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Facebook's Façade: Understanding The Disillusionment of Tunisian Youth

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Facebook's Façade: Understanding The Disillusionment of Tunisian Youth

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Abstract

Over the past nine years, Tunisian youth voter participation has been incredibly low. Once leaders of the country during its democratic revolution in January 2011, youth in Tunisia are now disillusioned with the Tunisian political sphere and have remained absent from formal politics, a transition that is both confusing and worrying. Tunisian youth have also had a dominant presence on Facebook during this time, often utilizing the online space for political activity in lieu of voting in elections and holding membership in political parties. This paper examines the relationship between the Facebook usage and participation in elections of Tunisia youth, ultimately suggesting that Facebook has helped exacerbate youth disillusionment and the ensuing issue of low youth voter participation.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to Professors Mounir Khélifa and Rached Khalifa for their endless enthusiasm, and to my parents for allowing me to explore the world.

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I would like to thank Professor Mounir Khélifa, Dr. Mohamed Limam, and Dr. Sarah Yerkes for their guidance and expertise. I would also like to thank my friends, Gabe Rody-Ramazani and Hugh Jones IV, for their inspiration and unique insight throughout this process.

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Introduction

Tunisian youth (ages 18-30) were once at the forefront of political change in their country. During the successful ousting of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, this demographic led the country to democracy through coordinated protests and incendiary blogs — a revolution like no other. While in other Arab counties, “the institutions created by autocratic regimes demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and ruthlessness,”¹ the Tunisian revolution was ultimately successful in overthrowing the dictatorship that had dominated the country since its independence from France in 1956. Yet, in the decade following the revolution, youth in Tunisia have participated in formal politics, in particular voting, in staggeringly low numbers. Their overall disillusionment with political life is particularly surprising given their prominent role in the democratic revolution just under a decade ago.

What has caused Tunisian youth to go from revolutionary leaders to apathetic voters? This paper will examine multiples lines of evidence to explain this phenomenon, and then put forth a new theory in order to construct a holistic understanding of why Tunisian youth do not vote. Specifically, this paper will focus on the effects of Facebook on Tunisian youth today, and explore the possible impact of this social media site on the voting behavior of this demographic.

¹ Hassan Mneimneh, *The End of Paternalism: Assessing the “Arab Spring” Three Years On*, 30 January 2014, <https://www.gmfus.org/blog/2014/01/30/end-paternalism-assessing-“arab-spring”-three-years>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

Tunisia youth voter participation was incredibly low in the 2011 and 2014 presidential and parliamentary elections, both compared to other voting age groups in Tunisia and to youth voter participation across the world.² “According to the World Values Survey, less than 13 percent of Tunisian youth (under 30) say they “always” vote in national elections. This is compared to 80 percent of Argentine youth, 78 percent of Brazilian youth, 77 percent of Indian youth, 80 percent of Peruvian youth and 55 percent of Romanian youth.”³ Additionally, “more than two-thirds of young Tunisian boycott[ed] the 2014 elections” (Yerkes). Most recently in 2019, only 28% of youth age 18-25 voted in the second round of presidential elections⁴ and just under 42% of youth voted in parliamentary elections.⁵ Feelings of frustration towards politics as a whole, and a general disappointment with political leaders is undoubtedly widespread among Tunisian youth, who increasingly see the 2011 revolution as “hijacked”⁶ by older Tunisians and politicians from the Ben Ali era. They do not necessarily have negative attitudes surrounding democracy itself, but rather are disillusioned with how the political actors operate in Tunisia.

² Youth voter participation rates are low across the globe, but Tunisian youth voter participation rates are consistently on the lower end of the spectrum for democracies, which, as stated earlier, is surprising given their leading role in the 2011 democratic revolution.

³ Sarah Yerkes, *Where Have All the Revolutionaries Gone?* Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/cmep_20160317_where_have_revolutionaries_gone.pdf. Access 25 April 2020. Further references will be cited, abbreviated, “Yerkes.”

⁴ Hafdhd Chekir, *Youth at the center of social change: A new paradigm*, PowerPoint Presentation to SIT Tunisia and Italy program, 12 February 2020. Further references will be cited, abbreviated, “Chekir.”

⁵ Maher Al-Qudurat, *Consensus Politics and Democracy in Tunisia: Challenges for Political Reform*, The Washington Institute, 2 March 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/consensus-politics-and-democracy-in-tunisia-challenges-for-political-reform>. Accessed 3 May 2020. Further references will be cited, abbreviated, “Al-Qudurat.”

⁶ Safwan M. Masri, *Tunisia: an Arab anomaly*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 54. Further references will be cited, abbreviated, “Masri.”

Tunisian youth are also incredibly active on Facebook, which was a major catalyst of the 2011 democratic revolution. Indeed, they were prominent participants in the revolution, particularly in its beginning, and “an obvious explanation of this fact can be attributed to the ease with which younger people cope with new communication platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.”⁷ Today, Tunisian youth consist of 68% of all Facebook users in the country (Chekir), and they continue to utilize this online space for political expression. Their reliance on Facebook to express their opinions has prompted one author to go so far as to argue that youth have focused too much of their time online, basing their political aspirations “not on solid ground but on social media.”⁸ Instead of actively working to realize the goals of the democratic revolution, they have partaken in “ideological discussion” in a “dream world of virtual reality” (Ezzine). Regardless of one’s perspective on youth activity online, it can be readily stated that there is a clear correlation between high Facebook usage and low voter participation among Tunisian youth.

Accordingly, the remainder of this paper will be focused on exploring the relationship between these two variables, ultimately arguing the possible

⁷ Yousri Marzouki, Moez Bejaoui, Haythem Hammoudi, and Tarek Bellaj, *The Contribution of Facebook to the 2011 Tunisian Revolution: A Cyberpsychological Insight*, ResearchGate, April 2012, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/224823171_The_Contribution_of_Facebook_to_the_2011_Tunisian_Revolution_A_Cyberpsychological_Insight. Accessed 29 April 2020.

⁸ Elyes Ezzine, *The Tunisian Revolution and Its Youth: The Democratic Deficit*, The Washington Institute, 27 November 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-tunisian-revolution-and-its-youth-the-democratic-deficit>. Accessed 24 April 2020. Further references will be cited, abbreviated, “Ezzine.”

determinacy of high Facebook usage contributing to the low voter participation rates of Tunisian youth. The paper will be structured as such:

- I. Analysis of work, both scholarly and journalistic, written about youth disillusionment in Tunisia, and the resulting lack of youth participation in elections
- II. Examination of scholarly work regarding Facebook's influence in political life
- III. Discussion of my own research regarding Facebook usage among Tunisian youth and subsequent synthesis of my research and the works already considered
- IV. Concluding thoughts on democratic consolidation

I have chosen to structure my paper as such in hopes of readers considering my research as an extension of the theoretical and empirical foundations laid out by previous scholars and understanding the suppositional nature of my work given restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion of my research is not meant to invalidate any of the work I have reviewed, but rather serve to enhance overall understanding of this particular phenomenon.

