>. (accessed 22.6.2017).

8. For this reason, the term »revolution« is used throughout this article.

In order to address these questions, this article uses the available data to provide a snapshot of the attitudes of young people living in Tunisia during the summer 2016 and early 2017. The first section focuses on the precise nature of the multifaceted, self-perceived frustration described above. The next section discusses the possible consequences of this complex sense of frustration, making particular reference to the visions and expectations of the future in evidence among the Tunisians surveyed. Both sections expand on the empirical findings by using descriptive statistical methods and specific quotations drawn from qualitative interviews. The article concludes with brief interpretative conclusions drawn from the results and placed in a specifically Tunisian context.

2. Characteristics of the Survey Sample

The sample of 998 Tunisians (weighted: 1,000) consists of 495 men (49.5 per cent) and 505 women (50.5 per cent): 35 per cent are 26–30 years old, 34 per cent are 21–25 years old, and 31 per cent are 16–20 years old. They are mainly from large cities: big cities (64 per cent), small cities (32 per cent), and rural (4 per cent). Nearly all respondents consider themselves to be youth rather than adults (95 per cent). About 44 per cent of the respondents are currently students – amongst them, 56 per cent are attending school, 34 per cent university, and 9 per cent enrolled in some form of vocational training – while 77 per cent are single, another 10 per cent are engaged, and 13 per cent are married. A majority of the Tunisian youth surveyed (80 per cent) live in the same household as their parents, while 13 per cent live with their own partner/family, but without their parents. The respondents' average household size consists of 5 people ($M = 4.9$), and about 72 per cent of respondents perceive the father to be the head of the household, while 58 per cent consider the mother chiefly responsible for household management. Just over half of respondents locate their families in the »lower middle class« (52 per cent), while 44 per cent consider themselves to be in the upper middle class, 3 per cent to be poor, and 1 per cent to be destitute. Moreover, only 31 per cent of the surveyed young people have access to their own financial budget; and 58 per cent of those who do have a personal budget indicate that their main source of income is their own work, while 43 per cent are reliant on financial support from the family. Only

14 per cent claim to have savings, which the relative majority of them consider to be for emergencies. Furthermore, 15 per cent of the surveyed youth are in debt – 41 per cent only slightly (that is, less than one month's budget) and 41 per cent moderately (that is, between one and six months' budgets).

3. Self-Assessed Disappointment: The Frustration of Tunisian Youth in the Context of Social and Political Transformation

3.1 Instability of the Tunisian Political System

In the opinion of two-fifths of the Tunisian youth surveyed, foreign interference in the events that have been taking place in the MENA region since late 2010/early 2011 has contributed significantly to the ensuing political instability. This is confirmed by the following statements: first, »external actors instigated the events« (42 per cent agree); second, »international actors have long worked for Arab regimes to fall« (42 per cent); and third, »The US wanted to stir up the whole region« (43 per cent). In addition, only a small proportion (19 per cent) of the youth surveyed consider »the political situation« to be »(rather) stable«. Nonetheless it seems clear that, five years after the outbreak of the Tunisian revolution, 52 per cent of those surveyed endorse »democracy« as their preferred model of government for Tunisia. That said, another model also received considerable support: 23 per cent of respondents express a desire for a »strong man who governs the country«.

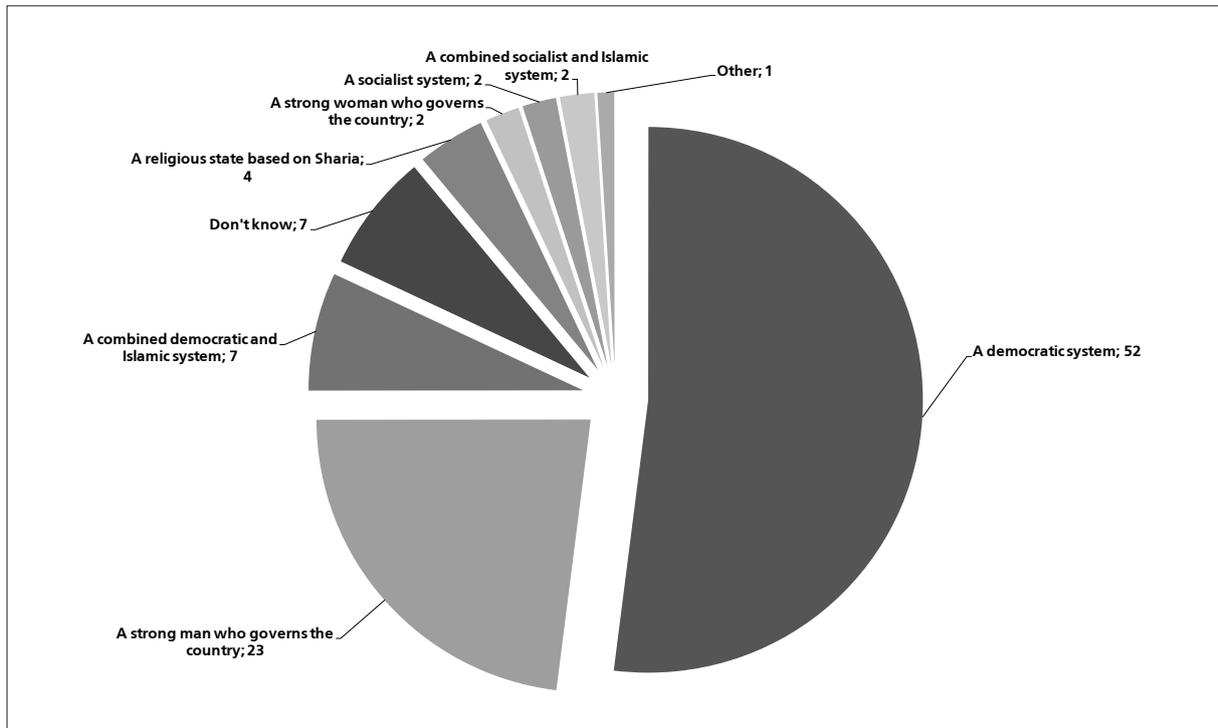
In socio-demographic terms, the least educated exhibit the most polarised response to the question about their preferred political system; 36 per cent of this group endorse »a strong man who governs the country«, while 42 per cent indicate that they would prefer »democracy«.

3.2 Increase in Violence in the Tunisian Transformation Process

Of the young people questioned, 65 per cent agree that the events that have taken place in the MENA region since late 2010/early 2011 have not produced any lasting changes. Despite this, however, 56 per cent identify »growing violence« as an important change that affects them personally, with 61 per cent agreeing that



Figure 1: »If you look into the world, what kind of political system would you prefer?« (values in percentages)



»the events are responsible for widespread violence«. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of Tunisians surveyed (90 per cent) call for an enhanced effort on the part of the state, especially in the area of security policy.

Of those who call for a stronger state role, 61 per cent believe that this should mainly be in the area of social security. More than half of young people also believe that the state should be more transparent (54 per cent) and more supervisory (52 per cent). Half of the respondents report that they have personally witnessed an act of violence (53 per cent), including 61 per cent of men and 46 per cent of women. Most of this takes the form of psychological violence (18 per cent).

