


Spring 2011

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Recommended Citation

Zarlenga, Erica, "Post-Revolutionary Effects: Political Self-Education of Tunisian Youth" (2011). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 1007.

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SIT TUNISIA SPRING 2011

Post-Revolutionary Effects: Political Self-Education of Tunisian Youth

Erica Zarlenga

5/12/2011

Tunisia is a country with a rich and diverse historical and cultural background that has absorbed many ideas from western thought into its political and educational systems. For many years, the Tunisian “Republic” had the appearance of a government similar to Western democracies, yet the president’s actions were very far from those of a democratically elected president. The flaws in former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Ben Ali)’s government in addition to sweeping unemployment and underdevelopment were the factors which led to the major uprising that became the Tunisian revolution. Although the revolution was a great symbolic victory for the Tunisian people, especially the youth who were the main participants, it is only the first step of many to reestablish a new Tunisian government with true democratic values and practices. The very young Tunisians who were so persistent in driving away Ben Ali are those who are still taking their roles as Tunisian citizens in order to continue the process toward democracy and the scheduled elections on July 24th. Prior to the revolution, Ben Ali’s ruling party was consistently elected to power, and his censorship of other political entities essentially prohibited the success of opposing campaigns. For this, the Tunisian population was neither educated about the political process nor did it have interest in staying informed about Ben Ali’s masquerade government. However, the revolution has opened the door to freedom in politics, and the developing political freedom has led to the creation of political parties that never had the opportunity to exist under Ben Ali’s rule. While these parties are frantically trying to prepare themselves in order to be viable candidates for the upcoming elections, young Tunisians are trying to educate themselves about democratic politics after a twenty-three year period of apathy due to the blatant abuse of democracy by Ben Ali’s regime.

Since this period in Tunisian history is still unsure and there are many factors that are constantly changing, I have interviewed various students to focus on how young Tunisians are “self-educating” about new Tunisian politics in the post-revolution period. At this stage, data is not quite quantifiable, but through various interviews with young Tunisians, I have explored both the methods of researching political information and the political activeness among young Tunisians. In addition, I have independently researched the information that I was able to find on the internet—particularly the social media website Facebook—about the recently-created Tunisian political parties and the major possible contenders for a presidential election. In order to establish a background of political education to which I can compare my findings, I have also investigated the political and civic education given to young Tunisians in primary and secondary school. This history will act as a theoretical platform on which young Tunisians are building to complete their political knowledge in order to be active citizens in the post-revolution era.

HISTORY OF POLITICAL EDUCATION

One of the important focuses after the Tunisian independence of 1956 was the creation of a sound education system for the children of Tunisia. Despite flaws in democracy, the Tunisian government assured that its schools were of the same quality as the western democracies in the world. A series of reforms were made throughout Tunisian history to update the education system in order to prepare the pupils to become educated Tunisian citizens. This education engrained the values of democracy, human rights, and citizenship into the minds of young Tunisians and provided them with a solid comprehension of what it means to be a citizen. Each student had the lessons and instruction to learn about the general concept of democracy and

citizenship as well as Tunisia's history and independence. I have studied both the outlines for lessons in Tunisian schools as well as an example of a textbook used in Tunisian high schools about democracy, government, and history. This study will provide a basis for comparison between the theoretical lessons taught in schools and the political self-education young people are now doing in order to apply these lessons to the developing political system in post-revolution Tunisia.

The history of education in Tunisia, though only consisting of the fifty-five years since independence, is significant in understanding the values emphasized in the Tunisian education system. This education is an important factor for this study because the young Tunisians who were participants in the revolution and who are now educating themselves about the developing political system were each educated in the Tunisian school well before the beginning of the revolution. Since independence, there have been three significant governmental reforms involving education. The first reform of 1958 focused on providing free education to all Tunisian children starting at age six (Ayed 278). This reform, although not specific to the political education of students, increased the enrollment rate to ninety-two percent of all Tunisian children in school. The second reform, the reform of 1989, pushed for the creation of the *citoyen moderne* 'modern citizen' in a *démocratie en construction* 'democracy in construction' (Ayed 279). This was the beginning of a major push for citizenship as a subject taught in Tunisian schools and is a relevant factor in the education of the current youth in Tunisia who would have received these lessons after the reform of 1989. The final reform, the reform of 2002, emphasized the role of Tunisia in the context of globalization and further developed lessons about the values of "citizenship" for students. These reforms provide

the basis for the values that are now instilled in the minds of young Tunisians about their rights and role in their country.