I. Why disillusionment has occurred

Understanding the overwhelming disillusionment of Tunisian youth is no simple task, as many variables have created the necessary conditions to cause such low numbers of voter participation. This section will analyze multiple lines of evidence discussing this phenomenon over the past nine years, and will be segmented into three sub-sections: ideas-based reasons, interests-based reasons, and institutions-based reasons.

Ideas-based Reasons

This section will focus on arguments that are inherently more theoretical in nature, explaining why Tunisian youth are disillusioned with the political landscape, and subsequently vote in low numbers in elections.

The revolution was hijacked

“The youth felt that the opposition parties hijacked the movement that they had started and appropriated the protests to advance their own agendas” (Masri). Indeed, Tunisian youth’s current lack of political agency has contributed to a growing sentiment of disappointment regarding the revolution’s aftermath. As stated by Jbeli Hella, a 21-year-old who boycotted the 2014 elections, “When you don’t see rapid change, it is easy to be disillusioned.” “Essebsi [the President of Tunisia from December 2015-July 2019] is too old to govern.”⁹ As a whole, “almost 70 percent of youth said that old people have too much political influence (compared to just 49 percent of those over 50)” (Yerkes). This frustration with older political figures and their parties is expressed in numerous ways, perhaps most forcibly in this quote: “No political party cares for the youth except when they take advantage of them to distribute flyers and stuff in return for just a pack of cigarettes and 10 dinars. They have never given them real responsibility for something.”¹⁰ As their ability to enact change dwindled with the formation of a democratic society, the recalcitrance of youth changed into

⁹ Christine Petre, *Why Aren’t Young People Voting in the Tunisian Elections?*, World Bank Blogs, 21 November 2014, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/why-aren-t-young-people-voting-tunisian-elections>. Accessed 4 May 2020. Further references will be cited, abbreviated, “Petre.”

¹⁰ *Expectations and Reality: Citizens of Tunisia Express Their Views*, National Democratic Institute, 22-29 October 2015, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/En-Tunisia_Public_Opinion_Oct_2015_0.pdf. Accessed 7 May 2020.

disaffection, a major impetus encouraging abstention from formal political processes such as voting.

Generational divide

This tension between younger and older Tunisians has only been exacerbated by the generational divide and paternalistic nature of Tunisian society. “Many members of the older generation were thrown in jail or tortured under Ben Ali, giving them a sense of credibility. They look at the youth and think, “what did they ever do for their country?”” (Yerkes). This “skin in the game” attitude has justified a significant reversion to a norm in which political power is held by older members of society. The youth may have been those leading the revolution, but when the time came to govern, those experienced in politics took control. As power was redistributed following the revolution, youth were “conspicuously absent from the political scene during the transition”¹¹ and “only 4 percent of the members of the NCA, the body elected in 2011 to draft Tunisia’s post-revolution constitution, were under 30 with an additional 18 percent between 30 and 40” (Yerkes).

Furthermore, youth traditionally occupy a more “subservient role” in Tunisian society, in which challenging authority, particularly when that authority is based in patriarchal roots, is not as accepted as in other democracies across the world (Yerkes). This has undoubtedly reduced the effective power of youth in the political sphere, further contributing to their discouragement with Tunisian politics.

¹¹ Daniel Tavana and Alex Russell, *Tunisia’s Parliamentary and Presidential Elections*, [Project on Middle East Democracy](https://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Tunisia-Election-Guide-2014.pdf), October 2014, <https://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Tunisia-Election-Guide-2014.pdf>. Accessed 5 May 2020.

Lack of political ability

The revolutionary energy that brought so many Tunisian youth to the front of the democratic revolution¹² was not successfully translated into the workings of formal politics. Particularly, “many non-Islamist activists were discouraged by the necessity to compromise with those with whom they disagreed, making it extremely difficult to forge a common political agenda” (Yerkes). Although the youth were capable of galvanizing support for a political revolution, their political abilities in a democratic society were far less effective. Accordingly, youth ceded political power to older Tunisians over a short period of time, losing their agency in the political arena. With this loss of political power came their subsequent loss of enthusiasm for participation in formal politics, and their participation in elections decreased.

Interests-based Reasons

This section will focus on arguments related to the economic capacity of Tunisian youth, linking financial frustrations with political disappointment.

Lack of coordination between higher education and job market, and subsequent economic strife

Although the Tunisian education system has experienced improvements since the 2011 democratic revolution, the disconnect between higher education and entry level job markets is still a massive problem. The unemployment rate among youth with a university degree is a staggering 28%, with the male rate at 16.4% and the female rate at 38.1% (Chekir). This demographic — unemployed youth with a university degree — represents almost 42% of all unemployed

¹² This is meant to be taken literally, as youth were overwhelmingly present at protests and rallies in December 2010 and January 2011.

people in Tunisia, creating a large population of disgruntled youth struggling to find jobs (Chekir). Additionally, the jobs that Tunisian youth are likely to find do not always match their career expectations. It is not uncommon to find university graduates driving taxis or working in other jobs that do not require higher education (Yerkes). For Tunisians wanting to start their own businesses, barriers are numerous, including the “low preparation to the culture of entrepreneurship” (Chekir) and the lack of support from international investors given concerns over the political climate (as this headline from The Eurasia Group shows: “Tunisia’s fledgling democracy shows signs of wear and tear”¹³). Furthermore, some French schools “siphon off” many of Tunisia’s brightest students, contributing to a sort of “brain drain” that further weakens the overall capacity of recent graduates to find suitable employment.¹⁴ With bleak economic prospects and no governmental solution in sight, Tunisian youth are increasingly frustrated. 26-year-old Montasser Khedher expressed this anger as such: "Either they employ us or it's better that they kill us," he said. "At least then we'll be able to rest."¹⁵

This economic anger has created fertile ground for political apathy. The democratic revolution brought hopes of economic progress, but this dream has not been realized, and the continuing financial struggles of the country disproportionately affect Tunisian youth. A lack of economic freedom has bred anger towards the government for its inadequate assistance, and an ensuing disregard of the formal political system.

¹³ Ian Bremmer, *Tunisia’s fledgling democracy shows signs of wear and tear*, *The Eurasia Group*, 24 January 2019, <https://www.eurasiagroup.net/live-post/tunisia-fledgling-democracy-shows-signs-of-wear-and-tear>. Accessed 23 April 2020.

