Gen-Z, Gender, & Governmental Grievances: A post-transition political philosophy for the newest generation of women in a ‘failed’ state.

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Gen-Z, Gender, & Governmental Grievances: A post-transition political philosophy for the newest generation of women in a ‘failed’ state.

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Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia
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Abstract

Over a decade since the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, a new generation has come into adulthood, grappling with anxieties about their future in the midst of continuous national instability. This paper aims to bridge their sentiments of disillusionment and disengagement towards politics together with general conceptions of life by ‘Generation-Z’ women (between the ages of 18 and 30). The findings follow conceptions of history, freedoms, rights and personal life, particularly as they are affected by gender in Tunisian society. Specifically, this study is interested in how these aspects have changed from before to after the political changes of the past decade, and how they are reflected on by those with limited memory of before. The paper draws on formal (published) literature as well as contemporary online articles on new experimental frameworks, as well as interviews and survey responses from local women based in or near the capital city of Tunis.
Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Dr. Mounir Khélifa, for his support, resources, and encouragement throughout the course of my research. I would similarly like to thank my advisor Dr. Hafedh Chekir, for his guidance and expertise.

In addition, I would like Rym Bouderbala for the time spent helping me hammer out the direction of my research and the invaluable advice and kindness throughout my time in Tunisia.

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Finally, I want to give special thanks to my fellow peers that assisted me daily and kept me going throughout this process; without you this project would have been impossible to complete, and I will always value our time working together.
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Introduction

The Arab Spring—and in particular, the revolution in Tunisia—has been understood to be a movement towards democracy as a political ideal. The period of 2011-2014 was widely heralded as an ushering-in of rights and liberties for the citizens of each country where protests had led way to significant change. All across the Middle East and North Africa, “The currents of hope and outrage that traveled so electrically from country-to-country and from people-to-people in 2011 were a remarkable, shared feature of the new regional landscape.”\(^1\) The ousting of Tunisia’s autocratic ruler, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali came just under a month after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouaziz in Ben Arous. This surge of hope was not without its anxieties, as a new system needed to be implemented in the midst of what was essentially a power vacuum.

In today’s politics, that spark of hope seems to be slowly and painfully dying out. In my conversations with academics and locals alike, I have found widespread dismay at the outcome of this ‘Jasmine Revolution’. In many of my interactions with young Tunisians while living as a student in La Marsa, a suburban town of Tunis, I discovered that this was an especially interesting conundrum, as they had come into adulthood through this period of instability and turbulent political and economic conditions. With unemployment still incredibly high and rampant corruption amongst political institutions, the resulting effect is one of disappointment and disillusion. From this, many have turned towards radical solutions and see more appeal in populist figures.

\(^1\) Anderson (pp. 154)
Current President Kais Saied was elected in 2019 as an Independent social conservative, winning an alarming 73% of the votes cast. In a speech following the results, Saied proclaimed, “What I have done is a new revolution,” continuing the rhetoric used during his campaign to become a force of reform. He made a pointed effort at appealing to the marginalized feelings of younger generations, who had only known economic and political instability, as a charismatic force promising to shake things up. That is certainly a promise kept, as the president has taken many controversial and sweepingly radical actions, such as freezing the parliament in July 2021 and then the judiciary in February 2022. He has done these political calculations by publically reasoning that it would be for the better, as a way to root out corruption that has been a fixture in Tunisian politics for a while. His base largely believes this rationale, and he remains popular among the younger generation.

What this paper is specifically concerned with is the ways in which these tense and ever-changing political dynamics, as they are largely impacted by economic factors, have been supported by the political ideologies of Gen-Z individuals, particularly women. I am intrigued about how my contemporaries in age perceive the past with a large future ahead of them, and how certain landmark events of our generation’s childhood, such as U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East in the early-aughts, the financial recession of 2009, and the Arab Spring uprisings of the early 2010s have informed common anxieties as we face the workforce. My interest in how different social and self perceptions build political beliefs are largely due to my undergraduate educational background in

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2 Reuters (2019)
Thus, the goal of this project is to attempt to find commonalities across women that grew up as minors during the outset of the revolution in how they perceive of Tunisian politics and what that means for the future of the country. My desire is not to oversimplify this manifestly diverse group’s varying beliefs, but rather to listen and study what driving factors and experiences have led each of these women to their conclusions. As such, my study was based on qualitative interviews and a holistic, methodical survey to collect these narratives. Of course, this study uses responses from a dozen young women living in a specific section of the country and so these findings and interpretation should not be directly extrapolated to the rest of Tunisian women, as I was simply attempting to get a pulse as to what could be in the political atmosphere. My scope is small for this reason, and more so focused on the depth of each individual’s responses and belief systems.

At the outset of conducting research, I found it necessary to ground my questions and future analysis in theory that would accurately contextualize the weight of different social phenomena in Tunisian society. I wanted to integrate gendered development theory as to consider what questions to ask concerning various areas of life and gender in society, in order to better picture where young women feel especially pressured and what is most commonly felt. Two concepts I decided were well suited as frameworks for understanding the role of norms, inequality, and identity are the capability approach and political constructivism, as they center the autonomy of individuals but account for the societal and state conditions that influence their condition. The capability approach, contemporary
development theory, and political constructivism are also notably post-modern, post-colonial theories and I see it fitting to utilize them in conjunction as a basis for my questioning and direction, especially in dealing with a formerly colonial society’s modern notions of self.

My overarching questions are therefore as follows:

➢ Do young Tunisian women generally have a positive or negative perception of recent history and outlook on the future?

➢ Why might young women particularly display feelings of disillusionment?

➢ What characterizes a distinctly ‘Gen-Z’ political philosophy for women?

➢ Do current social norms have any impact on their political philosophies/involvement?

➢ How does a gendered analysis help define the state of political rights in Tunisian society?

➢ On a broad level, how do ideas of gender and societal position influence politics?
Literature review

I. Theoretical Frameworks

i. Capability Approach

Originated principally by Amartya Sen (as well as Martha Nussbaum, though I will focus on Sen’s model), the capability approach asks for further consideration of the human condition beyond basic needs or utilitarian happiness when measuring quality of life. Instead, Sen identifies one’s ability to accomplish certain things as the benchmark for a ‘good outcome’ of social development. The question at hand should thus be what choices a citizen of a particular society has in creating and achieving their own desired fulfillment. To this end, “much attention is paid to the links between material, mental and social well-being, or to the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of life.” Further, political and societal structures must allow for diversity in desires and alleviate certain barriers to their citizens’ abilities to reach eudaimonia (a borrowed Aristotelian term essentially meaning ‘ultimate human flourishing’).

Importantly, the Capability Approach prioritizes equity over sum wealth or basic needs as a qualifier for a desirable society. “The human development and capability approach developed as an alternative development paradigm that challenges standard economic frameworks” and necessitates a move away from blanket measures. One such economic standard, for example, would be Gross Domestic Product, which is both too narrow and too vague of a measurement for true development, as

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3 Robeyns (2005), pp. 96
4 Clark, 2006.
it is constrained to simply an added total of the value generated by production in a given country. It is inaccurate to Sen, as it fails to observe how “different people and societies typically differ in their capacity to convert income and commodities into valuable achievements.” To consider wealth without whom the actors are that benefit more or less, or even have more or less of an advantage in systems that inhibit (an already highly unlikely) even distribution of that wealth, is ignorant of more exigent factors at play.