3.3 Crisis of Employment Security and a Lack of Money

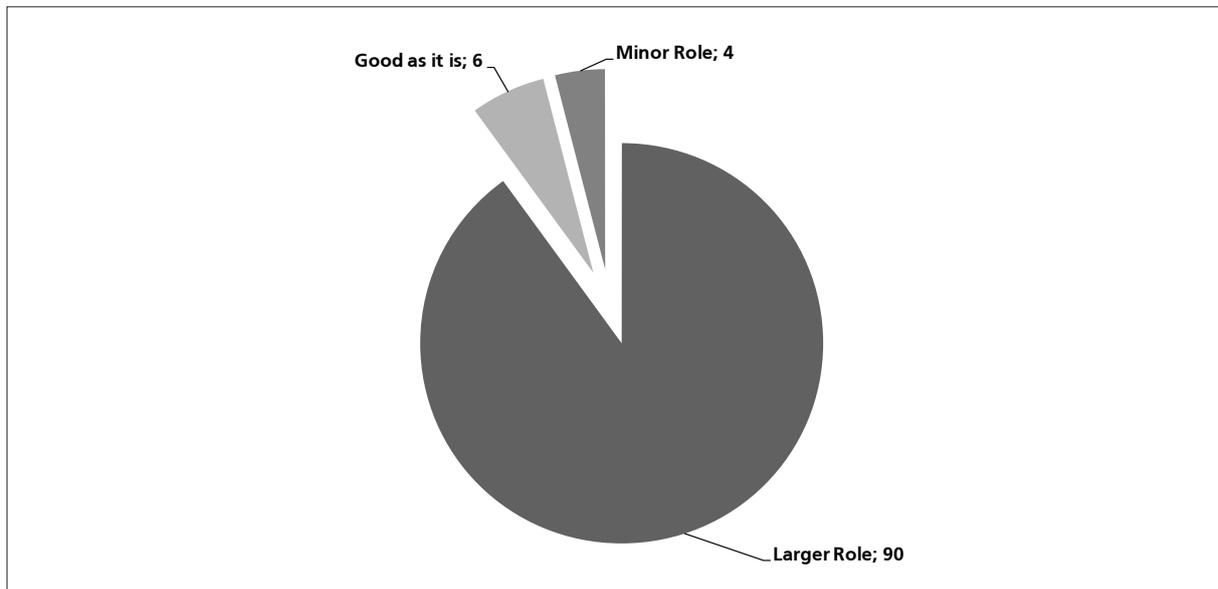
The empirical findings point to a contradiction in respondents' assessments of the economic situation of Tunisian youths and their families (see in this study the chapter »Economy and Employment«). In short, there is a discrepancy between statements from the quali-

tative interviews and the current research consensus,⁹ and the responses in the survey to questions concerning the respondents' and their families' current economic situation. In the qualitative interviews, all interviewees, without exception, emphasise both their own and their country's economic difficulties. An example of this is the 22-year-old Mouna from Ariana, who complains, »unemployment is an obstacle to achieving our dreams; There are no offers of jobs in our country, this is because of the economic weakness of the country«. ¹⁰ By contrast, the available data suggest that 61 per cent of the youth surveyed consider their personal economic situation to be stable, while a clear majority report a positive perception of their personal economic situation (»very/

9. See Chantal Berman, Tunisia's Economic Transition? Popular Evaluations of Social Crisis and Reform. Tunisia Wave IV Country Report, 2016; available at: <http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/arab-barometer-iv-tunisia-economic-country-report> (accessed 22.6.2017); Mongi Boughzala, Youth Employment and Economic Transition in Tunisia. Global Economy & Development, Working Paper 57, 2013. Washington: Brookings; Irene Weipert-Fenner and Philipp Vatthauer, Die soziale Frage in Tunesien – Soziökonomische Proteste und politische Demokratisierung nach 2011. HSFK-Report Nr. 3, 2017; available at: https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publicationen/Report0317.pdf (accessed 22.6.2017); International Crisis Group (2012): Tunisie: Rélèver les défis économiques et sociaux tunisiens. Rapport Moyen-Orient/Afrique du Nord N°124; available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/124-tunisia-confronting-social-and-economic-challenges-french.pdf> (accessed 22.6.2017).

10. Names of interview partners have been anonymized.

Figure 2: »Should the state play a larger or a minor role in daily life or is it good as it is at the moment?« (values in percentages)



rather good« = 65 per cent); the remaining 35 per cent, however, consider their economic situation to be »rather/very bad«. A similar trend is evident in respondents' even more positive assessments of their own family's current economic predicament. In total, more than 86 per cent view their family's current economic situation as »rather good/very good«, while only 14 per cent report this as »rather/very bad«. Similar results are observable in comparison to the assessment of the familial situation in 2010: the degree of satisfaction here is nearly identical to the current economic situation of the family (87 per cent).

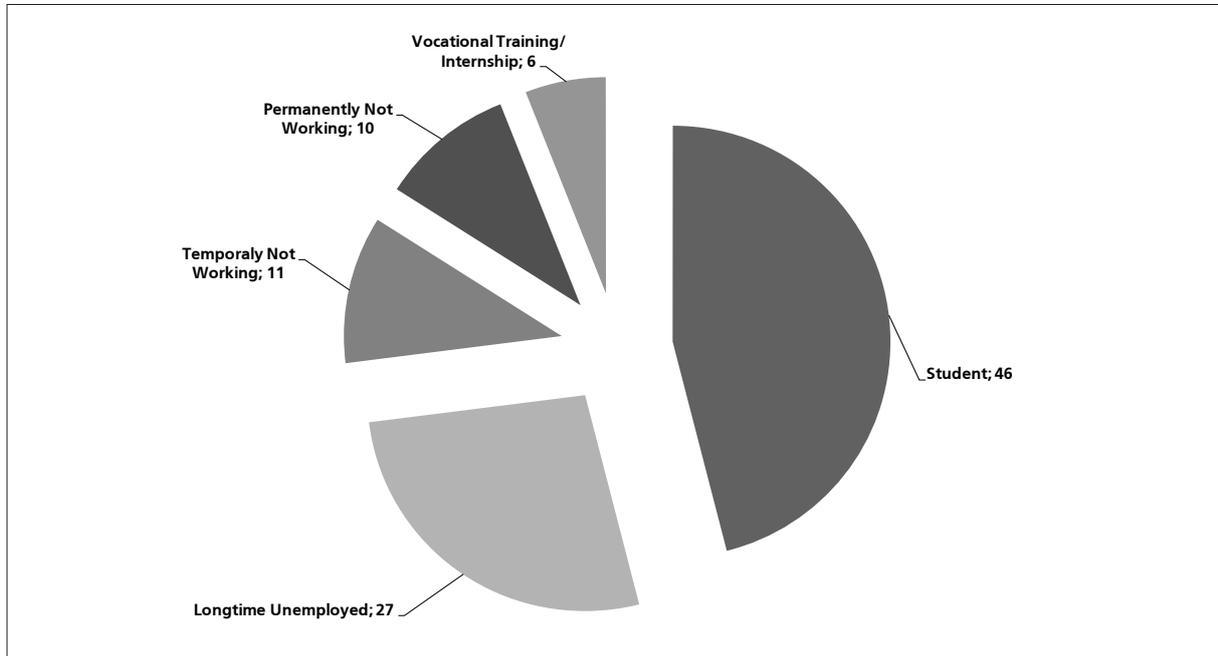
In spite of this broadly positive economic impression, a more intensive assessment of a specific economic sector – youth employment – indicates a major economic frustration. Since the Tunisian revolution, job losses (45 per cent) are seen as the second most important change in the lives of those surveyed. This is congruent with the results of the qualitative interviews, because all respondents stress that underemployment and unemployment are among the greatest challenges presented by the Tunisian transformation process. For example, in response to the question »What are the obstacles that prevent graduate students from achieving their goals?«, 19-year-old Salim from Sfax answers, »Unemployment and the lack of jobs in the country – our country kills the ambitions of youths, it does not encourage competent peo-

ple«. Tellingly, the loss of a job presents an elementary fear for a majority of respondents (68 per cent).

