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Economic Perceptions and Potential Within La Marsa

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Abstract

This research largely focuses on the perspectives of the Tunisian youth in regards to the unemployment situation they are being faced with. These perspectives carry many insights as to the problems in Tunisia and the potential solutions to these problems. Background research was conducted to examine the specifics of the economic situation and how it ended up in such a state. The Tunisian economy was found to be heavily suffering from high unemployment, high inflation, a lack of job creation, and a lack of FDI to name a few. These negative symptoms have especially been impacting the young adults in Tunisia. Through questionnaires, it was found that young adults had very strong feelings towards the situation they find themselves in. First, their mental health was negatively impacted from the unemployment crisis and trying to find a job. Second, they held the Tunisian government largely responsible for the current conditions. Topics such as incompetent government policy, poor education, and corruption within the government were all brought up by the interviewees. Every individual expressed a desire to leave the nation which reflects very poorly on the current situation at hand. After the interviews were broken down, there was a brief discussion on the solutions that are required in order to better the situation for young adults and keep them in the country. The sake of the Tunisian future is reliant on the current and next generations which is discussed in the concluding aspects of this research.

Introduction

The intention of this research is to answer the primary research question: How do young adults of La Marsa perceive the economic condition of Tunisia and their own personal potential within Tunisia's economic system? The main purpose of this is to see how the current economic condition has impacted the psychological state of the Tunisian youth while examining future impacts this psychological state may bring to the individuals involved and the country of Tunisia as a whole. The direction of the country going forward will be impacted largely by the youth as they will be the generation that steers the nation in the coming decades. The location of the study is primarily within La Marsa, Tunisia. However, research continued from Powell, Ohio due to external pressures that forced the researcher to move locations. However, assistance from the academic advisor and use of technology overcame this limitation and enabled the research to be conducted.

Literature Review

The primary aim of the collected literature is to examine the current economic state of Tunisia and potential solutions to this state, the context behind this economic condition, and how young adults are being impacted and perceive their occupational futures. The primary research question focuses on young adults specifically because they have been deemed the greatest victims of economic decline over the past decade. Their status in the working world along with their perceptions of the future are incredibly important in understanding where the Tunisian economy is really going. An economy is only going to be as strong as it is perceived to be. If individuals do not have faith in the economy and seek out other opportunities, the economy will inevitably grow weaker. This snowball effect caused by an initially weak economy can and may spiral out of control if nothing is done. In order to properly understand how to solve these issues, the causes must also be properly understood. Young adults are the main body moving into the workforce, and so they are a great indicator for how things are going and may turn out. The literature will be broken down thematically into the sections mentioned earlier: The current economic state of Tunisia paired with solutions to this, the background to this economic state, and how the youth have been impacted and perceive their nation's economy. As there may be overlap between one source and multiple themes, the source will be placed where its primary function lies (while acknowledging other thematic contributions).

Tunisian Economy (Problems and Solutions)

CIA World Factbook. (2022). *Tunisia*. CIA World Factbook.

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/tunisia/#economy>

The CIA World Factbook does a good job at providing an overview of economic statistics and facts for Tunisia. While it provides brief context for the provided statistics, most of the worth is found in the statistics themselves. The CIA Factbook provides accurate information on GDP, GDP growth rates, inflation rates, and unemployment rates. As well, it helps break down GDP by the most important industries within the country. Wealth distribution, debt, imports and exports are all statistics provided by the institute as well. This information is very useful in gauging economic health and economic trends. This all provides a greater understanding of the economic state of Tunisia. Interpretation and explanation of these statistics is primarily found in related sources.

Sternfeld, R. (2009). Transparency and Economic Growth: Internet Censorship and Foreign Direct Investment in Tunisia and Egypt. *Conference Papers -- Midwestern Political Science Association*, 1.

Sternfeld provides information on a niche topic that carries wide implications for the Tunisian economy. The focus of this literature is specifically on Foreign Direct Investment and the positive impacts it has on an economy. The focus of this is under the Ben Ali administration in relation to a company's willingness to invest in light of internet censorship. While this specific case is not super applicable to the modern Tunisian economy, there is a large lack of FDI currently in Tunisia. This article expresses why FDI is so important and what may draw away investors. The current Tunisian economy is plagued with this issue (though for different reasons). Foreign Direct Investment was shown to have a positive impact on the Tunisian economy for 30 years in this article. Tunisia is struggling with FDI and this article provides insight on how to potentially fix this and why that would greatly benefit the economy and young adults within the

economy. Young adults specifically benefit as they are the primary drivers of new businesses and entrepreneurship.