Sen fundamentally rejects attempts to set a canonical set of qualifiers that would be meant to apply to any and all contexts as well, because there is no capability set that could be ‘objectively correct’; it would not account for the diverse perceptions of what is most desired by each individual (Sen, 1993). However, establishing capability as the best measure of social development suggests a need for some specific qualifiers to understand the conditions of real cases. A relatively new and popular assessment tool that is heavily influenced by Sen’s work and is a prime example of his theory in action is the Human Development Index. The HDI and other similar indexes use specific statistical markers in dimensions such as education and health in order to create a broader image of the circumstances in each measured region. “Among other things the CA has been used to investigate poverty, inequality, well-being, social justice, gender, social exclusion, health, disability, child poverty and identity. It has also been related to human needs, human rights and human security as well as development more broadly.” The HDI also takes into account freedom of choice and cultural practices that differ from other groups when measuring certain categories in order to even out a cross measurement. For

\[5\] Clark, 2006, pp. 33
\[6\] Clark, 2006, pp. 41
instance, a group that practices fasting for religious reasons should not be considered the same as one who cannot afford food, since the former has the choice to forgo eating whereas the latter is involuntarily hungry. The focus is choice and thus degrees of autonomy. This is helpful because in observing qualities of life in various populations, one can come away with a clearer, more nuanced understanding of the abilities to make choices in certain contexts.

As a general framing, Sen provides five categories as a key foundation for operating with freedom; these consist of political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. These broadly point to an expansion of human capabilities under sociopolitical structuring and so assessment considerations should fall under these tenets. When considering where gender should be placed, it could encompass a combination of the five. In dealing with the societal conception of gender, “The CA also provides a strong justification for the promotion of interpersonal equity in the space of basic capabilities.” Returning to the HDI example, the relevant dimensions of human development I am most concerned about in creating conditions for human development are shown in Figure 1 below.

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8 Clark, 2006, pp. 40-1
Besides the immediately obvious ‘Gender Equality’ stipulation for women’s rights, we can also imagine civic/community participation and security as litmus tests for how enfranchised, included and secure women are in society.

On an additional note, Sen elucidates his approach further by also devaluing utility in considering condition, as “utility can be easily swayed by mental conditioning or adaptive expectations.”\(^9\) In Sen’s view, prioritizing utility endangers the primacy of the intrinsic value of ‘rights and positive freedoms’, which could be sacrificed in the name of relative net happiness for some. This is notable to this study as it clarifies the potentiality for relativism when making value judgments that may be present in the perceptions collected by my interviews. Sen maintains that there may exist ‘significant disparities between the externally observed’ and ‘subjective impressions’ of one’s state (Sen, 1985). That said, in a study attempting to identify valuable capabilities among both urban and rural populations in South Africa, “most people appear to share a common vision of the good, which is not fundamentally at odds with the capabilities advocated.”\(^10\) So, despite notions tied to circumstantial

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\(^{10}\) Clark, 2002
difficulties, we can still draw some certain conclusions on a common philosophy for what a group may consider as ‘good’.

**ii. Gender and Development**

The article ‘Gender and Development’ by Ruth Pearson, a professor of International Development and the director of the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Leeds, gives a brief overview and framework on how international development initiatives have engaged in women’s empowerment. She articulates three primary areas of investigation, the first of which including how national governments have evolved their development policy and intervention throughout the past. Secondly, Pearson advocates for in-depth gendered considerations of developmental policies and practices, and, third, of “gender and global change which encompasses planned and unplanned changes in the global economy and social order which both impact on and are influenced by the changing nature of gender identities and roles.”

Despite the integral role of gender in societally-granted capabilities, Pearson writes that it is, “Only in more recent times have development agencies returned to a more holistic consideration of women’s empowerment.” She defines women’s empowerment as encompassing “the improvement of women’s individual, intra-household, economic, political and social status, and autonomy,” and provides us with concrete areas to understand the proliferation of rights movements in recent history. While the Tunisian Revolution was concentrated on general political freedoms, we can also consider

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how this goal has affected Tunisian women in the decade following, and up to today. Pearson highlights an imperative intersectionality between “three aspects of gender and development – the gendering [of] international development policy, the interrogation of development policy through a gender lens, and the analysis of global change”\textsuperscript{13} Applying a gendered analysis to developmental goals in, say, a young democracy like Tunisia, can expand our view and create valuable insights into how the state is functioning in general. If the goal of a political system is a theoretical expansion of freedom and opportunities for the common person, but in fact has not been equal for certain sections of the population, then it has not been sufficient and must be further reviewed.

\textit{iii. Political Constructivism}

Another ontological framework I used in engineering my questions for this study is Political Constructivism, as told by Alexander Wendt in \textit{Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics}. This theory establishes that political systems are greatly influenced by societal thought, which is in turn composed of individuals’ ideations. These three levels function in a chain to the end that if a norm is widely held, it will be reflected and inducted into political institutions. Importantly, it posits that these individuals’ perceptions of the world are not purely behavioral (as in the rationalist basis of realism and liberalism), but also greatly and inextricably informed by their identities and experiences. Elaborating on the significance of “\textit{Anarchy is What States Make of it}”, Wendt means that in moments of structural uncertainty, such as in anarchy (both when occurring inside a state, but also globally), the situation can be moved in a variety of directions.

\textsuperscript{13} Pearson, 2002, pp. 195.
What matters is how collective perspectives are construed by ‘norm entrepreneurs’ and the influence they bear in moving society.

Wendt is concerned with the power dynamics between certain groups in society and how that is reflected in international relations, though I will be using his framework to interpret the role of individual experience and societal currents in constructing a political philosophy. Described by Dr. Sarina Theys, a professor at Newcastle University:

“Constructivism is often said to simply state the obvious – that actions, interactions and perceptions shape reality. Indeed, that idea is the source of the name of this theory family. Our thoughts and actions literally construct international relations. Yet, this seemingly simple idea, when applied theoretically, has significant implications for how we can understand the world. The discipline of International Relations benefits from constructivism as it addresses issues and concepts that are neglected by mainstream theories – especially realism. Doing so, constructivists offer alternative explanations and insights for events occurring in the social world. They show, for instance, that it is not only the distribution of material power, wealth and geographical conditions that can explain state behavior but also ideas, identities and norms. Furthermore, their focus on ideational factors shows that reality is not fixed, but rather subject to change”

I find this appealing as it conceives of the individual as a cornerstone of societal and state construction, and speaks to the phenomenon of identity politics today. Critical constructivism in particular
investigates, “‘how’-type questions such as how do actors come to believe in a certain identity.”\footnote{Theys, Sarina (2018)} I will use this framework to contextualize the importance of social thought among young Tunisian women, and how their conceptions of the past will influence where the country’s democracy is headed in the future. It will also explain how societal norms and pressures work in a cyclical pattern, in that they are constructed of previous expectations and are perpetuated by current reactions.