Overall, the following findings arise from the data: young Tunisians who earn their own income through work have a single job, which they usually acquired through various contact groups – such as friends (25 per cent), the family circle (21 per cent), or a public institution (14 per cent). Yet respondents show considerable division regarding where they first seek advice and assistance in finding a job: public institutions (39 per cent), the family (23 per cent), and Internet platforms (20 per cent). Half of those surveyed who work indicate that they had no other choice of employment (51 per cent), with (notably) 60 per cent of women and 40 per cent of men giving this answer. The two most common reasons given for the acceptance of a particular job are the possibility of on-the-job training (51 per cent) and the social compatibility of the employment relationship (50 per cent).

Furthermore, amongst respondents who are employed, there is wide spectrum in terms of how satisfied they are with their current job. While 42 per cent of young people indicate strong or total satisfaction, 57 per cent report only moderate or no satisfaction. Conversely, respondents who do not earn their own money most commonly receive support because they are enrolled in school/university (73 per cent). However, it seems that

Figure 3: »If you do not have any money at your disposal, can you please indicate your situation?«
(values in percentages)



this support is largely irregular (61 per cent). On average, respondents from rural areas receive less financial support from their families ($M^{11} = 34$ EUR per month) than those from large cities ($M = 70$ EUR per month). Ultimately, 69 per cent of those surveyed have no money at their disposal, which includes those who do not work (48 per cent) – that is, either temporarily unemployed (11 per cent), permanently unemployed (10 per cent), or long-term unemployed (27 per cent). Significantly, 46 per cent of respondents with no money at their disposal identified themselves as students.

3.4 Disturbances in the Relationship Between Citizens and the State

The institution in which those Tunisian youth surveyed seem most ready to place their trust was not the state, its various actors or sectors, but their own families (90 per cent). Furthermore, half of respondents express an outright lack of confidence in Tunisia's political decision makers, with only 13 per cent viewing the government – and even less the parliament (8 per cent) and trade unions (8 per cent) – as trustworthy. Of all social insti-

tutions, the Tunisian military enjoys the highest level of expressed confidence (72 per cent) among young people surveyed, while 30 per cent of respondents express a relatively high level of trust in »the legal system and courts« and 26 per cent in the police. Far fewer show much confidence in human rights NGOs (12 per cent) or religious organisations (11 per cent), while almost none of those surveyed trusts political parties (3 per cent).

With respect to institutionalised sectors of society, it is noticeable that 28 per cent of respondents trust the education system and 24 per cent the public health system, while 16 per cent trust the media.

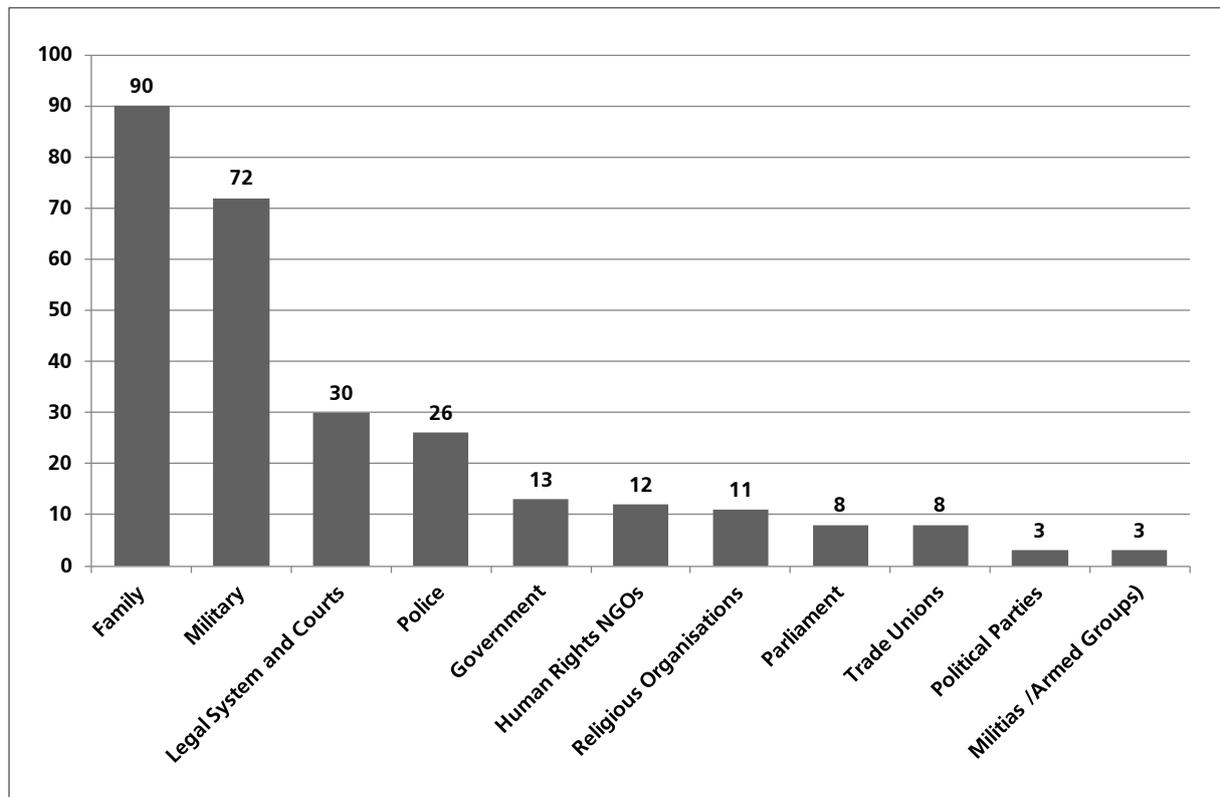
3.5 Lack of Access to Participation in Public and Political Life

The overwhelming majority of those surveyed (67 per cent) state that they are not interested in politics, while 23 per cent show little interest, leaving only 10 per cent who either express an interest (6 per cent) or a strong interest (4 per cent).