World Bank. (2014). *The Unfinished Revolution Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs And Greater Wealth To All Tunisians. The World Bank.*

This World Bank report, though slightly dated, remains true in its outlook on the Tunisian economy. Many of the existing and potential problems listed within this report have been amplified over the past decade due to government instability and COVID-19. The World Bank's analysis of the business environment in Tunisia is in agreement with comments made by Haddar video panel as monopolies and state owned enterprises cause difficulty for the Tunisian economy. The World Bank dives deeper into the impacts a lack of economic competition can cause as well as looking to find solutions for the nation. Additionally, the World Bank explains what has increased the unemployment rate of Tunisia. This information focuses on the lack of job creation (which has a connection to FDI) within the nation. All of this information is incredibly useful in grasping the economic situation that many individuals who are entering the workforce or are somewhat new in the workforce must encounter. This gives insight for how young adults may perceive the situation they are in while explaining the high unemployment rates they are faced with.

Haddar, M. (2022). *Tunisia's Economic Crisis: Possible Paths Forward?* [Video File] Retrieved from: <https://www.mei.edu/events/tunisias-economic-crisis-possible-paths-forward>

This source provides a comprehensive view of the current state of everyday Tunisian life while also providing reasons for the situation. A group of five panelists with different expertise related

to Tunisia and economics discuss the economic situation in Tunisia along with what they think could help it. Some of the highlights include the following problems (with solutions): a discussion on the infrastructure of different popular industries (agriculture and tourism) being unable to modernize as most post industrial revolution industries do. The causes of poor economic growth and how they stem back to the Ben Ali era as the current economy is choked out by state owned enterprises and monopolies in the private sector (difficulty to create businesses). A discussion of poor education and how it translates to poor economic output. Additionally, the panel touches on inflation and unemployment as of 2021. The panel also elaborates on the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic to the Tunisian economy. All of this information is useful in properly understanding the state of the Tunisia economy and how it has become this way. It points out specific ways in which the economy could be changed and revitalized from actions by the state. Additionally, there is a focus on how young adults are disproportionately impacted.

Historical Context

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2021, December 10). Jasmine Revolution. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jasmine-Revolution>

This article provides background to the Jasmine Revolution which is important for the contextual portion of this paper. It shows how and why the Jasmine Revolution started, which directly relates to the economic conditions of Tunisia pre revolution. In addition to this, it also shows the lasting effects of the Jasmine Revolution which contributes to the current economic condition of the country. All of this information is useful in understanding how Tunisia is currently at where it is today.

Cino, L. (2019). Tunisia's Institutional Change after the Revolution: Politics, Institutions and Change Agents. *Politikon*, 43, 32–49. <https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.43.2>

The material presented from Cino examines the institutional changes from the Ben Ali era to the post revolution era. Rather, the report examines the lack of institutions found within the post revolution era. There is an in depth examination of the Ben Ali policies that contributed to the conditions met in Tunisia which primed the nation for revolution. The way these conditions changed (for better or worse) was analyzed through the introduction of unstable governments post Ben Ali. This material is highly useful in understanding the history behind Tunisia and the context of the current situation. Much of the original reasoning behind the revolution occurred because of the economic conditions established under the Ben Ali regime. However, this article examines that while also looking at the shortcomings of the revolution era. In order to fix the problems established, it is necessary to properly grasp the connection between the economy under Ben Ali and the economy after his reign.

Murphy, E. , Brown, . L. Carl , Clarke, . John Innes , Barbour, . Nevill and Talbi, . Mohamed (2022, August 17). Tunisia. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Tunisia>

Encyclopedia Britannica is a well known source for providing detailed information on a given topic. Their section over Tunisia is rich in material. It includes content over the Ben Ali era, The Jasmine Revolution, the transitional period after the revolution, and now the Kais Saied regime. It breaks these periods down in detail to explain the cause and effect relationship between them all as transitions have occurred over the past years. Additionally, Encyclopedia Britannica

provides an overview of the Tunisian economy, pointing out primary imports, exports, and trade partners. All of this information is useful in understanding Tunisia's position in the world order while seeing how they have gotten to where they are today. All of this contextual information will be used to set the backdrop for the modern Tunisian economic situation. Information regarding the revolution and its roots with the youth also give insight into the current economic situation plaguing the youth (primarily unemployment). Analyzing the failures of the transitional period post revolution provides greater understanding as to why the economy continued to plummet post revolution. The revolution had deep roots in the poor economic performance of Tunisia, so its continued failure is a point that needs to be investigated and grasped in order to properly research the modern economy's status.