II. Contemporary issues

i. Democracy & Youth Participation

As this study is largely related to the democratic movement, freedoms, and political structures of Tunisia, it is necessary to form a basic understanding on what kind of system is in play, in order to then assess the situation and feelings surrounding it. The term ‘Democracy’ is a universal, common concept but with many contextual variations. Still, Economist Irma Adelman insists on establishing a broad definition: “We define democracy to be a political system that is characterized by the existence of competitive political parties in which the majority respects the rights of minorities and there are institutions which limit the power of government and ensure its accountability.” But beyond simply the political dimension, we can consider a socially democratic framework. “Social democracy is attained when both the constitution and political institutions guarantee possibilities for equal ethnic, religious and gender participation.”\footnote{Adelman (2006).} It is therefore visible how certain identities are informed by
political structures, and how balanced interactions between the two (such as protections or civic
engagement) are vital in maintaining the health of democracies.

Still, Adelman refutes the position that democracy immediately results in greater equality nor
does it indicate an absence of disparities. In fact, if not executed in a prudent and equitable manner,
“democracy cannot persist for any length of time if inequalities among groups of citizens are too vast.”
Adelman predicts that it will instead fold from the social and economic tensions, with only two routes
out: reform or repression/authoritarianism. One section of the population that Adelman addresses is
the middle class, which is also the group that I primarily interviewed. As an inverse effect of expanding
economic prospects and democracy: “the middle class itself may develop political aspirations that are
not consonant with current national form of government. It may become restless and disaffected, and
generate political instability and domestic strife of varying degrees of intensity. Rather than bridging
the growing gaps between the masses and the elites, it may foment political unrest and civil strife aimed
at toppling the current rulers.”\textsuperscript{16} One issue in particular that may manifest is demonstrated in the
example of democratic movements in the mid-20th century, and seems to echo sentiments of
dissatisfaction regarding the economic growth in Tunisia today. In cases that ultimately failed, “the
major focus of the leadership was not economic and social modernisation but rather the creation of a
national polity (that is, nation-building).” So while attention should of course be paid to how political
structures are developed, it is imperative to also consider issues of wealth, growth, and society. Given

\textsuperscript{16} Adelman, pp. 106.
that Anderson feels these divides could very easily result in drastic political change, the security of democracy rests on the ability to address political, social, and economic dimensions together.

When discussing the revolution and the role of different groups in popular transitory movements, contributions from young people cannot be overlooked. In an article entitled, “Youth, the ‘Arab Spring’, and Social Movements”, Dr. Charles W. Anderson rejects youth involvement as characterized by naivete and chaos, instead underscoring the group as a vital political factor due to a “capacity for stimulating the development of new types of associational activity, cultural and political discourses, and novel subjectivities and social networks. The conditions under which these capabilities develop fruitfully and provide a basis for mobilization should draw more attention than they have.”

It is thus critical that my analysis of how young women perceive democracy, the revolution, and its aftermath is not dismissive but rather interprets the political environment to discern causal factors for legitimate attitudes. It must also include a look into respondents’ activities corresponding to the areas Anderson lists in order to observe mobilization (or a lack thereof).

Though his initial article was drafted in late 2012 (an edition that is admittedly more optimistic), Anderson attached an afternote to his journal article, discussing the disappointments of many other Arab Spring movements in the MENA region. The ‘Arab Winter’ (named to mark a bleak end of the Spring) saw Egypt’s complications with Morsi, the ‘shambles’ of the Libyan conflict, and a devastating civil war in Syria, to name a few. In the past decade, conversation on the swell of the Arab Spring has ended up resting the most hope on Tunisia as a shining example of what could be

\[\text{17 Anderson (2013), pp. 151.}\]
accomplished as the last outpost of success. But that period appears to be waning in light of the attitudes reflected by many Tunisians, and will be explored in my research. Looking at other examples, we can trace where cracks may have formed: "In cases where a regime or its top figures are dislodged, the initial cycle(s) of mobilization and opposition typically find greater consensus (around limited or first-order aims, such as toppling dictators) than do their aftermaths when the revolutionary camp often splinter as debate, division and conflict reemerge among its constituent elements." This contextual element of other cases may be a key in understanding how the revolution had so much popular momentum but yet has fizzled out to be replaced with controversy and division.

On a final note, Anderson offers specific guidance and suggests that, "Perhaps what such studies [on youth, labor and social forces] could offer would be to further develop a more dynamic and profound sense of the sometimes meandering, and frequently unglamorous, struggles of ordinary people to remake their worlds." This contributed to how I went about contemplating the formation of these women’s political philosophies and judgments, within the context of a system still in motion. It would be wrong to assume that progress would be linear, and that there would be no push-and-pull over how to formulate a government agreeable to all. As such, the frustration, disillusionment, and at times dissonant conceptions of what direction the country is going in—all of which will be discussed at further length in the analysis of my findings—is a natural feature in the fallout of a revolution, when rebuilding a new and perhaps unsteady future.

19 Anderson, pp. 152.
To investigate the recorded participation, a journal article entitled “Explaining Divergent Revolutionary Coalitions: Regime Strategies and the Structuring of Participation in the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions” cites a 2011 Arab Barometer Study, in which participants were asked, “Did you participate in the protests against former president Hosni Mubarak/Ben Ali between January 25 and February 11, 2011/December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011?” The latter in both options refer to the revolution in Tunisia, marking the interim between the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouzizi and Ben Ali’s escape to Saudi Arabia. The results are broken into age range as displayed in Table 1 below:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE CATEGORY</th>
<th>% total of population (Tunisia)</th>
<th>% of revolutionaries (Tunisia)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 or older</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed, there is a strong correlation between age and participation in protests, which were a driving force behind the resignation of Ben Ali. The youngest group is the most represented in the revolutionary movement, and the data continues in an inverse trend where as age increases, participation decreases. Additionally, of the occupations respondents were constrained to, the category which represented the second-highest percentage of revolutionaries (after “Unemployed”) in Tunisia
was “Student”, at 18.9%. This is an overrepresentation of a group that constituted 8.6% of the Tunisian population. While the population has of course aged, it is quite remarkable how distinct age has been a determinant for mobilization in the past. It raises the question of how involved those who are now in those youngest categories are, and reiterates the importance of examining how civic engagement shapes political attitudes.

**ii. Changing Views of Democracy in Tunisia**

In a poll by the Arab Barometer in 2016 on an assortment of public opinions, we can observe an emerging phenomenon of a turn away from democracy, particularly among youth. While much has occurred in the years since this survey, it is still notable for its findings just five years following the outset of the Revolution. Below in Table 2, these shifts are clear and apparent:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changing Views of Democracy</th>
<th>% say democracy is...</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indecisive</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td>+50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad for Stability</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td>+34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad for Economy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td>+28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best System</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
<td>+16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Set in contrast with opinions during the revolutionary movement, democracy still has majority support today as the best possible system, compared to other potential conditions. Still, the assignment of negative sentiments towards democracy has overwhelmingly increased. Though it may be a better system, “Fewer than one-in-five rates the state of the economy as good and nine-in-ten say corruption is rife.” Again, just five years on, democracy is seen far less favorably: Tunisians are three times as likely to say democracy is a destabilizing force (+34 points), and more than twice as likely to say it is a harm to the economy (+28).\textsuperscript{21} The turbulent political transitions and stifled economy of the years following the momentum of the revolution appears to have resulted in Tunisians rating democracy as insecure and inefficient for important facets of national functionality.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Concerns about Democracy</th>
<th>% who say democracy is...</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad for Stability</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>+11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad for the Economy</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indecisive</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best System</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above, Table 3 splits respondents into two age ranges, and subsequently found that those in the younger category are more likely to express negative sentiments towards democracy. Those in the 18-34 category are 11 points more likely to say democracy is bad for stability and 8 points more likely

\textsuperscript{21} Robins (2016), pp. 1-3.
to say it is bad for the economy compared with those who are 35 and older.  