When asked to gauge their level of political interest – according to little/medium/high interest – the high-

11. M = mean value (statistical average).

Figure 4: »What about your trust in different institutions?« (values in percentages »(limited) trust in institutions«)



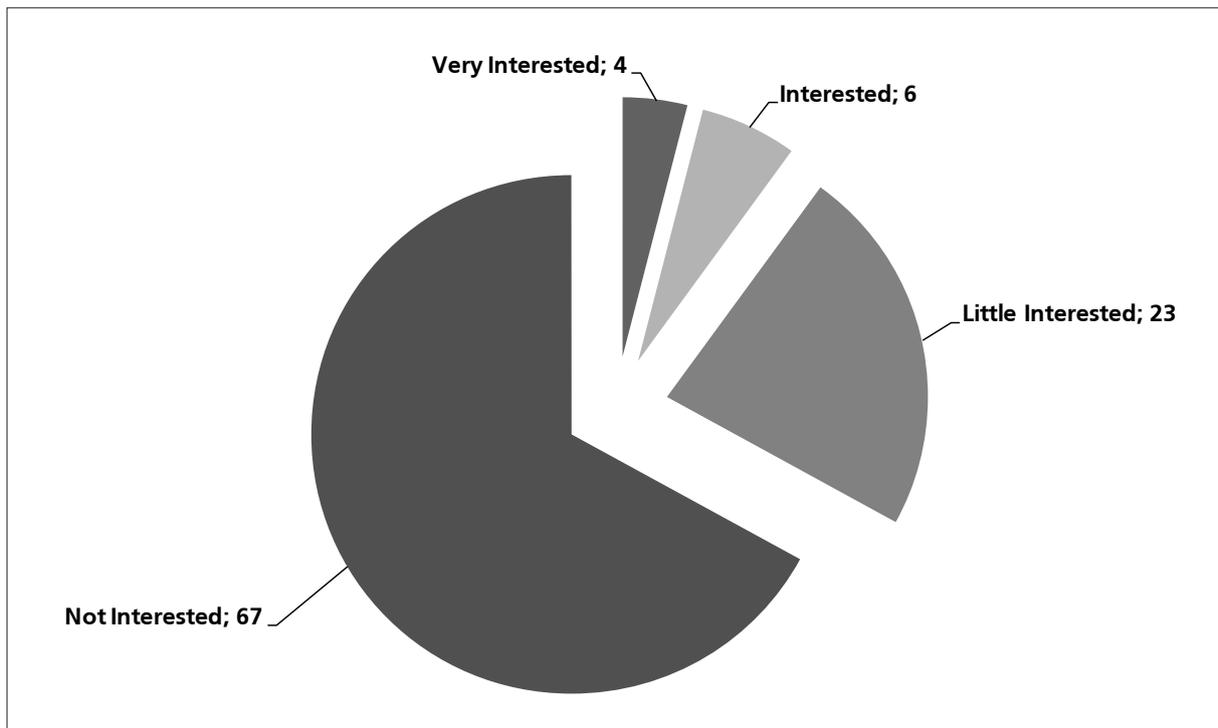
est interest in politics was expressed by young people from rural areas (40 per cent), whereas the group with the lowest interest in politics is to be found in smaller towns (22 per cent). This tendency is also appreciable in the qualitative interviews, in which all the interviewees evinced a degree of disenchantment with politics. In 90 per cent of these interviews, formal political actors are denounced as egotistical liars – as evident, for example, in the responses of 22-year-old Iman from Manouba: *»Generally, the politicians are not credible, they are liars and hypocrites, and they do not have principles. They work for their personal interests and they do not think about the interests of the country, most of them give fake promises.«*

In addition to this lack of interest in politics, however, 21 per cent of the young people surveyed purport to actively inform themselves about politics. The central sources of information here are the television (80 per cent) and the Internet (69 per cent), while 25 per cent do so through face-to-face conversations. Other than this, however, the data suggest that Tunisia's youth have been scarcely involved in political activity since the revo-

lution. Only two forms of political activity can command a degree of involvement, with 24 per cent of those surveyed having *»participated in elections«* and 23 per cent *»in demonstrations«*. Even if Tunisian youth hypothetically wanted to make their voices heard, 61 per cent would not even vote in an election. Indeed, only 18 per cent would participate in a demonstration or a 16 per cent in a strike, while 15 per cent would try to mobilise others via the Internet.

The young people surveyed also show themselves to be very reserved about civic engagement, though they are divided in terms of the reasons given for their lack of commitment. Only one-fifth evince a high degree of civil engagement, with the majority doing so *»for helping poor and vulnerable people«* (21 per cent) and *»for elderly people who depend on help and support«* (20 per cent). In addition, 16 per cent indicate a willingness to engage *»for my religious convictions«* and *»for guaranteeing safety and order in my area of residence«* (16 per cent), while the lowest areas of involvement are for *»social and political change in my country«* (9 per cent) or *»for those who are coming from situations of armed*

Figure 5: »Are you interested in politics?« (values in percentages)



conflicts« (9 per cent). Those who are socially engaged show most activity in the context of a school/university group (46 per cent) or an association (41 per cent). In the context of civil engagement, joining or being active in a political party seems insignificant to most respondents, with only 9 per cent naming this as their field of activity, and a further 8 per cent suggesting that they might join a party in the future. Ultimately, this means that for 92 per cent of the respondents, political parties offer no viable platform for civic engagement. According to 47 per cent of them, this lack of engagement is due to »no or only very few initiatives in my area«, as well as a lack of professionalism (42 per cent), an excessively narrow target group for social projects (40 per cent), a preference for focusing on their own lives (40 per cent), and an insufficiently clear financing structure of what is on offer.

3.6 Social Tensions in Public Space

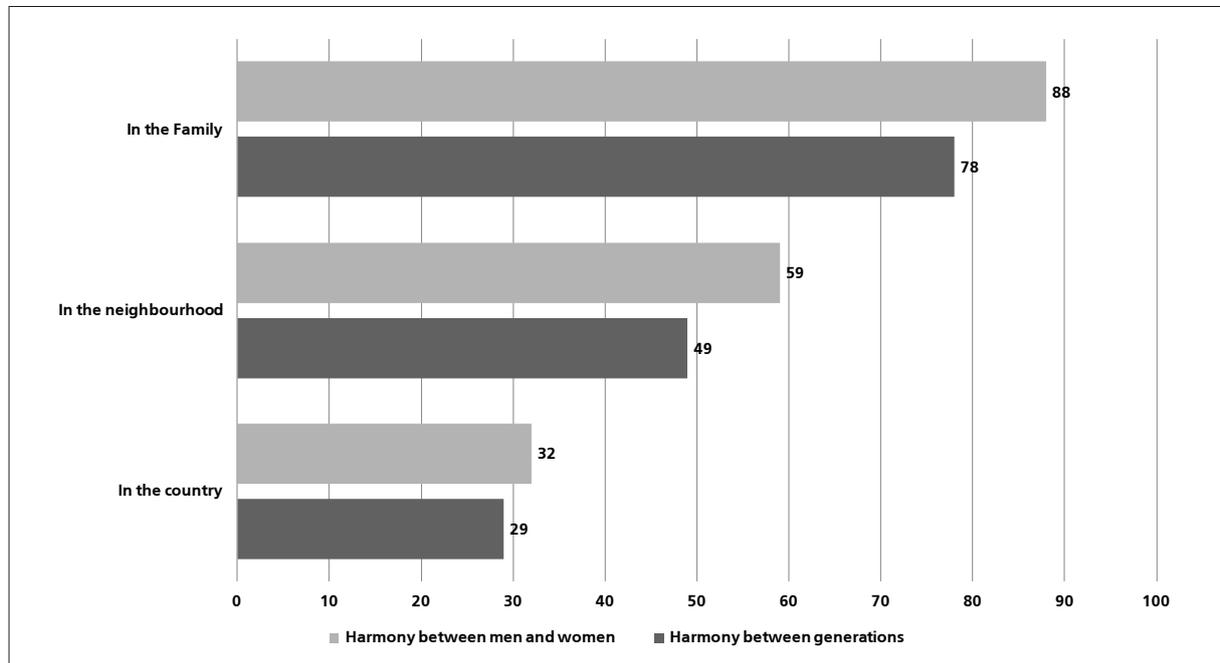
Of those surveyed, a clear majority (82 per cent), agree with the statement that public spaces are becoming increasingly tense, while 38 per cent say that social instability is one of the most significant post-revolutionary changes. For example, this tendency is evident in