Impact and Perceptions of Young Adults

Arous, M. (2022, September 14). To Support Youth, Tunisia Needs a New Approach to Development. *United States Institute of Peace*.

<https://www.usip.org/blog/2022/09/support-youth-tunisia-needs-new-approach-development>

This resource provides information in regards to young adults and the job market. The article is written by an individual from Tunisia so there is practical experience applied, going beyond basic statistics. The first point it brings up is the lack of jobs and how that is forcing individuals to seek opportunities abroad. A lack of jobs is the primary issue facing young adults in the job market. This article examines the causes behind the low job creation and how it is directly impacting young adults. Additionally, this article provides ways in which the Tunisian job market can grow and assist young people. These solutions are both on a state level and a

community level. The article doesn't hold back in looking at all the ways in which people can be working to fix the economic situation they find themselves in. This article is incredibly valuable as it touches on the main focus of the research. The condition of youth unemployment is investigated and solutions going forward are provided. This research will be compared with results from the interviews and used to address the economic situation going forward.

Fernandez-Urbano, R., Kulic, N. (2020). Requiem for a Dream: Perceived Economic Conditions and Subjective Well-Being in Times of Prosperity and Economic Crisis. *Soc Indic Res* **151**, 793–813 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02404-w>

The research provided in this article is unique as it examines the relationship between economic perceptions and subjective economic well-being. The article found that a better perception typically led to better economic outcomes in times of crisis for those in lower or middle income classes. The research did find this to not be the case amongst individuals of a higher social background and there was less of a relationship during times of economic prosperity. The research found in this report is incredibly relevant as the primary focus of my research is the perceptions of the youth in Tunisia. This report on perceived economic perceptions sheds light on why it is important to understand the state of the Tunisian youth as they view the economy/job market they are in or trying to enter. These perceptions aren't just an indicator of how things are, but they are also telling as to how things will be. Having research to back this up provides credence for analyzing the situation as it relates to Tunisia.

Kriaa, F. , Bouhari, M. , Mathlouthi, Y. (2020). Determinants of unemployment duration for young men and women in Tunisia. *Economics, Management and Sustainability*, 5(2),78-95. doi:10.14254/jems.2020.5-2.5.

This research takes a look at the specific characteristics (gender, race, age, etc.) which contribute to longer lengths of unemployment duration within Tunisia. One of the first and primary findings is that increased education decreases the duration of unemployment. With this, there is a gap in employment rates between urban and rural areas. Gender is also examined as a determinant of unemployment. It's found that women have a harder time finding a job than men do (historically, this is due to education, but this has been changing recently). Understanding the determinants of unemployment may help in understanding how different types of people may view the economic situation in Tunisia. People sharing characteristics of groups least impacted by economic marginalization will most likely view Tunisia more favorably than their counterparts (and vice versa is true). Seeing these differences also provides insight into the ways in which the Tunisian economy may be helped. The current research paper is not focused on these determinants based off demography, but they are helpful in potentially understanding the underlying problems behind unemployment.

Kumar, K. B. (2020). Crisis Beyond the Crises: MENA's Youth Unemployment Problem.

Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development, 16, 186–197.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48573760>

This report on the MENA regions youth unemployment contains a broad overview of the specific problem that this research paper covers. Information is provided on the entire MENA region and it looks at the Arab Spring Revolutions, their aftermath, and the COVID-19 Pandemic. Multiple

problems that spur on youth unemployment such as a difficulty matching laborers and the labor market, a lack of technical or secondary education, poor governance, and rapid technological change are addressed within this report. The issues are separated into supply and demand sides as it views the labor market. This helps break down the causes of high unemployment into digestible pieces which can be treated accordingly. From here, the article describes the ramifications of high unemployment on the MENA region as a whole. While not specific to Tunisia, it provides international insight as the entire region is plagued by a similar problem. Options going forward are also briefly mentioned at the end of the report. All of this information assists in directly answering the primary research question while looking to bring solutions to the table.