“The problems facing Tunisia are particularly acute for younger Tunisians, who are more likely to be dissatisfied with the political situation. For example, those who are 18-34 are 17 points less likely to trust the government than those who are 35 and older” Those between the ages of 18-34 may not remember life before the revolution as well as the older group, and it seems that memory may play a great role in how Tunisian institutions are perceived in relation to democracy and recent history. “These differences reflect the challenges the younger generation has experienced early in their adult lives, including the far higher rate of youth unemployment in Tunisia,” and these worries are likely a high causal factor for why most Tunisian youth wish to emigrate.  

I will thus investigate how young women may attribute issues of employment, finances, and security to the political landscape and what they feel towards democracy in general.


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22 Robins, pp. 13.
23 Robbins, pp. 11.
Finally, Figure 2 above juxtaposes the average rating of Tunisia as democratic with the average rating of democracy as a suitable system. The favorability of democracy has fallen despite a slight rise in identifying the government as such. This contrast between what is realistic versus idealistic for Tunisia is a key measure for the development of political philosophies. I will continue the investigation of this concept, measuring with similar questioning to see overall the attitudes of young Tunisian women today, not only regarding how they perceive the government’s handling and aptitude for democracy, but also how they view themselves in the context of the population.

Another question set I wish to replicate is from another Arab Barometer study from 2018, accessed from an article in the Review of Democracy that asks ‘Is Democracy in Tunisia threatened or is it on the way to consolidation?’ The particular set I am interested in is concerned with Tunisians’ trust in governmental institutions. Figure 3 assesses trust in parliament and the politicians that are active in it:

*Figure 3. Trust in Parliament, percentage (2018), by the Arab Barometer. Retrieved from revdem.ceu.edu/2021/10/02/is-democracy-in-tunisia-threatened-or-is-it-on-the-way-to-consolidation*
The results are consistent with the growing evidence that a majority of Tunisians are unhappy with their government, with respondents reporting a deeply growing distrust. Considering the events of July 25, 2021 and the polarizing dynamic between President Saied and parliament, I will ask questions and have participants rate certain figures to assess a broader, up-to-date impression of Tunisian institutions.

The journal article concludes with a warning of what these shifting attitudes could mean for Tunisian political stability and why it’s important to observe the relationship between economic growth and political institutions:

“As several scholars have already pointed out, political institutions are not enough to achieve democratic consolidation. Without economic reforms, the social contract will remain fragile and might even fall apart. In Tunisia, despite the democratic milestones the country has reached, democratic development still remains incomplete. Therefore, there will be no democratic consolidation without a well-functioning economy, and there will be no economic growth without stable and strong political institutions”

Dysfunction in this dynamic and political grievances can easily devolve into distrust and lead to a breakdown in democratization, especially “if people’s frustration with economic performance and redistribution is not prioritized and if their expectations of what democracy has to offer are not realized.”24 My interviews will therefore revolve around this formula, and attempt to identify how

24 Mehraz (2021)
ingrained distrust in Tunisian democracy and democracy in general is into the political ideologies of
different individuals and what trends could be found across them.

**iii. Unemployment in Tunisia**

The Tunisian Revolution was largely influenced by the issue of employment and wealth
inequality. Paralyzing rates of joblessness and inability to earn a living under Former President Ben Ali
were driving factors for a push for dignity and change. Unfortunately, this mobilization towards
economic reform is as relevant as ever, as unemployment continues to plague the Tunisian population
today. In the third quarter of 2021 (the most recent set available), the national Tunisian Institute of
Statistics reported that 18.4% of the population was unemployed.\(^{25}\)

*Figure 4. Unemployment rate in Tunisia (percentage) over 10 years, by the National Institute of Statistics,

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on economies all over the
world, and it is consistent with international trends that unemployment spiked in 2020. But while

\(^{25}\) Statistics Tunisia (2021)
some have been able to curb the spike, Tunisia’s unemployment rate is even higher than in 2020. I anticipate in my findings that unemployment will still likely be a major concern, especially since it was reported by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights that, “6798 protests were organized between January and June 2021.” Of those that occurred in these six months, “more than 80% of them protested unemployment and asked for an improvement in work and living conditions.”

I want to look further into how staggering unemployment rates may affect attitudes towards the government’s abilities, since it can clearly serve as a catalyst for political movement.

Additionally, when the data was split by sex, the unemployment rate rose to 24.1% for females as opposed to 15.9% for males. Furthermore, since my identified research participants will be either currently enrolled in university or graduated with at least a university degree, the subcategorization of unemployment rate among higher education graduates by sex revealed astounding results shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Higher education graduate unemployment rate in Tunisia by sex (percentage), from 2012 to 2022, by the National Institute of Statistics, Tunisia. Retrieved from https://tradingeconomics.com/tunisia/unemployment-rate

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher education graduates unemployment rate</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Institute of Statistics

Update: 21-01-2021

26 Mehraz (2021)
27 Statistics Tunisia (2020)
For female graduates of higher education, 40.7% were jobless, compared to 17.6% for males in the third quarter of 2020. Importantly, this pattern appears to not have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting impacts, as this disparity has been held relatively constant since well before the outbreak. While no specific causations are given to explain the vast disparity, I anticipate that employment and career concerns will be a high priority to the respondents, given their demographic traits and stage in life.

**iv. Migration**

Today, about 10% of the Tunisian population is living abroad. Of that percentage, 83.5% of the diaspora resides in the European Union, with the majority choosing France as their destination. Considering proximity, language, and history, it would make sense that this would be the case, as the migratory pattern “to France from North Africa cannot be explained without reference to previous colonial links. Yet, factors other than political ties must also be incorporated into any explanation of global migration in the twenty-first century.” In Tunisia’s current economic and political state, it is certainly plausible that more ‘push’ factors exist rather than just the ‘pull’ of certain familiarities.

As discussed in previous subsections of this Literature Review, discontent with government and financial prospects would make emigration all the more appealing, especially to those with enough means to find a new residence. “The impact on the countries of origin can be profound and essentially revolve around two groups of issues, brain drain and remittances.” Currently, this issue is quite

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28 Statistics Tunisia (2020)
29 Pouessel (2020)
prevalent to the Tunisian population, which at present has lost a significant share of its higher-educated and professional community. In France alone, there are about 44,107 highly skilled Tunisian migrants aged 25 actively working abroad. Among the medical professionals educated in Tunisia, 22% settled in France.\textsuperscript{31} As previously established, my interviewees are in the process of or already have obtained a degree from Tunisian educational institutions, so as to understand how brain drain may affect them is relevant.