¹⁴ Mounir Khélifa, Lecture for IPREMS Seminar for SIT Tunisia and Italy program.

¹⁵ Jillian Kestler-D’Amours, *‘Employ us or kill us’: Tunisian youth on the margins*, *Al Jazeera*, 16 January 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/kill-tunisian-youth-margins-180116180238426.html>. Accessed 2 May 2020.

Institutions-based Reasons

This section will focus on arguments regarding the institutions in Tunisian society that have played a major role in helping create widespread youth disillusionment.

The political establishment

“Almost a third of Tunisian youth rate politicians as unintelligent and two-thirds of Tunisian youth rate politicians as dishonest” (Yerkes). For Tunisian youth, overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards those holding political power have helped create the necessary motivations not to vote in elections. As stated earlier, their negative attitudes towards politics are generally much more focused on the politicians themselves, rather than the political system they are participating in.¹⁶ Whether criticizing politicians from the Ben Ali regime who have been able to keep their jobs (in their eyes, a rather astonishing feat that speaks to the efficacy, or lack thereof, of the 2011 revolution) or vilifying members of parliament for their inability to fix the economic struggles of Tunisia, there is no shortage of disparagement of elected officials by Tunisian youth.

In addition to criticizing individual politicians, youth also feel incredibly disconnected from the political parties in Tunisia. “Young people do not feel “heard” within parties and many who originally joined parties in 2011 have since left public affairs altogether or joined CSOs [civil society organizations]” (Yerkes). Politics is also seen as an “elite endeavor” by many Tunisian youth (Yerkes), and “most parties remain only elite forces that attempt to fight for the people but lack the capacity to actually communicate with the Tunisia street or to

¹⁶ Advisor Mohamed Limam, Phone Call from 10 May 2020.

present concrete programs that would help everyday citizens” (Al-Qudurat). “Political parties are out of touch with current realities” and “youth feel consistently marginalized in the political process.”¹⁷ This “inaction and failure to solve the major problems that the country has grappled with since the revolution” (Al-Qudurat) has led to a dramatic dismissal of political parties by Tunisian youth. Phrases such as, “all parties are the same” (Petre) and a general frustration with the functioning of political parties are commonplace among Tunisian youth.

Furthermore, Tunisian youth have witnessed seemingly unending changes within the government. Whether the assassination of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013, or the splintering of Nidaa Tunis in 2016¹⁸, Tunisian politics have generally not been able to provide the stability that many Tunisian youth hoped for in the years following the 2011 revolution. With a lack of agency in the political arena, politicians who seem more interested in their own personal ambitions than serving their constituents, and political parties that are detached from ordinary life, many Tunisian youth see their vote as a meaningless formality that has no true effect.

*Attractiveness of civil society*¹⁹

¹⁷ *The Revolutionary Promise: Youth Perceptions in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia*, The American University in Cairo, May 2013, https://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2013_Youth_Perceptions_Egypt_Libya_Tunisia_Eng.pdf. Accessed 2 May 2020.

¹⁸ Elie Abouaoun, *Tunisia Timeline: Since the Jasmine Revolution*, United States Institute of Peace, 12 July 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/07/tunisia-timeline-jasmine-revolution>. Accessed 6 May 2020.

¹⁹ Although I have used much of Dr. Sarah Yerkes’ research (from both her Brookings paper and our phone conversation we had in early May), this section of my paper reviews the crux of her argument in her paper, “Where Have all The Revolutionaries Gone?”. Given my reliance on her arguments for this particular section, I have chosen not to cite individual sentences, but rather acknowledge that the ideas of this section are fully and completely from Dr. Yerkes, and I have merely paraphrased her work.

Tunisian youth's disillusionment regarding the political situation in their country has undoubtedly had a significant impact on their participation in formal political processes, including voting and holding membership in political parties. Yet, their disappointment with Tunisian politics has not caused them to totally remove themselves from the political sphere altogether. Indeed, many youth, in particular non-Islamist revolutionaries, remain politically engaged through civil society organizations and protest activity. Through this participation in informal politics, Tunisian youth have found a "more attractive and effective method" (Yerkes) for voicing their concerns. To neatly summarize why youth are more attracted to participation in civil society: "political parties are perceived as weaker and less effective than informal politics, civil society is an easier avenue to enter than politics, and civil society provides better incentives for young people than formal politics" (Yerkes). For young people who want to be politically engaged, civil society provides both an outlet and the freedom to engage in a variety of initiatives. Yet, one might ask, why has this engagement with the informal political sphere not translated to involvement with formal politics as whole, or at least to voting?

This question would undoubtedly be answered differently by many Tunisian youth. Whether they believe in the ability of civil society to enact change more than the ability of elected officials to do so, or they see civil society as more representative of their interests, the connection between participation in civil society and subsequent participation in formal politics is not present. Additionally, civil society activists often feel that the government does not take their activity seriously, viewing their action as a "nuisance." In short, non-

Islamist Tunisian youth “have found a more welcoming home in Tunisian civil society than formal politics” (Yerkes).

II. Facebook’s political influence

The effects of social media, in particular Facebook, on political life across the world has received an incredible amount of attention from both citizens and scholars over the past decade. While some have argued that Facebook can create more political engagement and can be an effective tool to spread information,²⁰ others have criticized the site for allowing harmful misinformation campaigns to occur and breeding political polarization. Movies, such as Netflix’s *The Great Hack* (2019), and books, like Dr. Siva Vaidhyanathan’s²¹ “Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy” have decried the influence of Facebook on democracies across the world, and created a newfound awareness of Facebook’s potency in the political sphere.

At first glance, Facebook can bring about a plethora of positive effects. Whether finally having the ability to connect with other dog-lovers in one’s community, finding a new online database for sharing memes with friends, or keeping in touch with family, Facebook has helped create a world that is more connected than ever before. Yet, as Dr. Vaidhyanathan once said, “The problem of Facebook is Facebook.”²²

²⁰ Jakob Ohme, *Facebook is now a vital part of our democracy*, [The Conversation](https://theconversation.com/facebook-is-now-a-vital-part-of-our-democracy-94777), 12 April 2018. <https://theconversation.com/facebook-is-now-a-vital-part-of-our-democracy-94777>. Accessed 24 April 2020.

²¹ Dr. Vaidhyanathan is widely considered to be one of the leading authorities on the study of Facebook and democracy, and is the Robertson Professor of Modern Media Studies at the University of Virginia.

²² Siva Vaidhyanathan, Presentation Pdf YouTube, Uploaded 18 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD_hFadTGtU. Accessed 2 May 2020.