Methodology

The methodology of this research will be two fold. To begin, past research and literature will be utilized to provide the backbone of this research project. Economics, The Tunisian Revolution, and global affairs are all topics that require previous research to be investigated. Past economic policies and trends need to be understood in order to fully grasp the current political-economic situation that Tunisia is facing. Additionally, the impacts and lingering effects of the revolution play a critical role in the economic possibilities for the young adults of Tunisia. Using this data will also help expand the research question and create sub questions. Prior research gives an understanding of popular industries within Tunisia and what caused the economic downfall of the nation. All of this literature will be thoroughly covered within the literature review.

The second, and most important, piece of methodology would be the conducted interviews of youth found within La Marsa. The goal of this research is to see the perceptions of

the Tunisian economy while figuring out potential solutions to existing problems. These interviews will be semi structured meetings with 10 individuals of varying backgrounds ranging from the ages of 18-30. The interviews are to be semi structured in order to leave wiggle room for the interviewee to express their thoughts and opinions on given topics. However, potential language barriers have made it so that set questions will be asked in order to keep the conversation on topic and understandable. Additionally, the backgrounds of these individuals will be varied so that a broader understanding of youth employment is understood. Picking individuals from the same background may skew the results as individuals in a higher economic class may have more natural opportunities and resources. The age of these participants has been selected in order to look at individuals about to enter the job market, or those who have recently entered the job market/finished school. These interviews will be recorded and analyzed according to the provided questions. Some of the interviews will be conducted as a questionnaire that is answered by participants. This is necessary as some participants were only willing to go through with the research if total anonymity was kept. A private and trusted liaison has acted as the intermediary between some parties and the researcher. It is the goal of this research to properly represent the feelings and perceptions of Tunisian young adults, while also protecting them and following ethical procedures.

Research Findings

Historical Background of Modern Tunisia

The primary goal of this research is to examine the perspectives of young adults in regards to the current economic situation that is engulfing Tunisia. But before that can be done, it is necessary to understand where Tunisia is at and how it got there. This section will go over the

historical background of Tunisia from the end of the Ben Ali era and the premonitions of the Jasmine Revolution to the modern day under Kais Saied.

Ben Ali was appointed Prime Minister of Tunisia and then President of the nation in 1987. This was accomplished by ousting the previous President Bourgiba as he was deemed mentally unfit. Bourgiba appointed Ben Ali Prime Minister just a month prior, and so he took control of the presidency. Ali promised liberalization and democratization in his regime, but his time in power reflected quite the opposite. Ben Ali was seen to have oppressive policies that abused human rights and relied on the military as a fear mongering tactic of control. Additionally, elections under Ben Ali were not democratic and free. (Murphy, 2022). Before Ben Ali took power, Tunisia was in the midst of transitioning from a socialist economy to a mixed economy. This process saw some gains in GDP, debt, inflation, and global standing, though there were still many problems to be solved such as rising unemployment. Under the Ben Ali administration, this economic progress began to plateau and eventually decline. The decline stemmed from many different factors; some examples include corruption, high barriers to entry in the market, and a lack of modernizing infrastructure (Murphy, 2022). As unemployment continually grew and educated people were out of the job, tensions between the people and government also grew. The economic stress, specifically in unemployment and lack of jobs, was one of the first causes for the Jasmine Revolution. On December 17th, 2011, Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire in front of a municipal building. The purpose of this is recorded as, “Bouazizi, who had been supporting his family by selling fruit from a cart, was enraged when local officials repeatedly demanded bribes and confiscated his merchandise” (Britannica, 2022). The spark of revolution was off, and it was driven by economic woes as seen by Bouazizi. Eventually Ben Ali Was ousted from power, and Tunisia took on new governments and faces.