These issues combined with the mythologization of success defined as ‘making it out’, has only been intensified with the help of social media. “Tunisian nationals abroad organize themselves informally as an emigrant lobby: their messages flow through Facebook pages, websites, associations, etc., spreading information, developing solidarity and enabling mobilization.”\textsuperscript{32} While this is surely a useful tool for individuals planning to move and may be looking to find appropriate resources and connections, it also can contribute to a notion of ‘grass is greener’ syndrome. The opportunities and prosperity may be disproportionately advertised back to a distant audience, creating a feedback loop on a manicured portrayal of success abroad. A primary topic I wish to explore is in regard to how women in Tunisia (that have never left) view emigration away; specifically, what connotations they have, how popular it is among their social groups, and personal motivations to leave home.

\textsuperscript{31} Musette (2017)  
\textsuperscript{32} Pouessel (2020)
v. Dissociative Feminism

A new concept in the social lexicon primarily concerning young women is a term called ‘Dissociative Feminism’. Coined in an article by student Emmelin Clein, it is a very recent conceptualization of post-modern feminism that is crucially self-aware, but self-destructive. Since dissociative feminism is a relatively recent concept, I will be using more casual articles to piece together my own usage in a political context. While not originated in academia, I still find these as useful viewpoints in understanding how young women react to their surroundings and how that may inform their engagement with the feminist movement, given that the writings on this subject are mostly penned by contemporary, university-aged students.

Clein’s article that is credited for first using the term, entitled ‘The Smartest Women I Know Are All Dissociating’, she notices that “we now seem to be interiorizing our existential aches and angst, smirking knowingly at them, and numbing ourselves to maintain our nonchalance.” A dissociative feminist sees the frustrations of daily life as a woman and decides on an existentialist attitude to attempt untouchability. For instance, constant harassment means, “Most girls learn to dissociate early... whenever we first notice the way our outfits and makeup or lack thereof can provoke reactions. Quickly, we adopt the daily, quotidian dissociation of getting dressed in the morning or prepared to go out at night, a process that involves stepping outside your body to see it from the outside, and dressing it depending on the occasion.” That ‘dissociative’ quality refers to how this is done as a coping mechanism: internalizing the parts of societal life that are unjust and attempting to brush them off as if
it doesn’t actually matter in order to preserve sanity while abstracting the importance/consequences of her actions.

Clein attributes this detachment to a rejection of popular white neoliberalist feminism, as belonging “to a subset of women who undeniably have it much easier than most.” However, the rejection of a performative manner of feminism does not equate to immediately good principles. Instead, it is yet another category of aestheticized (de)activism, given how a lot of these dissociative traits have become a trend in media as a counter-culture to ever-empowering but rather shallow portrayals. But its contrarian ways can go too far, as it often “promotes a nihilism that is somewhere between unproductive and genuinely dangerous.”

Further in another article, student Ameerah Ali writes, that the dissociated feminist is disillusioned and “dangerously self-aware.” As a result of the messy condition of gender in society, young women learn early on to attempt to only engage with sexism or even feminism on a strictly-surface level in the hopes that ‘if it’s not really happening to me, then I can move forward.’ She understands that the world she lives in is less than ideal but is paralyzed to fix it:

“She is a woman of intelligence, well-read, and in possession of leftist social beliefs. However, she is, by definition, too completely and utterly exhausted to follow through with any action for her self-improvement. This fatalist lifestyle of self-destruction is a rising issue; young women are becoming naïve to the truly

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33 Clein (2019)
detrimental effects of dissociative feminism. With excessive media consumption accessible to a younger demographic, this tainted idea of feminism can only cause more harm than good.\textsuperscript{34}

This paradox is a very central concept of the paper. In learning about dissociative feminism as a coping mechanism for young women growing up in the 21st Century—with its unique set of problems stemming from digital-age media, the recession, and more—I wondered how this concept of disengagement as a way to internalize negative emotion might be applied to a political discipline. I used this new and experimental theory and applied it to questions aimed at understanding the disillusionment that we have been seeing as a theme among youth, as they face adulthood and the sociopolitical conditions they live in.

The burden to centralize gender as a primary causal factor for political apathy/pessimism will be harder to isolate, especially since this has been conceptualized in an entirely different part of the world. Still, I wish to investigate if this mindset rings true to some and if it holds up in an international comparative context. The inherently problematic way that dissociative feminism ignores reality shows how, while it may feel like there is no point in acting a certain way/participating in political life/feeling optimism for the future, it actually is an artificial despair drawn out to construct a new, perhaps more comfortable ‘reality’. Again, this is not to invalidate the real systemic issues encountered daily by young Tunisian women to shoulder, but this framing may reveal a way to understand why some are nostalgic for a simpler time that simply does not exist. In a political light, this abstraction could explain how

\textsuperscript{34} Ali (2022)
such despair demobilizes so much of the young Tunisian population, and leads to my central question of how social norms impact political philosophies and involvement, and how ideas of gender and societal position influence politics.


Research methodology

To conduct my research, I collected data through both surveys and interviews. I sent my long-form survey to many identified potential candidates, both randomly and through connections with local students and acquaintances. This survey was split into 4 sections of both qualitative open-ended response fields and quantitative-geared ratings so as to balance both descriptive and numerical data points, to broaden the image captured. In total, I collected 13 responses to the questionnaire, though one had to be eliminated for substantial incompletion. I also conducted formal in-person interviews, in which I spoke more at length about questions on the survey, in the relevant areas.

My sample size was therefore limited to the dozen responses I logged, which also happened to only include higher-educated (either currently studying or graduated) young women from the Tunis and Ariana governorates, who were generally from working- to professional-class families. Additionally, many potential participants that were asked to fill out the questionnaire self-selected out of the dataset, with five indicating that they either did not know enough to help, were not interested in politics, or stated the questions were too sensitive. Additionally, there was a potential barrier posed by language; I took additional time to avoid this issue and created my survey both in French and English, in an attempt to gain more access to how respondents would feel, as I believe that original language is a key tool in unlocking true beliefs. Still, as I only speak French as an additional language relevant to Tunisia, I was unable to conduct my interviews and provide the ability for respondents to answer in
Arabic. While I did not have any explicit issues with this, it could have been a reason why some of those who were sent the survey never responded.

Still, conducting much of my data collection online proved to be an asset in recording responses from a variety of people I had never met before. Having a kind but professional tone in my interactions also helped in being approachable, especially considering that I was younger than most of my subjects. While it was difficult to get much of a response rate in the short time period that I had to actually gather results, I learned that a little reminder often helped in producing a completed form. Overall, conducting research primarily online was a challenge (as many of us have come to learn in a pandemic environment) and I had to be more flexible and come up with my own ways to deal with unforeseen challenges and produce results.