In addition, these reforms pushed to increase the enrollment rate of children in schools. Although the rate had reach ninety-two percent following the period after the first major reform, by 1998, the enrollment rate among six-year-olds (the age of first-year students) reached ninety-nine percent (Ayed interview). These statistics ensure that the vast majority of Tunisians were not only educated, but most-likely received specific instruction about the following subjects that I will address. Although it is virtually impossible to guarantee that each school abided to the state-instituted curriculum, it is most likely that these lessons were generally consistent among pupils educated in the Tunisian system.

Since the formal education involving politics and government is the only subject necessary to establish a background of knowledge of the political systems among interviewees, I will limit this section to a study of civic education in Tunisian schools. Throughout primary and secondary school, many values are given importance in civic education. The instructed coursework about civic engagement and politics is clearly outlined in course planning for Tunisian schools. One of the most important concepts is the idea of identity of the Tunisian citizen. This concept is first introduced in primary school, on which it is elaborated in secondary coursework. Throughout instruction about identity, the main goals of these lessons are to instill “la loyauté envers leurs pays, l’amour et la fierté de la patrie” ‘loyalty to their country, love and pride of the homeland’ (Ayed 286). Following the first educational reform, the idea of developing a “Tunisian identity” was a main goal of the newly-independent Tunisia, and the government used the school as the forum for creating this identity among its people.

In addition, the notion of citizenship is also a crucial aspect of civic education, and participation in the public life is emphasized throughout the lessons on citizenship. This idea is interesting when considering the limited participation allowed by former President Ben Ali. However, a thorough lesson about citizenship is composed of sessions relating to various dimensions of citizenship including but not limited to the political, social, and judicial dimension of citizenship in Tunisia (Ayed 292). Within the category of citizenship is instruction on the rights and responsibilities of the Tunisian citizen, and there is a strong emphasis on many freedoms that the students would never experience in reality under Ben Ali's rule. The rights and duties of the Tunisian citizen are clearly outlined in the coursework throughout primary and secondary school. A strong theoretical background frames the following rights and duties:

Droits (Rights)	Devoirs (Duties)
Le droit de participation à la vie politique (The right to participate in political life)	Le devoir de défendre la patrie (The duty to defend the homeland)
Le droit à la santé (The right to health)	Le devoir de payer les impôts (The duty to pay taxes)
Le droit à l'enseignement (The right to education)	Le devoir de respecter la loi (The duty to respect the law)
Le droit au travail (The right to work)	-----

(Ayed 292)

Particularly, the right to participate in political life is especially interesting because of the lack of opportunity that these students would later receive to practice this right. However, each student is taught to understand the Tunisian government in this manner. Furthermore, "la

liberté de pensée et d'expression" 'liberty of thought and expression' is listed under a subcategory of freedoms of the citizen. Despite suspicions about the democratic legitimacy of the president's rule, these democratic notions were in fact a part of the basic education in Tunisia. Under the reform of 2002, Article 3 states that "l'école se doit également d'être ... s'inspirant des idéaux humanistes et des principes universels de liberté, de démocratie, de justice sociale et des droits de l'Homme" 'the school must be inspiring humanist ideas et universal principles of liberty, democracy, social justice and human rights' (Ayed 281). These principles that Ben Ali allowed into the Tunisian education system would be the very principles that young protestors use to drive their revolution.

Apart from theoretical values, there was also a study of national and international documents to provide students with practical information about both Tunisia and the international community. The study of the Constitution of the Tunisian Republic is one of the most essential aspects of these lessons. Despite the blatant abuse of power by former President Ben Ali, Tunisian students were taught about the constitution and the policies mandated by this document. In addition, there was a study of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international documents (Ayed 2). In addition, the manual for second-year high school students contains brief histories of nations like the United States, in addition to the study of western philosophies and literary figures such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire. Perhaps most interesting is the section about authoritarian rulers, with the examples of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Benito Mussolini listed in the textbook. Regardless of the actual status of the Tunisian government pre-revolution, the notion of democracy was

consistently supported in schools and each student was educated about Tunisia as a free democratic republic.