Facebook's features have rapidly evolved since its inception in February 2004. The introduction of the News Feed in September 2006, Facebook Chat in April 2008, the Like in February 2009, a Trending Topics section in January 2014, and live-streaming accessibility tools and group video calls in April 2020 are just a few of the updates that have helped Facebook undergo substantial changes in the last 16 years.²³ Each of these features has undoubtedly impacted users' experience on Facebook (some more than others), and made understanding the impact of Facebook even more difficult. Specifically, this rapid development has made tracking the negative effects of Facebook challenging. Scholarship regarding the political effects of Facebook is being updated yearly, as more researchers have begun to take interest in the burgeoning online world that Facebook has helped build. Aside from the sharing of cute puppy photos, what else has Facebook played a role in?

One unsettling story is the role of Facebook in Trinidad and Tobago's Do So Campaign. As highlighted in *The Great Hack*, the now-defunct data company Cambridge Analytica organized a massive Facebook campaign to "increase apathy"²⁴ among youth in this country ahead of its 2010 elections. The company created the "Do So Campaign," which meant "I'm not going to vote" and "Do so, don't vote." This was "a sign of resistance against not the government, but against politics and voting" (*The Great Hack*). The campaign was ultimately effective in reducing the voter participation of Afro-Caribbean youth in Trinidad

²³ The Associated Press, *Timeline: Key dates in Facebook's 10-year history*, [Phys.org](https://phys.org/news/2014-02-timeline-key-dates-facebook-year.html), 4 February 2014, <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-timeline-key-dates-facebook-year.html>. Accessed 3 May 2020.

²⁴ Jehane Noujaim and Karim Amer, *The Great Hack*, [Netflix](https://www.netflix.com/title/80119460), 26 January 2019. Accessed 14 November 2019. Further references will be cited, abbreviated, "The Great Hack."

and Tobago, producing a “difference in 18 to 35-year-old turnout [that] was like 40%” (The Great Hack), and swinging the election results by 6% in favor of the party with which Cambridge Analytica was working. This is undoubtedly an extreme example, but it does show the potential power that Facebook can have in influencing elections.²⁵

To be clear, Facebook did not cause these youth not to vote, but it was the platform through which this exploitation was able to occur. The movie continues to discuss interference in various elections across the world, including the 2016 United States presidential election, which was essentially determined by under 80,000 votes in the key swing states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wyoming. These are some of the more dramatic cases of Facebook’s political influence, particularly when powerful data mining companies can utilize “carefully targeted” (Vaidhyanathan) ads to affect voting in specific areas.

Even without the influence of massive data companies utilizing Facebook advertising, Facebook’s political influence can still be substantial. “Facebook and other platforms curate a unique feed of posts to show each user, designed to maximally engage the user and cater to their interests. Right-leaning users “like” and engage with conservative posts more than with liberal posts, so they are shown more of the same. They may even unfriend or unfollow their most

²⁵ Another particularly interesting example was the 2017 parliamentary elections in Iceland in which, “anonymous accounts had been spreading accusations on social media about nearly every political candidate. The country had been flooded with bizarre “exposé” videos on Facebook and YouTube. Some had been viewed millions of times, even though Iceland has only around 340,000 residents.”

Hanness Grassegger, *Facebook says its ‘voter button’ is good for turnout. But should the tech giant be nudging us at all?* *The Guardian*, 15 April 2018.
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/15/facebook-says-it-voter-button-is-good-for-turn-but-should-the-tech-giant-be-nudging-us-at-all>. Accessed 27 April 2020.

outspoken liberal friends. The converse is also true. This creates personalized social media cocoons where each user only comes into contact with opinions that they already agree with.”²⁶ This is even more concerning because “the algorithmic system [of Facebook] favors items that generate strong emotions” (Vaidhyanathan).

Data from a 2014 Pew Research Center study of Facebook showed that 23% of total users report seeing posts that “always” or “mostly” align with their preexisting political views. For “consistently liberal” users, this number is 32%, and for “consistently conservative” users, it is 47%.²⁷ This echo chamber affect has undoubtedly led to political polarization across the world, putting stress on crucial democratic norms. Users experience near constant justification for their political beliefs, a process that is able to help spur disdain for those outside of their belief communities.

Facebook users are engaged in a sort of “world building,”²⁸ in which their online experience has the capacity to tangibly affect the physical reality of the world around them. When incendiary political rhetoric occupies the same space as photos of puppies, more extreme views can be easily normalized, and the political opinions of one’s “friends” can be affected in palpable ways. Moreover, this process is not only one-tracked. Common experiences are intensified by their

²⁶ John Willard Fry, *The Role of Facebook in the Resurgence of Teacher Strikes*, Political and Social Thought Thesis at the University of Virginia, 1 April 2019. Accessed 6 May 2020.

²⁷ Amy Mitchell et al., *Social Media, Political News and Ideology*, Pew Research Center, 21 October 2014, <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/section-2-social-media-political-news-and-ideology/>. Accessed 3 May 2020.

²⁸ Hugh Jones IV, Phone Call from 11 May 2020.

dissemination via Facebook. Indeed, “Facebook can be an effective vehicle for amplifying the voice of a disgruntled population” (Fry).

III. Facebook, youth disillusionment, and voting abstention

Facebook is a unique forum for Tunisian youth. Capable of both helping to express one’s political frustrations and building a sense of community through which one can, in essence, endorse their own beliefs ad infinitum, Facebook has immense potential to impact this demographic in significant ways. Given their statistical dominance on the social media site, with almost 5 million youth²⁹ out of the total 7.4 million users in the country, youth have access to a powerful space to express their disillusionment with Tunisian politics. Even so, do they use this online medium to share their frustration, amplify feelings of disillusionment, and ultimately influence their own and others’ decision to participate in formal politics such as voting? My study set out to answer this question.

A. Methodology

The work needed to complete my study was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As I was forced to leave Tunisia a month before my project was scheduled to begin, all research for this paper was done from my home in Poughkeepsie, New York. Instead of discussing how my research was conducted, this section will describe how I would have done my field work, and what I would have expected to have been potential issues.

My plan was to interview 500 Tunisian college students from schools across Tunisia. Given the 60-day time limit on my research, most interviewees would

²⁹ This number was calculated utilizing data from Hafedh Chekir’s PowerPoint, cited in Footnote #4.

probably have been in Tunis. Interviews would have been semi-structured,³⁰ hoping to uncover perceptions of Facebook beyond its obvious social function. This interview style would have also allowed my interviews to function as casual conversations, rather than interrogatory sessions.