On the topic of digital complications, in the last week of conducting my research, I discovered that my form was altered and I was no longer receiving submissions. Unfortunately, that came at a time when the bulk of my project still needed to be analyzed and I had to track down the additional responses. If given the opportunity, I would definitely want to include a wider range of participants. This was especially frustrating because I had also run into some issues in clarifying the direction where I wanted to take my research, and how the survey would be set up. Therefore the timeframe in which I was actively collecting responses was significantly shorter than I had hoped, despite remaining open (or so I had thought) until the penultimate day of the research period.
I. Perceptions of History

This section is primarily about the revolution of 2011, and is oriented towards emotions and reflections on the period. All of the respondents, despite being between the ages of 6-18 at the time, noted that they were aware of the protests very early on, with many attributing their knowledge coming from television and those around them. Even Participant #7, who was living in Libya at the time, knew quickly about the uprising as she “learned about it through TV. I had never noticed that there was a dictatorship in Tunisia. It was a shock to me.”

Their age played a big part in how they interpreted that time. Participant #11 wrote “I remember I was scared and anxious. I was 10 years old back then, I was afraid that I would die. I wasn’t quite understanding what was happening to be honest,” and 5 others expressed similar sentiments. For those in later adolescence, they still might not have had enough political knowledge to contextualize the movement. Participant #10 recalled, “I wasn’t quite understanding what was happening to be honest. Protests in high schools were kind of fun, but then there were curfews and a lot of restrictions, so I feared that we’ll have to keep living that way for all our lives.” Still, three expressed happiness about what was unfolding, and “I was worried and scared but I was also hopeful that it’s happening for a better future.”

In terms of how those around them reacted, three responded positively, four responded negatively, and three expressed a combination or neutrality (2 abstentions). Those who responded
negatively noted that their families were fearful about what would happen: Participant #10 shared, “they panicked of course, we didn’t live something similar before. They stopped going out like they usually do and started calling each other too often.” Still, for Participant #6 and others, it was also a time of hope: “My family was a little scared but also happy for the change that’s hopefully going to happen.”

After answering what emotions were tied to these months as they were occurring, participants were asked to reflect on the Revolution and its path to today, over a decade later. Figure 5 below shows the distribution:

![Pie chart showing responses to the question: Do you think things were better before the revolution or now?]

Despite potential hopes they may have had during the outset of the uprising, respondents generally displayed feelings of dismay at the current situation they live in now. As a result, eight out of eleven respondents expressed feelings that life was better before the revolution than after. When asked to explain split opinions, Respondent #4 replied that “things were better for me and my family personally,
but can’t say it was better for the country” and Respondent #7 wrote, “It depends really, I mean of course there is a reason why the revolution happened, however the economy is doing much worse.”

Seven out of eleven participants that responded rated the revolution as failed or failing, as opposed to one that rated the Revolution a success. Three expressed sentiments that it is too soon to tell and that it is still in a transition period.

After reflecting on the last decade, participants were then asked open-ended questions as to what they expect and hope from Tunisian politics in the next ten years. Four out of the six that responded indicated that they were optimistic, at least as long as certain conditions change. For instance, Respondent #10 believes that, “If it’s ruled by younger people with modern mindsets, it will get better.” But despite these hopes, many respondents indicated anxieties in how they feel when thinking realistically of the next ten years of Tunisia’s politics. Respondent #1 wrote that she felt, “confused, without any clear vision”, Respondent #2 said, “a total mess,” and Respondent #3 reflected
that, “right now there’s a lot of corruption and laws [referring to policy] are not at all right.” Due to these issues, two respondents specifically mentioned the presidency and upcoming elections; Respondent #5 feels, “I believe that the current President Saied will take the necessary measures to fix many economic and political problems.” Respondent #10 also felt that the answer was highly contingent on the results, saying “It really depends, I hope we get a president that separates religion, traditions and laws.”

II. Attitudes towards Political Affairs

Next in my sequencing of questions, I measured participants’ perceptions of the current political landscape, including of different sections of government, as well as how involved they may be in civic life. As a broad opening question, respondents rated their general interest in political affairs:

![Figure 7](image)

In Figure 7, we can observe that the distribution falls more toward mid- to uninterested. The mean result was a value of 1.75: less inclined towards political affairs. Most participants also noted that they
are not involved in political or community-based organizations, with only two responding that they are currently active members. Further, most respondents indicated that they did not consume news media on a regular basis:

![Figure 8.](image)

On an additional note, as discussed in my methodology, many of the potential participants contacted declined to participate, specifically citing their personal disinterest and lack of knowledge in political matters.

Still, 11 out of 12 participants disclosed that they are planning to vote in the upcoming presidential election this year. To the question “Do you feel like your vote matters?”, many responded positively that they were motivated either by duty or desire. Respondent #6 stated “My vote matters, same as everyone else’s because if it’s not for my vote and others’ we won’t be able to elect the right person for the country also that allows us to make democracy happen which is the main reason for the revolution.” Even those that doubted how much their vote matters indicated that they will still do so.
Assessing the current state of politics in Tunisia on a scale of 0-6 (0= very negative, 6= very positive), no participants rated above a neutral score, leading to a mean value of 2.1.

![Figure 9: Opinion on Tunisian Politics](image)

Similarly, when rating their satisfaction with the legislative branch, respondents held neutral to very negative opinions, as shown in Figure 10. This resulted in a mean rating of 0.9 out of 4.

![Figure 10: Satisfaction with Parliament](image)

This dissatisfaction is extended to political parties as representatives of inefficacy. When asked if they personally felt represented by parliament and politicians, not one individual said yes.
On the other hand, the executive branch held a different position, and respondents tended to grade current President Kais Saied in a higher regard, as demonstrated by Figure 12:

On average, the president received an average 4 out of 6 rating, with three respondents assigning him a 6/6 and only one giving below neutral (at 0, very negative).

Elaborating on their perceptions of Kais Saied, respondents then rated their opinion of the dissolution of parliament by executive action on July 25th, 2021. Reflecting the negative feelings
towards legislative politicians and positive feelings towards the president, the majority supported Saied’s actions:

As before, participants had a particular distaste for parliamentary politicians when citing reasons for support. Respondent #8 simply put, “They are a bunch of hypocrites” after rating parliament a 0, similar to Respondent #10 who said she gave that score, “because of the drama and disrespect we see in the parliament.” Overall, participants felt that Saied was an agent of change for the betterment of national politics. In reference to the party dynamics of legislation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and worsening economy, Respondent #5 explained they were happy to see the radical action “because some political parties failed to defend the interests of citizens, especially Ennahda.” His appeal seems to stem from his ability to execute: “He is a lawyer, and [knows] at some point you have to have the courage to make such a decision.” Respondent #6 said the dissolution was for the betterment of politics, as “it could be beneficial if he made tough controversial decisions that will benefit Tunisia in
the long term.” The only differentiating opinion was by Respondent #1, who wrote that she initially approved of his actions, but that “he managed very badly and now he is a baby dictator.”