respondents' highly ambivalent attitudes toward relationships between generations and genders. The overwhelming majority report harmonious relationships between both the latter (88 per cent) and the former (78 per cent) within their own family circle. Beyond this space, however, the situation deteriorates: when asked about their own neighbourhoods, only 59 per cent perceive gender harmony, and 49 per cent intergenerational harmony, while the outlook within Tunisia's national borders seems even worse, with only 32 per cent perceiving gender harmony and 29 per cent cross-generational harmony. Furthermore, these averages evince almost no variations when sorted according to gender.

3.7 Disparity in the Importance and Guarantee of Fundamental Constitutional Rights

With an average consensus of $M = 7.4$ (1 = »Completely disagree«, 10 = »Completely agree«), a very high proportion of the young people surveyed think that they enjoy equal citizenship rights with other Tunisians – though they also acknowledge that not everyone in Tunisian society has the same rights ($M = 6.9$). For the most part, respondents do not perceive themselves as

Figure 6: »How would you describe relations between men and women/the younger and older generation ...?« (values in percentages)



socially excluded (M = 3.5) or as part of a minority (M = 2.5). Provided with a list of seven rights, respondents consider the most important to be the »security of basic needs« (M = 9.5) and the »right to an absence of violence« (M = 9.4), while freedom of speech and opinion make up the third most important perceived basic right (M = 9.0).

From the list presented to respondents, it is striking that further democratic and constitutional rights – such as the »freedom to elect political leaders« (M = 7.6) – are generally regarded as less important. Indeed, upon being explicitly asked to rank the seven listed rights, the least importance was assigned to the »freedom to elect political leaders« (11 per cent). Notably, however, while 86 per cent of those surveyed prioritise the right to an »absence of violence« and 76 per cent the »security of basic needs«, apparently only two-thirds believe that the state can assure these legal priorities (66 per cent and 64 per cent respectively). However, the »freedom to elect political leaders«, generally considered the least important right on the list (11 per cent), occupies second place in terms of how securely this is felt to be guaranteed by the state, while 73 per cent of those who ranked this as important consider the state to be an effective guarantor of freedom of speech and opinion.

3.8 Limitations in the Possibility for Personal Development

In total, 47 per cent of those surveyed claim that they do not make use of their full capabilities on a daily basis. Among them, 26 per cent complain about feeling permanently restricted in their capacities, with a full 13 per cent feeling ill; 20 per cent state that they do not feel able to call upon their full potential. The most negative responses in this area are given by those who consider themselves constantly stressed and sick (9 per cent) or just stressed (6 per cent). Conversely, only 26 per cent of respondents claim to have a good balance between work and leisure. Wiam, a 30-year-old from Le Bardo, points to the overall »failure« of the Tunisian state in this area: »The government is the main cause of the lack of opportunities, it does not trust the youth, as you know all the leaders of the country are old. The state does not encourage the youth to show their potential.«

With respect to the leisure activities of those young people surveyed, it seems that sports (11 per cent) and cultural activities (3 per cent) play only a marginal role. By contrast, 75 per cent name »television« and 61 per cent »surfing the Internet« as their most important leisure activities. It is notable here that the qualitative interviews



Figure 7: »Related to the three most important rights for you – can the state provide what you need?« (values in percentages)

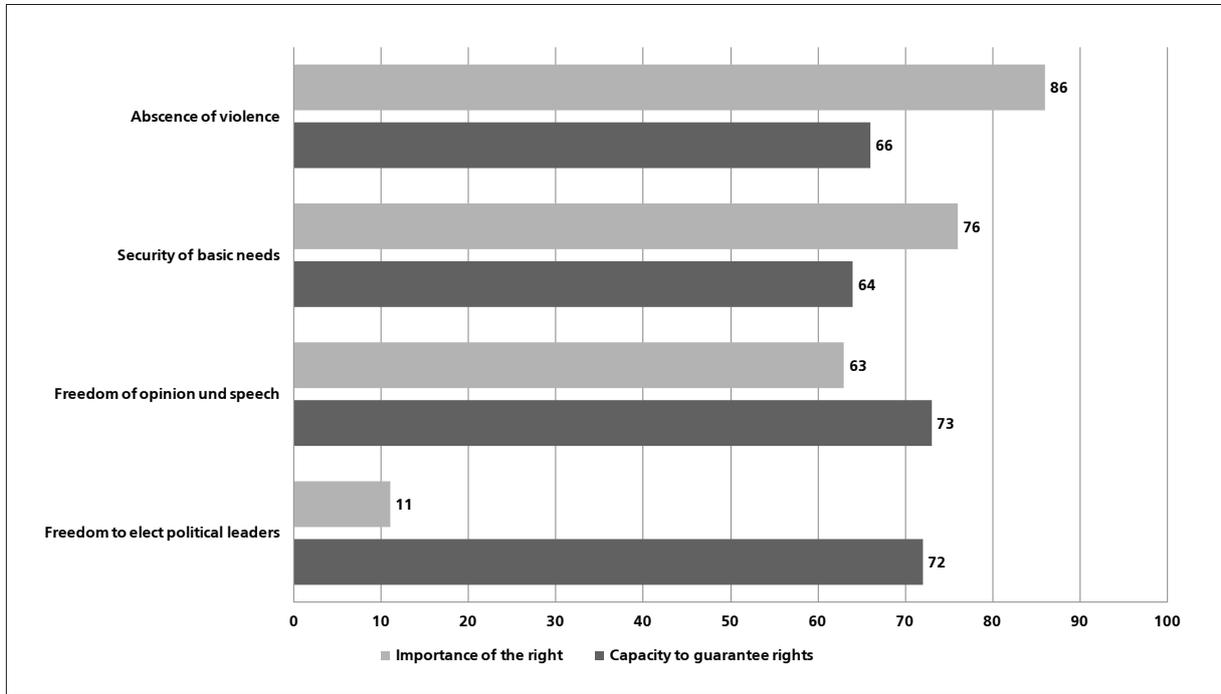
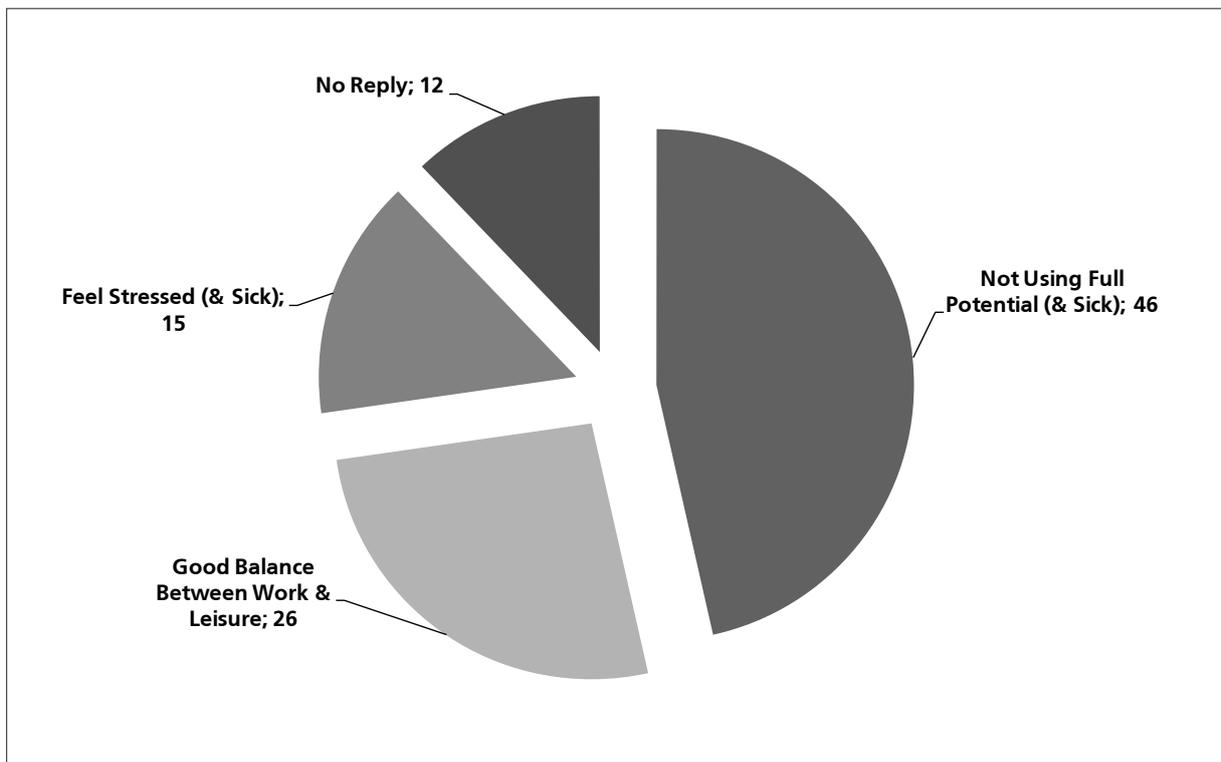