The current period is very unstable, and the revolution has left Tunisia with a very weak government. Although it is still very early on to classify the exact cause of the success of such a rapid revolution, most of the young Tunisians who were participants in the protests were educated in this system with these democratic values. I have not had the opportunity to study the effect of formal education on the mindset of young Tunisians during the revolution, but there is an obvious discrepancy between what was being taught in the school and what was lived in reality. Most of the Tunisian youth received a thorough civic education, yet they never had the opportunity to apply this education to practical participation in their government. Furthermore, while this system has provided a rather solid theoretical background about Tunisia, democracy, and the values of liberty of human rights, there was very little instruction specifically about the president and his policies. A study of the constitution was a glimpse at the practical work of the government, but a strong emphasis was put on the theory of democracy rather than its practice. In addition, political parties were absent from the civic education in the documents I reviewed, and a brief study of elections in primary school was the only reference to real democratic process in Tunisia. However, this history of education serves its purpose as a background for comparison to the current political self-education that young Tunisians have begun since the revolution.

History of Political Participation among young Tunisians

Prior to the revolution, political participation, especially among young Tunisians, was very limited. Whereas in the 1980s and 1990s universities were very active forums for discussions among students, more recently former President Ben Ali began censoring these types of gatherings in public places when Islamism became a threat to his power (Ayed interview). In order to attempt to understand the political participation among young Tunisians prior to the revolution, I interviewed various young Tunisians and asked them about their level of interest in politics prior to the first protests in Tunisia. These interviewees will also be referenced at a later point when addressing the methods through which young Tunisians are politically educating themselves. The interviewees, totaling twelve and ranging from various cities, families, and fields of study, each gave a brief response about their interest and activism in politics before the revolution.

Of the twelve interviewees, all twelve recall at least one lesson about the history of the government taught during primary or secondary school; however none were able to give specific information about the lessons, other than a brief study of the constitution in middle school. The limited recollection that the interviewees had about their formal education was also indicative of their political activism before the revolution. Three of the interviewees answered that they had occasionally followed the politics of Ben Ali when he made a speech or published a newspaper articles, but of these three, none of them believed that the information was completely accurate. Aziza Hadj Slimane, a student from Tunis, responded that she occasionally “read some papers just for joking” but that she never took any government publications or speeches seriously.

The students with whom I spoke showed a complete lack of interest in politics and the Tunisian government before the revolution. A student from Le Kram, Ahmed Labidi, emphasized that while he was aware of problems “before the 14th of January we didn’t care because we knew he would say the same things he always said. But if we go to certain cities, we find people who can’t eat, and he’s building things that don’t help the people.” Despite some knowledge about the growing economic and social problems facing the country, the young Tunisians with whom I spoke did not feel that they had an outlet for expression or a way to inform themselves using real statistics about their country. Furthermore, although these students were each educated about the Tunisian “democracy” in school, none of them believed that Tunisia was a legitimate democracy under Ben Ali. “[Ben Ali] always talked about democracy, but there was no democracy,” claimed Hafedh Hamrouni, a computer science student from Sfax, when referring to his reason for his lack of interest in Tunisian politics during Ben Ali’s rule. Political interest and participation was generally absent among young Tunisians during this period due to the censorship of Ben Ali’s regime and an overwhelming knowledge of the fraudulent information being regularly diffused by Ben Ali and his government officials.

Changes during the Revolution

For the youth of Tunisia, the revolution was the breaking point from a theoretical democracy to an attempt to transition to real democracy. The many injustices in their country were no longer acceptable, and the Tunisian youth became radically active after years of silence. Although none of the interviewees attributed their new-found political consciousness to the education they received in school, many of the rights taught in primary and secondary education were the

very rights that were being abused by the former president. Furthermore, it was a demand to have these rights that sparked the uprising of so many young Tunisians during the revolution. For ten of the interviewees, the revolution was a transition period during which they sought new freedoms to which they were entitled but always denied. The freedom to vote in fair elections was one desire for some interviewees. The students were aware of the illegitimacy of elections and fought for this freedom in their quest to oust the president. Mr. Hamrouni explained his outrage at past elections because “before, they were almost funny. You are supposed to be able to hide your vote, but there were no curtains. They gave you the red RCD [Rassemblement Constitutionnelle Démocratique, the party of Ben Ali] vote and you simply signed your name.” For nine of the interviewees, the beginning of the revolution was the point where they became extremely interested in politics and the events happening in Tunisia. They each followed the events closely during the revolution, and now believe that politics in Tunisia will be very different because of the revolution.