**III. Values & Political Beliefs**

To understand where the participants placed higher concern on daily issues and gain a broader image of their hopes and political ideologies, I asked a series of questions in a third section. I began by evaluating their perceptions of migration, as discussed in my Literature Review (pp. 27). The first question was simply whether or not they wished to emigrate, and is shown in Figure 14:

![Figure 14](image)

Of the 12 responses, all expressed at least some desire to move away from Tunisia, both permanently and temporarily. Respondent #10 specified that “I do like Tunisia to be honest, but I want to see the world... before deciding where I want to live. But I would like to live somewhere secure and with human rights, so if Tunisia doesn’t change, I will leave it for good.” As a was to solidify why participants may want to migrate, they were asked to check as many boxes as applicable in Figure 15:
Overall, the wish to migrate is propelled by more educational and career opportunities (in their perceptions), as according to my collected data, two-thirds of respondents want to move to find work and half want to attend higher education abroad. Additionally, participants were asked how many of their five closest friends have expressed a desire to leave as well, showing that this strong desire to leave seems to have permeated social groups. Figure 16 shows that each respondent had at least one close friend that wished to leave Tunisia:
The resulting discrete average number out of five closest friends that wish to leave Tunisia is four. This is, as Respondent #4 noted, “to have more opportunities, more freedom.”

In response to some preferences of living, education, and career prospects overseas, the next questions rate various aspects of Tunisian life from 0 to 4 (0 as very negative, 2 as neutral, 4 as very positive). Respondents ranked the education system low, with an average rating of 0.9, as demonstrated by Figure 17.

Even lower in rating was the Tunisian job market, to which respondents mostly scored as a 1.

Figure 17.

Figure 18.
The next subsection revolved around the societal values and political opinions each participant has, between 0 (not at all important) and 4 (very important). First, I asked “How important is preserving traditional family values to you?” To this, a variety of answers were made across the spectrum, but overall reflected towards neutral. I would like to add that this question was purposely left ambiguous, and could both mean conservative family values or also the value of family in general.

![Figure 19](image)

Specifically regarding religion, I then asked about the role of religion in participants’ lives, in order to compare with the next question.

![Figure 20](image)
While the group reflected diverse personal religiosities, a majority of respondents were decidedly against religion being a basis for politics, as in Figure 21.

In relation to a hot-button debate in Tunisian politics, I added a question as to how participants view the legal distribution of inheritance. According to Islamic law, inheritance must be split in a fashion that gives half as many shares to a daughter than that of a son. In today’s political affairs, there is question as to whether national laws should codify Islam, such as by regulating inheritance, or not.
To clarify, the one respondent that indicated a preference for the Islamic principle also chose that the government should not decide. In accordance with the findings of the other questions above, this also strongly demonstrates values of separation between divine and positive lawmaker.

Participants then were asked to select which beliefs were most important to them, and could choose as many as they desired. The results are shown below in Figure 23:

![Figure 23](image_url)

The absolute most pressing issue was manifestly unemployment, with 100% of respondents ticking that box. This was followed by education, and these two areas point to deficiencies that I uncovered earlier on in this section. Interestingly, as also found above, religious beliefs were not at all marked as a core political issue. Participants then were asked to pick one of the above issues as their most important cause, and five out of the nine responses were about education, “it’s the beginning to everything” (Respondent #4). Many felt similarly to Respondent #7 who reported simply, “Our education system
is really bad. So behind and backwards.” Two respondents also indicated women’s rights as their priority, with Respondent #2 linking women’s empowerment to the issue of education and access. Additionally, concerns relating to finances and the economy (unemployment and taxes/business) were more common than issues of social justice (women’s rights and social programs). Respondent #6 conveyed distress that, “it is becoming more and more challenging to find a job here even if you have a master’s degree and results in a huge decrease for the economy which will make it even harder to afford a living.”

To synthesize Sections II and III, the final question I asked was “Do you feel that your beliefs are represented by any political parties? If you are comfortable sharing, which ones?” All seven responses said no. Respondent #10 elucidated that she felt there was no good representing a political party as they go against her founding belief: “I strongly believe that you should do whatever you want as long as you don’t hurt anybody else. While in Tunisia you can hurt people but not live the way you want.”

As an ending note, one of the questions I asked the participants in my study is what they hoped to see happen in Tunisia’s future, specifically in regard to the political conditions. Many responded with specific suggestions on how things could be improved, like a restructuring of bureaucracy and governmental offices, with one calling on the media to air out all of the corruption that is occurring. A handful expressed a desire for policy directed towards young people, and further that more qualified young people should gain power.
IV. Feminism

As a baseline, I wanted to measure how many out of the group of participants ascribed to feminism and its principles. But since there are many misrepresentations about what modern feminism really is versus how it is portrayed, I wanted to compare those that label themselves as feminist and those that have been off but by misconceptions. The definition I use is that feminism advocates for equality between men and women. I measured the responses by asking if they believed in that principle or an inverse statement that men and women naturally occupy different roles, juxtaposing them as options in line or not with feminism given that respondents could only choose one option. The results are as shown in Figure 24:

But while seven out of ten responded affirmatively to the ‘most feminist’ option, only four marked in the affirmative whether they would use the label ‘Feminist’, seen in Figure 25.
When prompted to give a reason for their answers, many participants intimated a distaste for the way feminism is today, as they perceive it. Respondent #10 was particularly vocal about her resentment: “Because nowadays, when we hear feminism, we see women only demanding things. If you want a better salary, you need to work harder in a way that makes you a necessity to your employer, or start your own business. It’s not the government’s role to make a living for you, it has other important responsibilities.” Respondent #7 voted that she was unsure about officially categorizing herself as a feminist, stating “If feminism is about equality to men then yes I am a feminist. I just do not like the label and the meaning it has now.” Respondent #4 also expressed hesitation in the name in her interview, saying “I feel like feminists are very active, fighting for women’s rights and I don’t feel like I am that invested.”

Still for those that marked yes or maybe, they felt that feminism is an important movement, considering that they also voted that they had felt bias against them on account of their gender in the following question:
Figure 26.

Half of the ten responses indicated that they had felt this form of sexism, and this theme of experiences with gender-based discrimination is further explored in the next set of questions. To understand how early these concepts may come about into consciousness, participants were asked “How have you observed traditional gender roles in your family or among friends?” These answers varied, but six out of nine responses (two-thirds) noted that they had observed some form of unequal gender roles, and four expressed their resentment with how they have seen them play out. Respondent #1 described the roles in her family as “unequal and unfair”, and Respondent #11 wrote, “I hate it :) it is a sign of ignorance and I think my value doesn’t come from my gender.” Those that indicated that they encountered these expectations, Respondent #2 noted that it was mainly just from the elder generations of her family, and Respondent #7 explaining, “My family from both sides sometimes say things that could be interpreted as backwards, but honestly I don’t care, I am educated and I will be making my own money so their opinions don’t really matter, if anything I feel like the things they say are kind of funny sometimes.”
In terms of how these norms had affected their perceptions of self, I asked if they feel their actions fall outside of what is traditionally expected of a woman. This helps both evaluate how they conceive of gender norms, but also of themselves and how they live up to societal expectations.

I found that 60% of these young women feel that they frequently aberrate from society’s prescriptions as to how they should act, and that no respondents felt identified by normative constructions of how women should behave. Furthermore, 70% of participants indicated that they face extra pressure to act a certain way (such as get married, start a family, etc.) uniquely as a woman. They were then prompted to identify from which groups they felt most pressure to conform, choosing as many as they saw fit; this distribution is shown in Figure 28:

Figure 27.

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Figure 28.

The most popular responses were from society in general and family, which track with findings above related to societal normative culture.