Figure 8: »Are you already at the maximum of your performance concerning your studies, your work, or your daily affairs – what describes your situation best?« (values in percentages)



contain numerous complaints about the general lack of diversified leisure activities and entertainment in Tunisia, a state of affairs frequently pinned on the government. In the words of 25-year-old Asma from Ben Arous, *»The government is not interested in the rural areas; It should give more importance to these areas and improve them by creating free places and means of entertainment«*. Substantial gender differences are apparent in the leisure activity *»Going to the Coffee Shop«*, which plays a role in the leisure time of 62 per cent of men but only 7 per cent of women. A similar disparity is observable in those who engage in leisure time activities with members of their own family (15 per cent) – 23 per cent of women, compared with just 6 per cent of men.

3.9 Insecurity in Certain Areas of Life

When asked to assess the security of their overall life situation (school/job, family, economic standing, the political situation, future prospects, etc.), young people surveyed generally gave positive responses (M = 6.5 on a scale from 1 = *»not at all secure«* to 10 = *»totally secure«*). And yet, when sorted according to specific areas of life, three out of eight categories return values smaller than or only equal to the overall assessment (M = 6.5). These include the personal economic situation (M = 5.9), future career prospects (M = 6.3), and the probability of armed conflict (M = 6.5).

Table 1: *»Can you rate your sense of security (>I feel secure/insecure<) in the following fields? Please rate your situation on a scale from 1 (not at all secure) to 10 (totally secure).«*

Areas Of Personal Security (Average Values)	
My overall situation	6.5
The probability of armed conflict	5.9
My future professional career	6.3
My economic situation	5.9

With respect to the qualitative interviews, it is important to note here that the interviewees give different – though proportionally very evenly distributed – responses to the question about their sense of overall security: four respondents speak of an improved, five from a worsened, and one from an unchanged sense of security.

4. Confronting Frustration: Future Expectations of Tunisian Youth

As illustrated above, the young people surveyed reveal a remarkable and multifaceted range of frustration. Given this, it is unsurprising that the considerations and preoccupations of respondents prove largely negative and pessimistic. More striking, however, is the obvious contradiction between the sheer range of frustration and the preponderance of some partly positive expectations of the future.

4.1 Optimism of Tunisian Youth

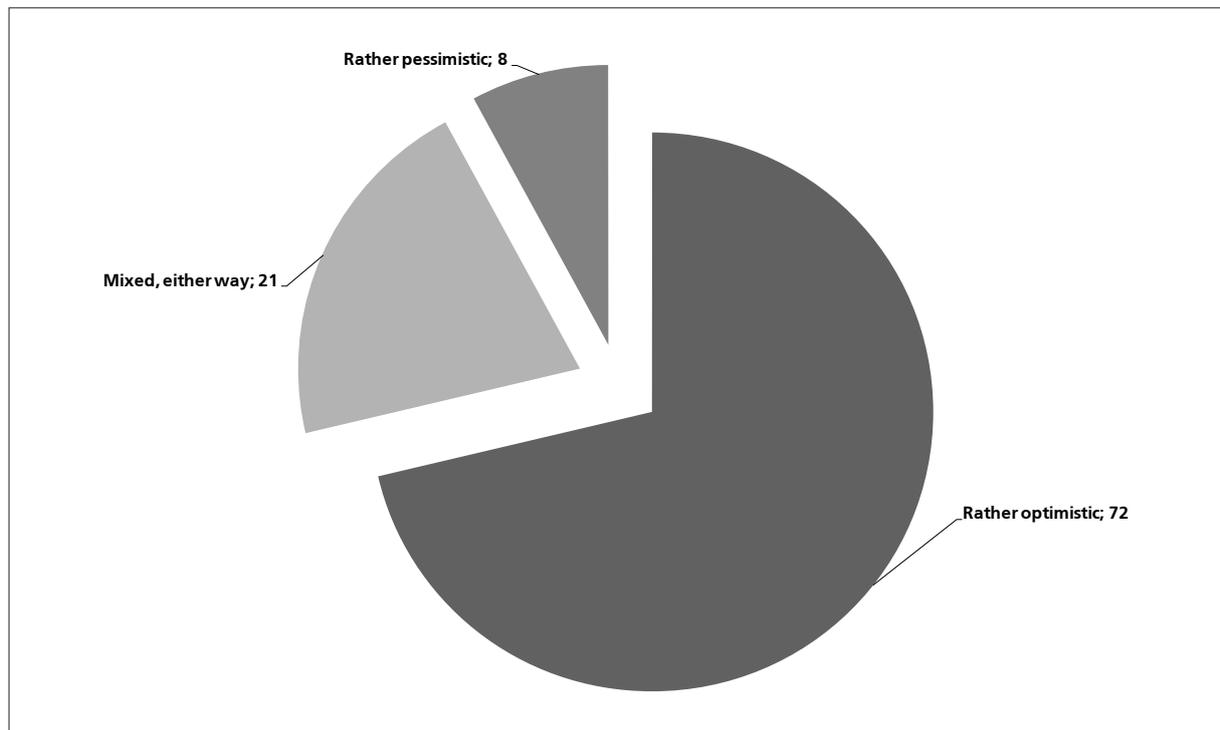
Most respondents hold a *»rather optimistic«* perception of the future (71 per cent), while only 8 per cent call themselves *»rather pessimistic«*. Mohammad, a 25-year-old from Sfax, justifies his future optimism as follows: *»Yes of course [I am optimistic], the hope is our weapon against routine and failure«*.