Interviews would have been conducted in coffee shops, and would have lasted no longer than one hour each. Before asking any of the interview questions, I would have informed participants that I am studying the effects of Facebook on youth voter participation in Tunisia. I would have also, with each interviewee's permission, recorded interviews, if translation at a later time was necessary. The interview questions, to be followed loosely, would have been the following:

1) Do you have a personal Facebook account? If so, how many hours per day, on average, do you go on the site?

- a. Note: If interviewee answers "no," to this question, the interview would skip to Question 4, and I would phrase Question 5 as, "Do you believe that the time people spend on Facebook affects their decision to vote, and/or who they vote for?" Anecdotal information would still be valuable to my research, although it would not be included in any statistics about interviewees.

2) Why do you use Facebook?

³⁰ Mounir Khélifa, *Interviews*, PowerPoint Presentation to SIT Tunisia and Italy program, Spring 2020.

Definition of "semi-structured" interview from presentation : "you have a clear idea of what you want to find out and a set of questions prepared, but you are ready to deviate from your questions."

- 3) What type of political activity do you see on Facebook?**
- 4) Do you vote?** (*This question would be introduced with a comforting statement such as, “I don’t mean to be rude...”. or “I hope you don’t mind me asking...”*)
- 5) Do you believe your time spent on Facebook affects your decision of who to vote for, and/or if you vote or do not vote in an election? If so, how?**

- a. Evidently, this is the most important question of the interview, and would be left open-ended to avoid confirmation bias in my interviews.

Given my inability to understand either Arabic or French, the language barrier would have undoubtedly posed a challenge to my interview process. Through communicating with university professors in order to have them inform their students about my research before coming to a university campus and utilizing a translator when necessary, I believe this barrier would have been manageable.

B. Research Findings

Given that I was unable to conduct any interviews during my research period, this section offers an analysis of hypothetical responses to my survey questions, ultimately synthesizing interview answers at its conclusion.

- 1) If answered: No
- a. Consider anecdotal evidence of the interviewee

If answered: Yes

- b. I would have expected³¹ interviewees to spend between 45 minutes and 3 hours daily on Facebook.³²
- 2) I would have expected interviewees to discuss the news (quality and quantity) that they receive via Facebook, and would have guided the conversation towards question three in hopes of understanding the political function of Facebook.
- 3) If interviewees discussed their perception of the role of Facebook during the democratic revolution in 2011, I would have rephrased the question to focus on the current political function of Facebook. I would have expected interviewees to possibly discuss the prominence of President-Elect Kais Saied’s 2019 presidential campaign on Facebook, and mention if they were aware of any protests and/or rallies that were currently being organized on Facebook.
- 4) I would have expected my interviewees’ responses to be slightly higher than the previous statistic given,³³ considering that the majority of interviewees would be highly educated.

³¹ All findings in this section are “expected findings” given the circumstances while this paper was written. These expectations are grounded in my own personal experiences with Tunisian youth during my time in Tunisia, the seminars I participated in during the program, and the academic literature previously discussed.

³² James B. Stewart, *Facebook Has 50 Minutes of Your Time Each Day. It Wants More*, The New York Times, 5 May 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/06/business/facebook-bends-the-rules-of-audience-engagement-to-its-advantage.html>. Accessed 26 April 2020.

This article examines Mark Zuckerberg’s comments reporting the average daily use of Facebook at 50 minutes per user. Given the demographic I was interviewing, I would have expected their daily use to have been longer than this average.

³³ As stated in the Introduction section, “according to the World Values Survey, less than 13 percent of Tunisian youth (under 30) say they “always” vote in national elections. is is compared to 80 percent of Argentine youth, 78 percent of Brazilian youth, 77 percent of Indian youth, 80 percent of Peruvian youth and 55 percent of Romanian youth” (Yerkes).

5) I would have broken down responses to this question into two categories: interviewees who answered, “yes” to Question 4 and interviews who answered, “no” to Question 4. I would have expected a wide variety of responses to this question, but would have looked for phrases such as, “all of my friends...,” “everyone knows...” and “we all just...” to see if interviewees were able to articulate their online perceptions of community. I would have also expected most interviewees to state that Facebook does affect who they vote for, but be much more hesitant to answer the latter half of the question. Responses might have included, “I could see it having an impact, but...” and “Possibly, but...” Admittedly, I would not have expected any interviewee to make the statement, “My time spent on Facebook makes me want to abstain from voting,” but I would have looked for phrases and words that might have a similar meaning, but be phrased differently.

- a. If interviewees were clear in stating the opposite of my initial inclination, this paper would have been able to somewhat conclusively rule out Facebook as a determinant of low youth voter participation. I would have had to be very careful to avoid confirmation bias regarding this question, and thus would have asked outside resources, including professors at the University of Virginia, to review interviewees’ responses to this question.

Given my research of scholarly sources regarding Tunisian youth voter participation and the political effects of Facebook, the rest of this paper will be dedicated to making the theoretical case for why Facebook can be considered to be a determinant factor in Tunisian youth’s decision to abstain from voting.

Further research must be done to determine the magnitude of this factor, but I believe its identification has potentially important implications for future policy decisions.

C. Discussion/Analysis

Tunisian civil society organizations are aware of the potential political impact that Facebook can have. In an open letter to Facebook before the 2019 election, numerous organizations, including the prominent Al Bawsala, wrote to Facebook “asking to implement effective measures for transparency and accountability towards your users in the context of the upcoming Tunisian elections.”³⁴ Their worries regarding transparency underscore the importance of Facebook in political affairs, and its ability to significantly impact elections.

This paper is not making the case that Facebook creates the widespread youth disillusionment apparent in Tunisia. Rather, it argues that Facebook, as an online apparatus conducive to the expression of this disillusionment, has the capacity to highlight youth’s frustrations and disappointment, amplifying these feelings and ultimately affecting youth participation in formal politics such as voting. In short, Facebook exacerbates youth disillusionment.

First, Facebook allows for instantaneous comparison between Tunisian youth and youth of other countries. This online juxtaposition allows Tunisian youth to feel a sense of relative deprivation,³⁵ particularly in relation to France. As such,

³⁴ *Open letter to Facebook on the upcoming Tunisian elections of 2019*, [accessnow](https://www.accessnow.org/open-letter-to-facebook-regarding-the-upcoming-tunisian-elections-of-2019/), 2 September 2019, <https://www.accessnow.org/open-letter-to-facebook-regarding-the-upcoming-tunisian-elections-of-2019/>. Accessed 6 May 2020.