Continuing with this theme of how women feel they are perceived by society, I asked “Do you feel like you are more easily harassed because of your gender?” To this, seven out of ten participants responded in the affirmative. As a follow up, I then asked, “Have you had to change aspects of your behavior to avoid harassment/criticism (i.e. transportation, clothing, etc)?” To this, eight out of ten respondents indicated that they had. Then, to see what impact it would have on their mentality, the next question was, “What impact does changing your behavior to avoid harassment/criticism have on your daily routine?” Eight respondents indicated that they feel behavior modification due to societal norms has impacted their day to day life, with three of those saying it has had a substantial daily impact. Participants were then given the option to expand on this chain of behavior change with the
question, “If it is the case [that you do change your behavior], how does changing your behavior to avoid harassment/criticism due to your gender make you feel?” Table 5 below records their responses, by respondent # identification:

Table 5. Responses to “If it is the case, how does changing your behavior to avoid harassment/criticism due to your gender make you feel?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent #2</td>
<td>A malaise/discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent #3</td>
<td>I don’t have to change but unfortunately sometimes I’m scared. The mentality has to change and the education[respect] too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent #4</td>
<td>it’s suffocating and it makes me anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent #5</td>
<td>Uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent #6</td>
<td>Wearing baggier clothes to hide my figure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent #10</td>
<td>I don’t feel free nor safe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses are notable as they signify a double ramification: of how women may feel both explicit and implicit societal pressures but then also how correcting to protect from this pressure by modifying behavior—down to the simple act of dressing to leave the house—can further affect mental wellbeing as a draining and humiliating aspect of internal dissonance. This is important, as it demonstrates how overarching societal pressures can push these young women away from self-expression and belonging. The categories of disbelonging/fear, habitual modification, and internalization and dissonance as investigated by this question chain represent a process of how societal norms very much so have the power to affect how women self-perceive, and that society and the individual are intertwined. And if
they feel marginalized and de-liberated in society, it could stand as a factor to why gender roles continue to intimidate, oppress, and exclude women (since there are both external and internal forces at play).

Finally, participants were asked if they felt that society will ever reach true equality in gender. This was my way to gauge how optimistic they actually feel about conditions improving, despite the issues mentioned above. Respondent #4 feels that “it should have been [equal] by now, but since it hasn’t, I am not very hopeful it will be in the near future.” Still, many are holding out for hope: two respondents said yes, and three responded with albeit wary hopes that there could come a time when women enjoy the same freedoms as men. But work needs to be done, and it is tied to the current situation, says Respondent #7: “I think we definitely can [reach equality], as soon as all women become financially independent.”
Conclusions

Considering the results of the first section, on perceptions of history by younger Tunisian women, it was found that many recalled to some extent the protests that were happening early on but may not have been well equipped to process the implications and how it related to earlier history. Now, with the apparent ending of the revolution’s goals, it seems that many are actually nostalgic for a time before all the political upheaval. And despite certain optimistic sentiments expressed in the survey, there still seems to be a lot of uncertainty regarding the direction of the country’s politics and how the current situation will be resolved.

Due to this uncertainty many questions pointed towards feelings of detachment and disillusionment, starting with the first question in Section II, where I found that of my respondents, most seemed less interested in political affairs and the news. And while the majority of participants indicated that they would vote in the next election, they still felt that Tunisian politics was strongly deficient. In general they rated national politics poorly, further placing blame on the status of the current Parliament. Instead, a majority preferred the populist political action of Kais Saied, who, as we established in the Literature Review section, heavily appeals to younger voters and positions himself as a changemaker for them. This is especially effective considering that my findings showed how many felt unrepresented by the current political pantheon of parties in parliament.

Bridging these findings with those of Section III, it appears that this resentment towards parliament has much to do with the effect of the Ennahda party that is both religiously fundamentalist
and notorious as a symbol of corruption. Sick of political infighting, constant instability, and economic desperation, it is understandable how these factors have pushed young people towards more radical figures as well as desires to migrate. If there are no opportunities at home and it only seems to get worse, it follows the natural progression would be a desire to leave.

So, in response to my core questions proposed in the Introduction:

➢ The young Tunisian women involved in my study generally have negative perceptions of recent history and may tend to prefer a past they do not fully remember as a time of more stability. In regard to the future, some are pessimistic while others are cautiously optimistic, provided that certain factors change.

➢ These young women particularly display feelings of disillusionment due to their position facing early adulthood in the midst of uncertainty. On a gendered account, while many subjects felt that the status of women’s rights were mostly fair, the added pressure of societal norms seemed to be a significant weight to many of their interpersonal relationships and mental health.

➢ Some traits of a distinctly ‘Gen-Z’ political philosophy across participants were disillusionment and unhappiness with the way government has been structured and a wish to see that overhauled through radical change. On a personal level, however, many ideologies seem to be disinterested in what is going on, likely because of how messy and frustrating it may be.

➢ Considering how social norms have deep impacts on many of the participants’ lives, it would be understandable that their engagement with political activism would be shaped by that.
Additionally, both political and gendered conditions seem to negatively impact the mental health of young women, and may hold a spiraling relationship to one another.

In response to the last two points: while there aren’t too many clear links in the results between gender and the current political situation, I find particularly interesting the responses that Respondent #10 had. Her responses completely separated gender equity from governmental responsibilities, and I wonder how much of that can be attributed to perceptions of political inefficiency and economic capital. On the other hand there is Respondent #1, who while answering how gender roles have affected her even used and ironic :) symbol to denote how she is trying to get through it, and also is a prime example of how a dissociative feminist tries to distance pain.

All of these mindsets discovered throughout each section of investigation point to a dissociation with Tunisian politics, either by checking out of political events, believing in potentially destructive leaders, or leaving all together. As a result I hope my study bridging new conceptions of feminism with how political philosophies are made in uncertainty, draws attention 2 institutions and mechanisms that are failing young women. I hope that more formal investigation is done 2 ensure that damage is not done permanently, and that political systems may eventually evolve.
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Notes

I. On Participants

Participants will remain anonymous, as promised. They have only been identified by number to keep track of responses and have only been assigned their number based on order of submission.

II. Limitations

As mentioned in the methodology section, an issue I ran into while collecting data was refusal to complete the survey in its entirety. Due to the relatively personal and potentially sensitive nature of many of the questions led to several potential interviewees declining to participate, and effectively self-selected out of what could have been stronger with their perspectives. Similarly, many of the participants did not fill out every question given. While I had stipulated in the instructions and repeated in recruiting potential participants that they could skip a question if they were confused or felt it was too personal, this plan backfired. Some respondents skipped entire sections, and while I ultimately made the decision to remove one particularly empty form, it resulted in some potentially uneven interpretations.

III. Recommendations for Further Study

Due to these issues, it would be potentially advisable to try and make as many questions required, as well as attempt to recruit on a wider basis. Specifically I think that many of my issues in growing my sample size stemmed from a lack of resources for where to find them and thus many of my tactics had
to be somewhat improvised. Therefore, for future ISP use, I would recommend more instruction on how to go about data collection.

Generally, I would also encourage wider study among a larger sample. I am adamant that the findings in this paper are narratives and syntheses of individual experiences and not universally applicable.

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