Since 2011, there have been 10 government changes in Tunisia. Systems, people, and parties have come and gone over the last decade as Tunisia looked for some semblance of stability in this time frame. While the revolution grew to represent many things (democracy, freedom, dignity), the core of it was a push for social-economic change. With this, it could be expected that the economic problems facing Tunisians would have been addressed in the following governments in power. However, while the institutions from the Ben Ali era were rooted out of government and completely changed (Cino, 2019), the institutions put into power did little to address economic problems such as unemployment. In fact, the large level of instability and a lack of unification hurt the nation's economy as foreign direct investment (FDI) dropped, inflation rose, and unemployment continued to increase post revolution. With no clear direction or leadership after the revolution, many of the economic demands that fueled the revolution slipped in between the cracks.

While many political changes were positive, the economic struggles would persist without long term ramifications. Many of the government shifts and a lack of stability created a gap to be filled in Tunisian society. This gap has led to the Kais Saied presidency. Kais Saied was the most recent democratically elected president in Tunisia. However, his term has ended up reflecting that of the Ben Ali era. He has dissolved his parliament and rewritten the constitution of Tunisia on his own. Regardless of his actions, there was a hope that Kais Saied would bring stability back to Tunisia and that would ultimately lead to economic growth and change yet again. However, in the face of the Covid-19 Pandemic and ineffective policies, none of the economic cries dating back to the revolution have found a real solution. Tunisia has been on a long road of economic plateauing with problems that have built up over the years.

Current Economic Situation

As it has been stated, the current economic situation in Tunisia is at a standstill for real long term growth, and the problems keep mounting up. In order to understand how young adults are viewing their nation, it is imperative to grasp the economic facts surrounding Tunisia. The major problem this research is investigating in young adults is unemployment. The CIA factbook recorded unemployment of 15.5% and of 34.9% amongst youth as of 2017 (CIA Factbook, 2017). This is obviously a statistic before Covid. The pandemic only inflated this issue as the third quarter statistic for 2021 is 18.5% (Haddar, 2022). Obviously Covid only made the situation worse, but it was already one where people were suffering. The statistic from 2017 for youth holds true today as the youth are by far the most impacted by unemployment still. Additionally, GDP saw a 9.2% contraction in 2020 with only a slight rebound since (Haddar, 2022). This is to be expected considering all of the harm Covid caused, but the World Bank shows a slightly decreasing trend in GDP growth rates over the past 10 years regardless (World Bank, 2021). As mentioned earlier, FDI has dropped tremendously in the country since the revolution, and it hasn't increased since Covid or the beginning of the Kais Saied presidency (Haddar, 2022). With all of this, GDP per Capita and Real GDP (Purchasing Power) has also decreased over the past few years (CIA Factbook, 2022). Lastly for the statistical breakdown, inflation has gotten slightly better, reaching 6.5% (Haddar, 2022). The prior years saw rates up to 7.2% (CIA Factbook, 2022). Now this number is still above a healthy inflation rate which most economists recognize at 2%.

This situation is clearly one not favorable for the Tunisian people. None of the aforementioned statistics are truly positive things for Tunisian people to live with. However, statistics alone need to be explained and fleshed out to properly understand the Tunisian plight.

Tunisian unemployment is high for a variety of reasons, all of which need to be addressed in order to gauge youth perceptions and go forward. To start, there has been a severe lack of job creation in the country. From 2014 World Bank reported, “Tunisia was plagued by high unemployment because the rate of jobs creation was insufficient and the quality of the jobs created remained low.” (World Bank, 2014). Job creation has remained low due to government policies that have turned many industries into state owned ones while helping certain private sectors become monopolies. The barriers to entry in the business world are very high and result in a small amount of jobs being created (Haddar, 2022). Additionally, FDI would normally be a source for job and business opportunities. While this remained low due to instability, it now remains low because Kais Saied has totalitarian practices which scare away foreign investment. High barriers to entry in the economy also have the same effect.

The education system also has a role in the unemployment crisis that currently exists. Provided education is not matching the modern job market. There is a disparity between education provided and sought after in the job market. Many laborers are looking for a combination of education and skills that are applicable in the workforce. Generally speaking, the education system in Tunisia is not the strongest when held against international thresholds. Additionally, there is also difficulty in matching laborers and the labor market. Tunisia struggles to have a system that properly and efficiently pairs these two parties. While a lack of jobs contributes to the unemployment rate, this inefficiency is also contributing to the problem (Kumar, 2020). The current youth are being impacted the most by this issue as they are the ones currently entering the job market and are the most recent products of the education system.