³⁵ As Marx writes in *Wage Labour and Capital*, “Our wants and pleasures have their origin in society; we therefore measure them in relation to society; we do not measure them in relation to the objects which serve for their gratification. Since they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature.”

feelings of envy are more easily spread via Facebook, contributing to a sort of “post-colonial hangover.”³⁶ When one can easily access information that reinforces feelings of jealousy, their disillusionment can be intensified in pronounced ways.³⁷

Second, Facebook create a pernicious echo chamber that allows users to continuously justify their actions and feelings. When one’s newsfeed is specifically curated through Facebook’s algorithmic structure to reverberate the feelings they express online (Vaidhyathan), the subsequent intensification of one’s beliefs is an unsurprising effect. Tunisian youth’s online presence is so powerful that some scholars have even criticized “the return of Tunisian youth to a virtual space where they follow their dreams of democracy in constructing the “Second Republic,” a republic of public freedom and the rule of law. These dreams are based not on solid ground but on social media, with the youth aiming their arrows of criticism at public policies that have not enabled a better life for all Tunisians” (Ezzine).

Just as social media sites have helped contribute to unrealistic body images,³⁸ they have helped build an unrealistic image of democracy for Tunisian youth: a digital fantasy so strong that the real world has become far less palatable. In expressing their political discontent on Facebook, Tunisian youth have created an online community that has helped justify their neglect of actual, important civic

³⁶ This is a phrase my internship coordinator last summer, the Director of the University of Virginia’s Global Internship Office, Dr. Ingrid Hakala, used to describe the lingering effects of colonialism in post-colonial countries.

³⁷ Sarah Yerkes, Phone Call from 13 May 2020.

³⁸Katelyn J. Gaffney, *Negative effects that Social Media causes on body Imaging*, Long Island University, 2017, https://digitalcommons.liu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1017&context=post_honors_theses. Accessed 9 May 2020.

duties. Functioning as site of refuge for their political activity, Facebook and its echo chamber have helped heighten and rationalize feelings of disillusionment, further removing Tunisian youth from formal politics. The copious quantity of information that Tunisian youth engage with online has bred a “narcotizing dysfunction”³⁹ that has encouraged “[abstention] from decision and action” (Lazarsfeld and Merton).

Third, with the increase in transparency that Facebook provides, Tunisian youth expect to see, albeit online, the tangible steps their political leaders are taking to solve the country’s problems. “Every ministry and public office has its own Facebook page,”⁴⁰ creating a new avenue of accountability for Facebook users, most of which are youth, to utilize. For many youth, Facebook is the central artery of their political engagement, and when they can witness the stagnation of the policymaking process online, it provides further justification for them to abstain from formal politics.

Fourth, Facebook’s functional algorithms allow extreme viewpoints to flourish. With “an ethically-compromised incentive structure which rewards the amplification of the loudest and most sensational voices,”⁴¹ Facebook supports maximalist political activity, not healthy and rational debate.

This was clearly demonstrated in Tunisia’s 2011 democratic revolution. Facebook was a mechanism for dissent, helping grow revolutionary energy that encouraged intense desires for swift change. Tunisian Facebook users did not see

³⁹ Nick Lee, *Narcotizing Dysfunction: The Danger of Information*, Medium, 7 July 2016, <https://medium.com/@nicklee3/narcotizing-dysfunction-the-danger-of-information-d832fd4869c0>. Accessed 6 May 2020.

⁴⁰ Afef Hagi, Phone Call from 12 May 2020.

⁴¹ Hugh Jones IV, *Between the Internet and Democracy*, University of Virginia Center for Politics, 2018, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UURWRD6vGK-eQcYqtsfkHJwoaANhkBdK/view>. Accessed 6 March 2020.

blogs and posts about slow-moving changes or reform within the system. The crescendo of online anti-Ben Ali sentiment was constructed within an “algorithmic system that favors items that generate strong emotions,” (Vaidhyanathan) helping revolutionaries spread their message quickly and effectively. Facebook itself did not create the widespread desire to overthrow the dictatorial regime, but it did help that desire become widely disseminated and supported.

The revolutionary energy on Facebook from 2011 has not been able to translate to democratic energy in Tunisia today. The public and those not on Facebook have moved on to participate and vote in the new political system (at least more than youth), but those still actively plugged into Facebook continue to use it as a platform for defiance and rejection of the status quo. Additionally, there is a “weakness of political culture in Tunisia inherited from 50 years of authoritarian rule that has stifled all energy of social commitment except radical contestation.”⁴² On Facebook, this uncompromising attitude is on full display. Facebook has remained a catalyst in Tunisia: a catalyst of dissent.

“When the entire information ecosystem becomes dominated by Facebook, the maladies that we have already identified in Facebook become amplified that much more. That’s a serious problem” (Vaidhyanathan). With “social media platforms [being the location] where many young people in Tunisia get their

⁴² Mounir Khélifa, Email correspondence from 5 May 2020.

news and information,”⁴³ and functioning as their “primary medium for access to political information,”⁴⁴ these concerns are magnified even more.

By helping circulate feelings of relative deprivation, creating a dangerous echo chamber, increasing transparency of government activity, and buttressing the spread of extreme political positions, Facebook has become a powerful digital playground that heightens youth disillusionment in Tunisia. Ultimately, it helps cultivate a “why bother” attitude towards voting while simultaneously encouraging revisionist, and often unrealistic, political opinions: a dangerous blend of political apathy and overwhelming disenchantment.

Counterarguments

Given the theoretical nature of the previous arguments, I realize some natural objections to my claims might arise. I will address three of the most pressing ones.

First, it is quite possible that the echo chamber effect is “overstated.”⁴⁵ A study by the Taylor and Francis Group found, “Using a nationally representative survey of adult internet users in the United Kingdom (N= 2000), we find that those who are interested in politics and those with diverse media diets tend to avoid echo chambers” (Dubois and Blank). This study also criticizes other studies

⁴³ ‘Proud to be a voice for youth’: a national TV show for Tunisian Teens, *Free Press Unlimited*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/stories/proud-to-be-a-voice-for-youth-a-national-tv-show-for-tunisian-teens>. Accessed 2 May 2020.

⁴⁴Konstantin Aal, Marén Schorch, Esma Ben Hadj Elkilani, Volker Wulf, *Facebook and the Mass Media in Tunisia*, *Media in Action*, 2018, https://www.wineme.uni-siegen.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Tunisia_Facebook_MiA_final.pdf. Accessed 4 May 2020.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Dubois and Grant Blank, *The echo chamber effect is overstated: the moderating effect political interest and diverse media*, *Information, Communication & Society*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656#aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cudGFuZGZvbmxpbmUuY29tL2RvaS9wZGYvMTAuMTA4MC8xMzY5MTE4WC4yMDE4LjE0Mjg2NTY/bmVlZEFjY2Vzcz10cnVlQEBAMA>. Accessed 9 May 2020.

of the echo chamber effect, arguing, “In studies of echo chambers, the dependent variable is commonly conceptualized as whether or not people are exposed to contrasting views from their own. This is problematic because people have a hard time recalling when they have been exposed to different ideas and so survey research is potentially flawed” (Dubois and Blank).