There is also considerable optimism among those surveyed that their individual ambitions for employment will be met in the future, with 74 per cent expressing *»fair to maximum confidence«* in this area. Conversely, only 15 per cent of the surveyed youth are quite pessimistic and a further 6 per cent are not at all confident. *»A good job«* is considered to be the most important factor for one’s own future (58 per cent), with the majority of respondents defining their ideal employment situation by using the following three characteristics (of eleven suggested): *»secure work«* (82 per cent), *»achieving a high income«* (76 per cent), and *»options to upgrade my position«* (72 per cent).

In terms of their personal futures, respondents consider *»a good marriage«* (21 per cent) and *»good family relations«* (19 per cent) to be the second and third most important factors. This tendency is also reflected in the qualitative interviews, where participants expressed a preference for employment over marriage. Statements from 19-year-old Hiba, from Sfax provide an example here: *»Of course, I want to be independent, and I will think about marriage, [but] I need to work and earn money before marrying«*.

On a scale from 1 (*»absolutely unimportant«*) to 10 (*»absolutely important«*), respondents’ central ambition for the future is *»achieving a high standard of living«*, with a mean score of M = 9.5.

Figure 9: »How do you perceive your own future and personal life?« (values in percentages)



For those surveyed, »believing in God« (M = 9.4) and »engaging in a good family life« (M = 9.1) emerge as the second and third most important aspects of their vision for the future. This reflects the fact that religion and family are two lifestyle features viewed with the most consistent positivity by those surveyed. Almost all respondents see an individual belief in Islam (95 per cent) and their families (94 per cent) as anchors (»rather stable« or »stable«): indeed, most view their families as their strongest point of connection (M = 9.3 on a scale of 1 = »not attached at all« to 10 = »totally attached«), and nearly all state that it is necessary to have a family in order to be happy in life (96 per cent). It is also striking that almost all respondents consider religion to be an explicitly private affair (93 per cent), with 67 per cent of young people expressing the desire for Islam to play a stronger role in society.

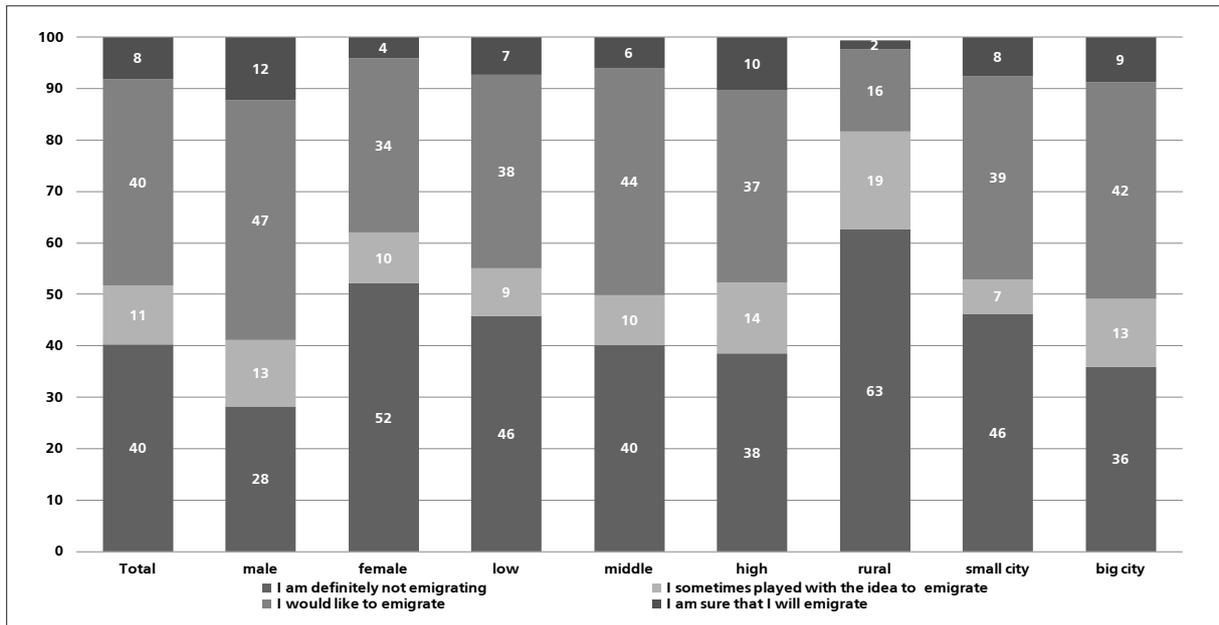
Furthermore, in the five years since the Arab Spring, there has been a slight increase in religious awareness among the Tunisian youth surveyed in this study. In a retrospective self-assessment, respondents' religiosity five years ago had a mean average of 5.7, whereas today, that average is 6.0 (on a scale of 1 = »not religious at all« to 10 = »very religious«). However, both earlier and later

averages can be considered »rather religious« (see the chapter in this study on Religiosity). This clear tendency toward growing religiosity applies to both sexes, but women prove more religious (2011: M = 6.0 / 2016: M = 6.3) compared with men (2011: M = 5.4 / 2016: M = 5.7). Finally, nearly half of the surveyed youth are optimistic that the perceived rancour between generations and genders will harmonise and 73 per cent see the future of the Tunisian society »rather optimistically«.

4.2 The Self-assessed Hopes and Fears of Tunisian Youth

Four-fifths of respondents identify their two biggest personal fears as »not being successful in life as I would wish« (80 per cent »very much« or »fairly«) and »increasing insecurity« (79 per cent). With a mean average of just 4.1, the most unimportant aspect of the future is »engaging in politics« (1 = »absolutely unimportant« to 10 = »absolutely important«), a tendency observable in both sexes (men = M = 4.3 / women = M = 3.9). Of those surveyed, 59 per cent reflect on their current situation by expressing a possible desire to emigrate: a majority articulate an active desire to do so (40 per cent), while a further

Figure 10: »What would best describe your situation?« (values in percentages)



11 per cent claim to have entertained the idea. Samah, a 17-year-old from Sousse, states, »I think the majority of Tunisian youths wish they could emigrate – because they want to get rid of the poverty and misery in Tunisia, they want to build their future«. A comparatively small proportion (8 per cent) of the respondents have already decided to emigrate. Differentiated according to gender, 72 per cent of men and almost 48 per cent of women surveyed express a desire to leave Tunisia. This desire is most marked among the best educated (61 per cent) and least among those from rural areas (37 per cent).