The Tunisian revolution has acted a bridge between a theoretical concept of a free and democratic Tunisia, and the freedom to construct a government that will realize this Tunisia. Despite the information provided to students throughout their education in the Tunisian school system, young Tunisians were never provided with the practical information to participate in truly democratic Tunisia. A significant absence of not only information about political parties but also the parties themselves has created a serious problem for Tunisia during the revolution. The parties who were given freedom to exist during the revolution are not yet established enough to lead Tunisia to a stable democratic future, and the youth population is not educated about the politics that were never allowed to exist prior to the revolution. Although the

revolution opened many doors and freedoms for both parties and the masses, it also eliminated the major party and ruler who had been organizing the country for the past twenty-three years. This dilemma is what sparked the interest of many young Tunisians to search for a solution themselves. They successfully drove out their autocratic president, but the revolution did not establish a democracy; it left an empty space in which the new government will be constructed. For this reason, many young Tunisians are self-educating themselves about the new political scene in Tunisia. They want to be well-informed citizens who are both prepared to vote in upcoming elections and are aware enough to monitor their government to prevent future injustices. Eleven of the interviewees said that they intend to vote in the upcoming elections, and most of them are preparing themselves to make an informed vote to help establish the Tunisia that the revolution sought.

Methods of Political Self-Education

Tunisia is still in a period of transition and information is not yet easily accessible about the interim government and the numerous new political parties. However, young Tunisians are very interested in finding information about the various facets of the new political world in Tunisia. The young Tunisians that I interviewed use various resources for gathering information and staying informed about developments in the political world. The average amount of time reportedly spent researching politics daily is one hour and five minutes among the interviewees. Most of the information of interest is about the interim government, the new political parties, and possible candidates for a presidential election. Although none of the interviewee uses the same exact strategy of another, I have found that the most popular

resources of information are television programs, the internet—particularly the social media website Facebook, and discussions with family, friends, and colleagues. In addition, I have researched one particular youth organization formed after the revolution that provides young Tunisians with as much information as possible about all of the newly-formed Tunisian political parties. This organization, *SAWTY*, has taken self-education further and is sharing the information its members find with other young Tunisians who are trying to become informed about post-revolution politics. I will address each of these methods individually using the interviews with the twelve young Tunisians previously mentioned.

Television

Television is one of the most valuable resources for finding accurate information about governments and politics not only in Tunisia but also in the entire developed world. Particularly concerning information about the interim government, the majority of interviewees cited television as a major source of information about news in Tunisia. Prior to the revolution, television was strictly monitored by Ben Ali officials and was not considered an outlet for free media. However, the revolution has created a freedom to information that now establishes television as a real resource for factual information.

Mr. Labidi explained that his interest in the national channel has increased since the revolution; “before the revolution I never [watched] the national channel, but now it shows the truth about Tunisia.” The national channel was at one time a representation of the corruption and lies propagated by the former president’s regime, but it has now become a source of legitimate information for young Tunisians. Although the national channel has improved since Ben Ali’s departure, there are still several other reliable channels that have always been

considered honest sources of information in the Arab world. Among the responses of interviewees, Al Jazeera was the most popular channel for political information, closely followed by Nessma. These Arabic channels provided information both during and after the revolution about the situation in Tunisia. No foreign channels were listed among the top television resources used by the interviewees.

Although television is not as popular as the internet according to the responses of interviewees, there was a strong impression that the information provided on the television is held to better standards than on the internet. Mr. Hamrouni explained:

After the revolution, I tried to watch TV more than Facebook. On Facebook I tried to watch the program I missed on TV. After the revolution, I want the real politicians to talk because after the revolution everyone wants to talk—even someone twenty-three years old who studies computer systems wants to talk about politics. It's better to take information from the origin... I just watch the real politicians.