While unemployment is the focus of the study, it is important to recognize the other ways Tunisians are struggling. The revolution, Covid, and the ongoing political situation between

Russia and Ukraine have caused the economic situation on the ground to take a hit in day to day life. The people have been experiencing shortages of oil, water, sugar, and food (Haddar, 2022). Basic needs are failing to be met on a daily basis. As people cannot obtain oil, they cannot travel. As they cannot travel, they stop going to work and school which is also harmful for the economy. These supply shortages are hurting immediately hurting the economy but also harm in the long term as entrepreneurship drops (which is already low).

The Interviews

The primary stage in on the ground research took place in the form of interviews. 8 individuals filled out a detailed questionnaire that contained the questions listed below. All participants answered every question in order to provide maximum insight into the psychological condition of Tunisian youth.

- ☐ What is your age?
- ☐ What is your gender?
- ☐ Are you currently employed, studying, or unemployed?
- ☐ How has job-searching impacted your mental health?
- ☐ Do you feel confident about the job opportunities for individuals exiting high school and college?
- ☐ What factors determine if someone can get a job? (level of education, skills, etc.)
- ☐ What are your long term career or educational goals?
- ☐ What do you think stands in the way of these goals?
- ☐ Do you feel like you have been/ were prepared for life after high school or college? What do you think could have been different?

- ☐ Do you think the education system is adequate in preparing individuals for the workforce?
- ☐ What are the social perceptions of being unemployed? Are individuals treated or viewed differently depending on their employment status?
- ☐ How do parents view children who struggle to obtain employment?
- ☐ Do you want to stay in Tunisia long term? Why or why not?
- ☐ Do economic possibilities influence your decision to stay in or leave Tunisia?
- ☐ Is there a specific lure to migrate somewhere else? If so, what is it?
- ☐ If you wish to leave Tunisia, would your opinion on leaving be different if your perceptions of the economic future of Tunisia were better?
- ☐ Do you feel confident about the state of the Tunisian economy going forward?
- ☐ What might increase your confidence in the Tunisian economy?
- ☐ Are you confident that future generations will enjoy a higher standard of living in Tunisia than you currently have?
- ☐ What is your opinion towards the current government in power?
- ☐ Do you view the government as responsible for the economic state of Tunisia? If yes, how so?
- ☐ What do you think needs to change in order to improve Tunisia's economy? (Education system, government, etc.)

These questions yielded a very important set of findings. The pool of questions has been divided into the following sections for sake of clear separation: How the participants view the current situation in Tunisia, how the economy has impacted the participants, What the participants plan to do given their economic situation, and how the participants view the future of Tunisia.

The results and implications of these interviews will be discussed in the Analysis and Discussion session.

All of the participants in the selection seemed to have a poor view of the current economic situation in Tunisia. There was an overwhelming consensus on two major topics. All individuals but one directly held the education system at fault for poorly preparing them for life after school, but all of them did confirm that the education system is below average in preparing them for the workforce. This is important to note as $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants included education as a large determinant of one's ability to find employment. Additionally, all participants view the current situation in Tunisia as incredibly problematic economically. However, the group was split in the ease of finding a job after school. There was only one hard yes while the others included caveats of being optimistic or an explanation that one can do a startup. Finally for this section, participants were asked how they view the current government in power. All of them have disgruntled perspectives of the current government. The participants described the government as bad, incompetent, slow, without vision, and "ewie stinky". The group response was overwhelmingly negative to the current government. One participant also mentioned that all governments since the revolution have been in the same category. A similar type of response was given when asked if they felt the government was responsible for the poor economic situation in Tunisia. Every participant said the government has a large role of responsibility due to different laws, poor policies, corruption, and inadequate educational services.

In regards to how the economic situation has impacted the participants, all of those who had job hunted described an impact on their mental health. This varied from a bit of pressure to major depression. With this, there was a consensus that society treated unemployed young adults differently. The society is described as looking down on those suffering from unemployment.

Laziness was a common thread in the societal perceptions of those facing unemployment. This perception also holds true when asked how parents view unemployment in their children. It was taken even farther as the parents have much more invested into their child than the whole of society does. Some participants listed they felt like failures while others went as far as to hide their situation from their family. All participants were asked to state their long term goals (if they have any). After this, they were asked what they felt stood in the way of accomplishing those goals. The provided answers were varied. These included the economy, the government, the education system, and then a lack of motivation or self doubt (intrinsic reasoning).