This is a strong counterargument against the echo chamber effect that my argument utilizes. Yet, the case of Tunisia is not so easily compared to that of the United Kingdom. The latter is a fully consolidated democracy with deeply engrained democratic norms and powerful civic institutions, whose social media users might act much differently than those in Tunisia. Additionally, my argument is predicated on the existence of strong feelings of disillusionment prior to their amplification on Facebook. As stated earlier, Facebook does not create feelings of disillusionment, but rather is a mechanism for their exacerbation. The youth population⁴⁶ of the United Kingdom has also grown up in a much different environment than youth in Tunisia (the cultural, economic, and political difference are immense), and it would be impetuous to consider this paper as capable of invalidating my arguments in support of the echo chamber effect in Tunisia.

Second, the theory of rational ignorance might be a major factor driving the lack of voter participation among Tunisian youth. “Voters may not invest the time needed to become informed about political issues and candidates if they have reason to think that any action they might take would have little or no effect

⁴⁶ Ceylan Yeginsu, *Young Voters Help Upend Last U.K. Election. Can it happen again?*, The New York Times, 12 December 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/08/world/europe/young-voters-uk-election-brexit.html>. Accessed 2 May 2020.

on political outcomes.”⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, Tunisian youth feel removed from the political arena, and have often complained about their lack of representation in Tunisian politics. Yet, a “World Values Survey (WVS) found that two-thirds of Tunisians of all age groups stated that they believe elections play an important role in their family’s economic situation. Thus, Tunisians understand that elections can have a direct impact on their personal lives, yet young Tunisians, in particular, still choose to abstain from voting” (Yerkes). The results of this survey seem to debunk the explanatory value of the rational ignorance theory. Even so, this theory might still account for some decisions of youth to abstain from voting. Yet, this would not necessarily undermine the general theory put forth in this paper.

Third, and most strikingly, perhaps Facebook does the opposite of what this paper has argued: it helps increase youth voter participation. Both news articles related to this topic and well-researched scholarly pieces have argued this exact point. As stated in the first edition of the Arab Social Media Report by the Dubai School of Government, “Social networking tools have the potential to enhance citizen engagement in the region, promote social inclusion and create opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship and development.”⁴⁸ On election day in 2018, CNBC reported, “Facebook is trying to surface relevant information for users through its 2018 Election tab, where it lists the candidates on the ballot

⁴⁷ *The Theory of Rational Ignorance*, Community and Economic Development Program Clemson University, <https://www.uv.es/=atortosa/rational%20ignorance.pdf>. Accessed 14 April 2020.

⁴⁸ *Facebook Usage: Factors and Analysis*, Arab Social Media Report Dubai School of Government, January 2011, <https://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/UserManagement/PDF/ASMR%20Report%201.pdf>. Accessed 28 April 2020.

in your district. Facebook-owned Instagram⁴⁹ is also helping to get out the vote by adding an “I Voted” sticker and a “We Voted!” story at the top of the app.”⁵⁰ The recent presidential campaign of President-Elect Kais Saied might also further this narrative of Facebook as a tool for political mobilization. Indeed, “Saied’s supporters used Facebook to rally voters”⁵¹ and he was able to capture an astonishingly high percentage of the youth voters (90% of voters age 18-25 and 83.8% of voters age 26-44).⁵²

Moreover, Tunisian youth activists supportive of Saied’s main opposition, the Ennahda party, are particularly active on Facebook. They have helped discredit many posts expressing anti-Ennahda sentiment and have recently orchestrated an online campaign against the new President after his political disagreements with Ennahda party leader Rached Gannouchi. With all of this political activity on Facebook, how can it be possible that Facebook usage plays a role in decreasing youth voter participation?

Undoubtedly, Facebook has the *capacity* to increase overall voter participation in elections. Yet, when it comes to the specific demographic that this paper is focused on, its potential to positively impact voting diminishes

⁴⁹ Instagram, *Introducing the “I Voted” & “We Voted” Stickers*, 1 November 2018, <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/sharing-your-election-day-excitement-on-instagram>. Accessed 23 April 2020.

⁵⁰ Lauren Feiner, *How Google, Apple, Facebook and other tech companies are getting out the vote on Election Day*, CNBC, 6 November 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/06/google-facebook-and-twitter-election-day-get-out-the-vote-efforts.html>. Accessed 25 April 2020.

⁵¹ Imen Neffati, *Tunisia’s Second Revolution*, in *Jacobin*, 10 October 2019, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/10/tunisia-presidential-election-kais-saied-karoui>. Accessed 24 April 2020.

⁵² *Présidentielle 2019 [2e Tour]*, *Web Manager Center: Simga Conseil*, 13 October 2019, <https://www.webmanagercenter.com/2019/10/13/439974/presidentielle-2019-2e-tour-qui-a-vote-pour-kais-saied-selon-sigma-conseil/>. Accessed 10 May 2020.

quickly. Facebook might help Tunisian youth engage in additional civic activity, both online and offline, but this does not necessarily lead them to vote.

Furthermore, my argument is not reliant on denying that Tunisian youth are politically active on Facebook, and rather recognizes that this is the platform through which much of their political activity occurs. Yet, this online political activity occurs simultaneously in the same application where they can become increasingly disillusioned (as explained above). In sum, while they might read political articles, debate opinions, or even organize protests and rallies on Facebook, this political energy is still insufficient to bring youth to the voting booth because of the overwhelming disillusionment that Tunisian youth feel (and that is amplified by their time on Facebook).

In the case of President-Elect Kais Saied, one potential explanation for his popularity among youth is the countless Facebook pages that supported his candidacy: a direct appeal to youth in a youth-dominated medium. Yet, the statistic that many news articles cited — 90% of youth voters voting for Kais Saied — is misleading. Although 90% of the youth who voted supported Saied, only 28% of youth age 18-25 voted in the second round of the presidential elections (Chakir). Thus, *overall* youth voter participation was still extremely low. Additionally, youth were attracted to Saied because of his populist, anti-establishment character. He was backed by no political party, rejected coverage from mainstream media sources, and conducted a highly untraditional campaign that consisted of many visits to cafes across the country. These strategies ultimately earned him the nickname, “Mr. Clean” in Tunisia, and youth voters saw him as a candidate who could bring a new, fresh perspective to Tunisian politics. Yet, with the large majority of youth not voting in this election, his

candidacy did not represent an example of Facebook helping increase youth voter participation.