The information on television very well may be more accurate than information on the internet. However, considering the very recent development of political freedom for parties in Tunisia, the exposure to smaller parties is much less likely via television because these parties are neither well-established nor well-known and therefore do not receive air time like some of the more prominent long-term political figures. To counter this problem, the majority of interviewees rely on the internet to provide specific information about politicians and their parties and rely on television for more general news.

Internet

For many new Tunisian politicians, the internet is easiest and most readily-accessible resource for the distribution of information about their policies and simply becoming known in the political world. The internet, especially Facebook, was by far the most popular and most often used source of political information for interviewees. Every interviewee who regularly searches for political information cited Facebook as a primary source. The most popular internet resources cited by interviewees were Facebook and Wikipedia. Although some parties do have their own website already online, none of the interviewees reported using these sites as resources of information about political parties or politicians.

In addition, the internet is also used to watch videos of interviews or other television programs that were not watched when aired. During the revolution, amateur video footage was widespread on social media sites, but now interviews with accredited politicians are very popular. Although the responses of interviewees provided a solid background on how young Tunisians use the internet to find political information, I researched various political parties on Facebook in order to see the type and quality of information available online. The number of political parties in Tunisia increased significantly after the revolution, but I have limited my research to three moderately large political parties in order to find a decent amount of information. I have chosen to use these parties' Facebook pages rather than their individual websites because the interviewees use Facebook more often than these websites, and the information on their websites was generally much more limited and difficult to navigate.

The first party that I investigated on Facebook is the Parti Démocrate Progressiste (PDP) 'Democratic Progressive Party.' The Secretary General of this party is Maya Jrbibi, however its founder and most popular face is politician Ahmed Nejib Chebbi. In the case of this party, Mr.

Chebby's page is much more extensive than the PDP's and therefore the focus of this section will be on his page. One of the most noticeable aspects of these parties' pages was the use of language. Mr. Chebby's page has a balance of information in both Arabic and French, depending on the source. Dates of upcoming events or conferences with Mr. Chebby are frequently posted in addition to videos of such events. Information about the PDP is available on the PDP's page, however it is somewhat difficult to find because it is listed under the "information" section and not the main page. A history of the party is provided in French. The number of "fans" for Mr. Chebby's page is more than four times the number of "fans" for the PDP's page. The page is frequently updated daily, and information online is paralleled with opportunities to seek information in person. The page dates the party to 1983 when it was found and 1988 when it was legalized. The information on this page is well-organized, but it is important to note that this party existed well before the revolution.

Secondly, I researched the Islamist party, Ennahda, led by Rached Ghannouchi. Similar to the PDP, Rached Ghannouchi's personal page is best source of information about the party. Information on his page is provided exclusively in Arabic. Information is occasionally introduced in French when it comes from a French news source. Although the page does provide a link to Ghannouchi's website, the information on both his Facebook page and website is very detailed about his personal mission rather than information about Ennahda. Research about the information available on this page is admittedly much less thorough because the postings are almost exclusively in Arabic. A brief glimpse of Ghannouchi's website provided the same results because of the language barrier. This party, although existing before the revolution, was not functioning in Tunisia before the revolution because of the refusal of the former president.

The final party's page which I reviewed is the Alliance Républicaine 'Republican Alliance' known as *أفولاء جومهورية* 'Al Wifak al Jomhourī' in Arabic. This party was more recently formed on April 27th when two smaller parties merged to create one party under this new name. Despite its rather recent creation, the page has a solid amount of information available. Unlike the previous two, the party's page is much more in-depth than any of its member politicians. Its website was under construction when this study was done. The information posted is a mix of Arabic and French, however contact information is listed solely in French. The location of their headquarters is easily accessible on their page and they have information about regional representatives for those who do not live in the Tunis area. Information is posted daily, and despite a small number of "fans" the page is very well organized. One of the most noticeable differences about this page is the absence of a strong party leader as the face of the party.