Of the young people surveyed, 53 per cent express a readiness to leave their families to achieve a good professional qualification, or to get a job in a rural region of Tunisia (54 per cent) or Europe (52 per cent). Moreover, 34 per cent of respondents would be willing to accept work below their individual level of education, 36 per cent to marry someone from a social class above or 32 per cent or below their own. With respect to a possible emigration, the two European countries that attract the greatest interest are France (52 per cent) and Germany (42 per cent). Indeed, amongst the highly educated (47 per cent) and married (48 per cent), a slight majority express a preference for Germany ahead of France (46 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively), whereas this is reversed among the least well-educated, the majority of whom express a preference for France (76 per cent) over Germany (38 per cent).

5. Conclusions

The overall tendency observable in the survey of Tunisian youth is that the events of 2010/2011 are viewed as a »stolen« revolution, the effects of which are considered ongoing but broadly negative. Ultimately, the frustration of Tunisian youth in the context of the country’s ongoing transformation is composed of nine different, partly overlapping dimensions, which include the following perceptions:

Table 2: The Nine Dimensions of Frustration of Tunisian Youth

The Instability of the Political System
An Increase in Violence
A Crisis of Employment Security and a Lack of Money
A Disturbance in the Relationship between Citizen and State
The Denial of Participation in Public and Political Life
Communal Tensions in the Public Domain
Inequality in the Significance and Guarantee of Constitutional Rights
Restrictions on Personal Development
An Ambiguous Sense of Security in Particular Areas of Life

On the basis of these empirical findings, the following, cursory interpretation can be advanced: the task of including Tunisian youth in a changing society is a difficult one. Indeed, since 2010, the Tunisian state's profound transformation is mirrored in a similar process afflicting Tunisia's young people, with those surveyed giving voice to the multifaceted challenges they are currently trying to navigate. While the majority support democracy as a more participatory model of society, they still consider the existing political framework to be imperfect, and it would appear that systemic changes have not produced noticeable benefits for Tunisian youth.

Indeed, judging by the survey data and the interviewee responses, formal Tunisian democracy in summer 2016 and early 2017 is a young, fragile framework with few concrete ramifications for specific policy areas or social spheres. Striking weaknesses have been apparent in Tunisian security and socio-economic policy since 2010/2011, while a democratic payoff has been conspicuous by its absence, as have necessary economic reforms.¹² Indeed, the systemic and institutional changes in Tunisian politics have not produced any appreciable benefits for the broader population: a brief recession in 2011 was followed by a temporary recovery in 2012, but since 2013, economic growth has stagnated to the low annual rate of around 1 to 2 per cent, while state spending has risen. Also lacking have been measures to combat unemployment, terrorism, and disenchantment with politics. Furthermore, the main focus of ruling circles after the fall of Ben Ali was on enacting a formal political transformation, which was manifested primarily in a protracted, turbulent discussion about the constitution and continuous changes of government.¹³ On top

12. In the period during which the data for this study was collected, Youssef Chahed's Government of Unity, which has been in office since August 2016, implemented legal and institutional reforms for combating corruption and terror and for facilitating economic growth. With respect to the latter field, a national »development plan« (2016–2020) was created and, in September 2016, a new investment law was introduced. This came into force in January 2017 and was heralded in November 2016 by »Tunisia 2020«, an international investment conference.

13. Indeed, at the time this survey and the interviews were conducted, participants had experienced six such changes since the revolution.

of all this, Tunisia has increasingly become a target for terrorism, existing in a formal state of emergency from November 2015 until the time of this writing.¹⁴

The frustration of Tunisian youth could well contribute to the destabilisation and de-legitimisation of the country's ongoing political and social transformation, and to the partial exclusion of young people from this process. Indeed, the optimism the surveyed youth evince for Tunisia's socio-economic and socio-political development is anchored in the self – as a cushion against broader negative trends. Paradoxically, then, the young people surveyed hold a broadly optimistic vision of the future, which is grounded in their hope that the changes currently playing out in Tunisia will ultimately benefit them personally and society as a whole. This optimism also reflects respondents' confidence in personal networks of security, such as the family and religion, which can be understood as spheres of personal reassurance. Notably, however, respondents show a high potential for emigration, which suggests that a majority of Tunisian young people are favourably disposed towards the prospect of life outside of Tunisia.

Ultimately, the youth who participated in this study are in an ambiguous position: if they cannot live in their own country according to their ideas and ambitions, they are ready to leave. Preventing large-scale emigration from this demographic would necessarily entail easing their frustration and improving their situation: after all, a significant emigration of young people would surely imply a manifest failure of the transformation process that began in 2010. Indeed, due to the composition of its population, Tunisia is basically dependent on the commitment of young people for the medium and long-term stabilisation of its young democracy.

14. The declaration of a state of emergency was the government's reaction to a terrorist attack on a bus of the Presidential Guard at the Mohammed V avenue in Tunis City Centre on 24 November 2015. This was the third of four terrorist attacks that occurred in a twelve-month period between March 2015 and March 2016. The first of these took place on 18 March 2015 at the Bardo Museum in Tunis; the second on 26 June 2015 on the Sousse beach; while the fourth and final targeted Ben Guerdane, on the Libyan border, on 7 March 2016.



References

- Arab Barometer** (2013): *Arab Barometer Survey Wave 3*; available at: <http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/arab-barometer-iii-0> (last accessed on 22.6.2017).
- Berman, Chantal** (2016): *Tunisia's Economic Transition? Popular Evaluations of Social Crisis and Reform. Tunisia Wave 4 Country Report*; available at: <https://www.fes.de/lnk/341> (last accessed on 22.06.2017).
- Boughzala, Mongi** (2013): *Youth Employment and Economic Transition in Tunisia. Global Economy & Development, Working Paper 57*. Washington: Brookings.
- Dihstelhoff, Julius / Sold, Katrin** (2016): *The Carthage Agreement Under Scrutiny*. SADA, Carnegie Endowment; available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/66283>.
- EUROMED** (2013): *Le travail de jeunesse en Tunisie après la Révolution*; available at: <http://www.onj.nat.tn/pdf/p2.pdf> (last accessed on 22.6.2017).
- Gertel, Jörg / Hexel, Ralf** (2018): *Coping With Uncertainty. Youth in the Middle East and North Africa*, London: Saqi Books.
- Honwana, Alcinda** (2013): *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia*. London: African Arguments.
- International Crisis Group** (2012): *Tunisie: Rélèver les défis économiques et sociaux tunisiens*. Rapport Moyen-Orient/ Afrique du Nord N°124; available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/124-tunisia-confronting-social-and-economic-challenges-french.pdf> (last accessed on 22.6.2017).
- Merkel, Wolfgang** (2013): *Systemtransformation: Eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung*, 2. Auflage. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
- Statistiques Tunisie** (2017): *Population's estimation*; available at: <http://www.ins.tn/en/indicateur-cle> (last accessed on 22.6.2017).
- Weipert-Fenner, Irene / Vathauer, Philipp** (2017): *Die soziale Frage in Tunesien – Sozioökonomische Proteste und politische Demokratisierung nach 2011*. HSFK-Report Nr. 3; available at: https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publicationen/Report0317.pdf (last accessed on 22.6.2017).



About the author

Julius Dihstelhoff (MA) is a research fellow in the Department of Politics at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) at Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Dep. for Middle East and North Africa
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Dr Ralf Hexel, Head, Middle East and North Africa

Phone: +49-30-269-35-7420 | Fax: +49-30-269-35-9233
<http://www.fes.de/nahost>

Orders/Contact:
info.nahost@fes.de

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN
978-3-95861-984-5