With a lack of data to corroborate my argument due to the coronavirus pandemic, these counterarguments hold important weight, and thus this paper has given them a considerable amount of attention. Further research is needed to explore *how* youth spend their time on Facebook (looking at their Newsfeed, exploring groups in which they are members, updating their status, reading shared news articles, etc.) and to explain the magnitude of the effect that my paper has described. Without conducting interviews, my argument had to rely mainly on theoretical analysis and synthesize of scholarly work in hopes of bringing attention to this issue. Widespread interviews of Tunisian youth would help validate (or invalidate) the argument put forth in this paper, and should be conducted to fully understand the potential impact of Facebook on youth disillusionment and low voter participation.

IV. **Looking Ahead**⁵³

Tunisian youth have been both political leaders and outsiders over the past decade. In 2011, they spearheaded revolutionary efforts, but their current participation in formal politics is discouragingly low; and, their disillusionment has potentially significant effects on the process of democratic consolidation in their country. Tunisia's nascent democracy is under a decade old, and thus still in a fragile condition. The participation of youth in formal politics should be a primary concern of Tunisian government officials, as engaging this population

⁵³ This conclusion will be written considering the validity of the argument presented in this paper. As stated earlier, further research is necessary to support the theory presented above.

segment in formal political processes is crucial to helping solve the issues they face.

Tunisian youth feel ostracized from the inner workings of the political sphere and see their vote as useless. Without their participation in voting, leaders are able to be far less responsive to their demands. It is a vicious cycle of rejection that ultimately breeds youth disillusionment.

This widespread feeling is dangerous for the future of Tunisia, as “there is no greater threat to democracy than indifference and passivity on the part of citizens.”⁵⁴ If youth can be motivated to participate in formal politics, leaders with the capacity to enact meaningful change will be held accountable to both acknowledge and act upon their concerns. “As the glow of that achievement [the 2011 revolution] dims and demands for prosperity and fairness grow more urgent,” (Eurasia Group) engaging youth in the formal political process becomes all the more important.

If youth continue to operate on the outskirts of the formal political arena, their critique of politicians might change character to a broader critique of democracy (Yerkes), potentially undermining the democratic gains the country has achieved over the past nine years. The inclusion of youth in formal political processes would undoubtedly help the consolidation of Tunisia’s democracy, allowing democratic norms to take root throughout the country. The “democratic deficit” (Ezzine) that Tunisian youth are operating within threatens the stability of the entire political system and should be considered a pressing issue by actors at all levels of government and civil society.

⁵⁴ Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, quote from Polish civil society leader, Bronislaw Geremek, 242.

Governmental efforts, such as “Digital Tunisia 2020”⁵⁵ offer promising steps in the right direction. One of the planned “effects” of the project is “increased social, economic, and financial inclusion of the youth,” and it will help promote solutions to youth unemployment. Focusing on creating opportunities for youth will undoubtedly help combat youth disillusionment. Policies encouraging engagement with youth on Facebook and other social media sites in an approachable manner will also help this issue. By working with youth in “their domain,” Tunisian officials can directly address the negative effects of Facebook and potentially use the online environment in constructive, positive ways.

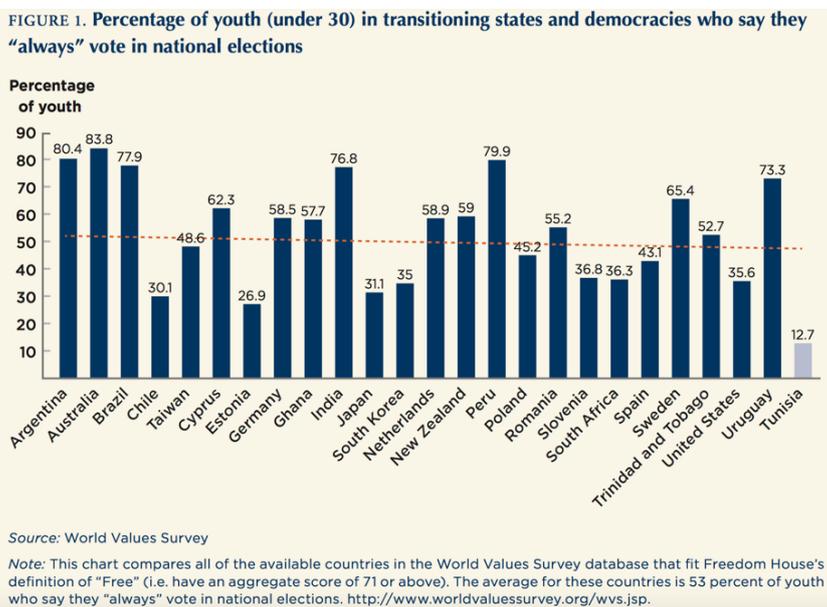
The issue of youth disillusionment in Tunisia is important, and Facebook is currently functioning to make the issue worse. Yet, a renewed focus on the plight of Tunisian youth and a concerted effort to utilize social media in a positive, civically-inspired manner can help fix this problem, and ultimately help secure the future health of Tunisia’s democracy.

⁵⁵ PICU/RDGN Departments, *Support Project For The Implementation Of The “Digital Tunisia 2020” National Strategic Plan*, African Development Bank, October 2017, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Tunisia_-_Support_Project_for_the_Implementation_of_the_“Digital_Tunisia_2020”_National_Strategic_Plan.pdf. Accessed 6 May 2020.

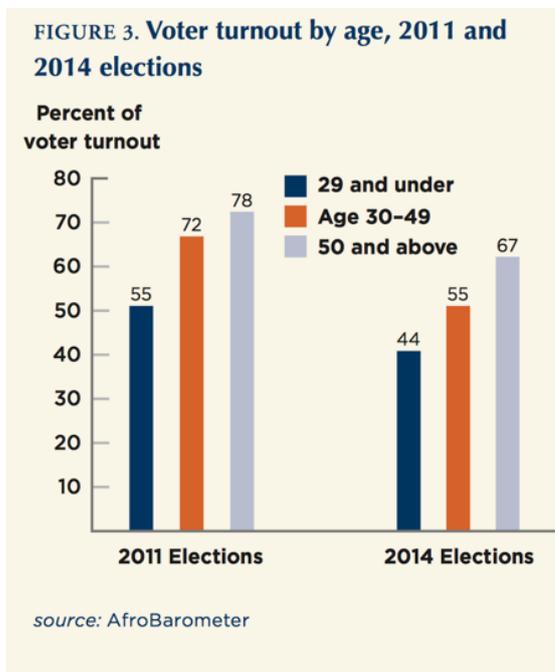
Appendix

Both of the graphs below are taken from Dr. Sarah Yerkes' 2017 paper, "Where Have All the Revolutionaries Gone?"

A.



B.



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