These three parties, ranging from various ends of the political spectrum, each provide insight to the amount of information available for young Tunisians to reach and watch. Though each party addresses the public in different manners and even in different languages at times, they each utilize Facebook as a main forum for spreading their names and messages. Although Facebook is not the most advanced method for political discussion, the use of this website has been instrumental in the revolution and is therefore an obvious resource for post-revolution politicking. In addition, many interviewees mention browsing as many of these pages as possible in order to reach a general understanding even if the parties are not necessarily from the same school of political thought as the interviewee.

Registration with Political Parties

A limited number of interviewees have already registered with a specific political party, and use the party as a key source of political information. Interviewees Mr. Labidi, his sister Yesmine Labidi, and Tunis student Saber Zaroui have each registered with the PDP. Mr. Zaroui is particularly interested in PDP events and he reported “je ne rate pas les réunions du PDP, et je m’intéresse aussi aux autres partis politiques, juste pour varier des idées” ‘I never miss PDP meetings and I’m also interested in other political parties, just to vary ideas.’ Although the majority of interviewees is still in the process of self-educating about parties and has not yet chosen a specific party, it is evident that the personal research has been a small success for these three students who have been able to make a somewhat-informed decision about Tunisian political parties.

Despite the optimism of many of the interviewees when attempting to educate themselves about politics, there was one interviewee who expressed serious doubts about the new political system and faith in these political parties. Yassine Neji, a computer science major from Sfax, does not subscribe to the newfound faith in political parties and doubts that he will register with one before the upcoming elections; Mr. Neji stated “je vois que le discours politique n'a pas changé et [que] c’est une continuation de ce que déjà Ben Ali a commencé et je crois que chacun dans ce gouvernement régler sa situation pour qu’il s’assure une place dans le nouveau gouvernement” ‘I see that political discourse has not changed and that it’s a continuation of what Ben Ali already started and I believe that each one in this government regulates his situation so that he is assured a place in the new government.’ Although registration with political parties is still a very distant step for some interviewees, this is not surprising considering the very short life of many of these parties. Despite some skepticism

about parties and politics in general, the majority of interviewees expressed hope to one day at least identify with a political party even if they have not yet decided which one.

Political Discussions

One of the most informative ways to learn about politics is to have an open discussion among peers, and this method is very popular among the young Tunisians with whom I spoke. During the time of Ben Ali, open political discourse was severely limited, and many people avoided talking about politics simply out of fear for the consequences. However, the revolution has provided each Tunisian with the freedom to express his or her ideas openly in public places. This phenomenon has played a large role in the self-education of politics among young Tunisians. Mr. and Ms. Labidi both said that their family dinner conversations are now almost exclusively centered on politics and that they never discussed this subject before the revolution. Many of the interviewees now openly discuss politics with their families and friends on a regular basis, and some even claimed that it is the most popular topic these days among all Tunisians. During this period, many young Tunisians not only research politics but are interested in discussing their findings with their friends. Unlike the very apathetic ideas under Ben Ali's rule, politics are now interesting in the minds of many Tunisians.

While interviewing several students in a café, I was fortunate enough to witness one of these discussions in person. The interview questions sparked a debate among the group of friends, and they spent the next half hour discussing political parties. Three of the members of the group are registered with the PDP, and they were lively discussing Ennahda with a friend who supports the Islamist party. Although the debate was friendly and the participants were close to one another, it was a very lively discussion. Even in the location in a café with many

onlookers, the young Tunisians were completely at ease with their discussion, and it lasted more than half an hour. Unfortunately the discussion was almost entirely in Tunisian Arabic and I was only able to understand several words and the brief translations that they gave me after they had finished. Regardless, all the students who spoke were very passionate about the subject, and they were eager to share their opinions with their friends. After it had finished, they each remarked how normal these discussions have become for them, and that when Ben Ali was president, they had never dared more than a whisper in public when rarely discussing politics. This subject has become a hot topic for many Tunisians throughout the nation, and it is easy to spot this type of conversation in almost any café.

Youth Organizations: SAWTY

The interest in politics among young people in Tunisia has definitely risen since the revolution, but there is a select group of young Tunisians who has taken this interest to the next level and who has become an active participant in political organizations in order to better the future of their country. I have studied one specific organization formed after the revolution whose goal is to spread information about Tunisian politics to the youth of Tunisia throughout the country. This organization, SAWTY, the Arabic word for “my voice,” was founded by young Tunisians looking to help their countrymen get informed about the new political system after the revolution. They gather information from political parties and work to distribute it online and in person to as many Tunisians from as many different regions as possible.

I was fortunate enough to interview Mariem Masmoudi, the Chief Communications Officer of the organization. She provided me with a detailed description of the work SAWTY does:

SAWTY is a non-profit, non-partisan Tunisian civil society organization devoted to instilling political activism and awareness in the post-revolution Tunisia...SAWTY seeks to provide opportunities for Tunisian youth to participate in politics by establishing a platform for exchanges and discussions between the youth and the government. During and after the transition to democracy, SAWTY's mission is to initiate young Tunisians into an active and informed political life through which democratic principles are learned and normalized.

The members of this organization have gone above and beyond their duties as Tunisian citizens and are now working diligently to help educate others about Tunisian politics.

Unfortunately, my interviewees all came from families living in coastal cities, and time and travel constraints limited my interviews to these young Tunisians. However, Ms. Masmoudi was able to provide me with some basic information about the political information available to those young Tunisians from interior regions. In the entire region of Sidi bouzid, there are only twenty internet sites and within these sites there are a total of twenty working computers. This difference in easy access to internet marks a significant gap between the information available to coastal Tunisians and those in interior regions. Especially since most of the information young Tunisians in cities find is on the internet, the opportunities for self-education in smaller interior cities would most likely be much more constricted. Ms. Masmoudi also explained that "Only the established political parties who can get on TV all the time can reach [rural Tunisians]. Civil society organizations are doing a lot of on-the-ground work in rural areas. There's still work to be done [in Tunis], but there's a lot more work to be done elsewhere."

The same limitations that I have had concerning access to youth populations for interviews parallel the limitations that the rural Tunisian youth have concerning information about politics and especially small political parties. Even the best efforts to self-educate are restricted by the information easily accessible to young Tunisians in a post-revolution period. Organizations like SAWTY are improving the amount of information available, but a more extensive research period would have allowed me to more adequately address these concerns about the disparity between urban and rural areas.

Conclusion

The political self-education of Tunisian youth is a fluid and unequal process across Tunisia that is transforming many young Tunisians from apathetic citizens to passionate Tunisian patriots. Although the sudden interest in politics is an obvious result of the pride of a revolution, this phenomenon is shaping the way the new government will be formed. My research has been limited due to various constraints, but the Tunisians I was able to interview have given a solid insight into the interests and every-day participation in Tunisian political life for the youth.

The history of political education in Tunisia has provided a solid background for the theoretical information instructed in the classroom for Tunisian youth. Although none of the interviewees attribute their primary and secondary education to the desire to revolt against an unjust leader, there is an obvious contradiction between what was being taught as democratic Tunisia in the classroom and what was happening under Ben Ali's government. I will not attempt to conclude that the Tunisian school was the cause for a revolution, but the values instructed in school most likely had at least a minimal effect on how Tunisians expected their

government to act. The vast majority of young Tunisians who were the driving forces for the revolution were educated in the Tunisian school system, and these values taught became important platforms for the decision to revolt.

Although school has instructed these young Tunisians about theory, and the revolution opened the doors to be able to practice these lessons as active citizens, the political self-education being attempted by many young Tunisians is preparing them for the practical duties of being a citizen in what will hopefully become a functional and free democracy. This self-education represents the enthusiasm for democracy in the hearts of many young Tunisians, but I have found that while researching information on the internet and watching interviews on television is a solid starting point, the most passionate interviewees used these methods as a precursor to registering in actual parties that can provide them with real representation in the new government.

Perhaps the one of the most significant aspects of this self-education is the help of organizations like SAWTY who are working to ensure that every Tunisian citizen has the information to be able to make an informed vote. Despite the success of education reforms and a high enrollment rate in schools, the current generation of young Tunisians was never given instruction about post-revolution Tunisia or the basic formation of a true multi-party system. This political self-education is a rather simply phenomenon that is the latest trend among young Tunisians. Although the revolution was a strong first step to a democratic Tunisia, the effort these young Tunisians are putting forth is amazing, and this self-education is proof that many young people are willing to do what is necessary to continue to push the nation in the right direction.

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