Given the poor economic conditions, the participants were asked questions on what they planned to do going forward. Every single participant said that they planned on leaving Tunisia or hoped to leave. The only semi exception was that one individual said he hoped to one day come back to his country after studying abroad (seeking education in a different country). Every individual said that economic conditions influenced their desire to leave the country and $\frac{5}{8}$ of the participants said that they would stay if the economic conditions were better than they currently are. When asked about the lures of migration, the participants listed places such as the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Europe as potential destinations for relocation (With one mention of the Middle East). With these, better economic conditions and a change in lifestyle, society, and laws were sought out.

Lastly, the interviewees were asked questions in regards to their perspective on the future of Tunisia. Not a single participant said they felt confident about the economic future of Tunisia. Half of these answers included poor government (or government with selfish motivations) as the reason that there will not be an upswing in the future. When asked what would improve their lack of confidence, individuals said large government reforms and better education would help

fix the situation. One individual included an increase in foreign investment in their answer. Shockingly, multiple interviewees said that they did not think anything could fix the current problem. When asked if future generations would enjoy a higher standard of living, only one individual seemed to have hope. That hope was reliant on the current generation seeking something different and dispelling the current way of doing things in order to secure a better future for the next generation. Lastly, the participants were asked what needs to be changed in order to improve Tunisia and the economic crisis it is in. 5 of the participants said everything needs to be changed from the top down or bottom up in order to bring lasting change. Specific changes included the government regime, the education system, FDI, and a mention of “TV sensibilisation”.

These were the main findings from the questionnaire that was sent out. While every question was not included in the findings, the big themes that were deemed important were investigated thoroughly. These findings will be further discussed in the Discussion and Analysis section that follows.

Discussion and Analysis

Interpreting the Interviews

The interviews provided the backbone of the research as they were the direct link to the primary research question. As stated, the pool of questions has been divided into the following sections for sake of analysis: How the participants view the current situation in Tunisia, how the economy has impacted the participants, What the participants plan to do given their economic situation, and how the participants view the future of Tunisia. Again, these sections will be used to interpret the results of the interviews.

It was very clear that the participants have a negative perception of the Tunisian economic situation as a whole. While the participants were split in their view on how easy it is to obtain a job, all of them agreed that they had not been properly prepared for the workforce and that Tunisia is in dire straits. It is possible that the views differed due to different educational opportunities or chosen fields of study. Individuals coming from a more prestigious background that are in fields with easier access to employment probably had far less difficulty in finding a job. Additionally, there was a large mention of poor education systems in Tunisia. It seems one of the biggest roadblocks to success is a lack of preparation, knowledge, and relevant skills for Tunisians. Given that an economic disparity exists between the coastal regions and inland regions, it is probable that the education system also dips in quality the more inland it is. Lastly, the consensus of a negative view on the government is very important to understanding the perspective of Tunisian youths. Even the view on education seemed to be the result of poor government policy. While the revolution was supposed to usher out totalitarianism, it did nothing to insert a government that represented the values and ideals of the revolution. The youth of Tunisia have been heavily impacted by this and hold the government to blame. Regardless of Covid, the recent global recession, and other factors that impact the economy, the burden seems to currently weigh on the government according to the participants. This will be further discussed in the final section of interpreting the interviews due to the future implications this holds.

As the views of the participants have been largely negative, it seems the impact left on them has also been largely negative. Those who have engaged in job hunting have faced a negative pressure on their mental health. While some of this could be categorized as typical stress that could result from a job hunting prospect, there is also a much more serious and

dangerous level of depression that some participants are facing. Looking for employment is bound to contain a level of stress, but the intense feelings described by some are quite dangerous. This seems to stem from a lack of purpose and potential implications within the family. Harsh feelings like this were described by one of the participants to also be the mental state of some of the friends they knew as they were in similar positions of joblessness. This goes hand in hand with the way society and the family views those who are unemployed. Almost every participant talked about a negative view on those suffering from unemployment against their will. Societal and familial perceptions are seemingly a large contributing factor to the poor mental states some participants are facing. Problems like this need to be addressed as there is potential danger to those seriously suffering from depression. Given their situations, they may feel like they cannot reach out for any help. Additionally, as a population becomes disgruntled, they become less likely to engage in work when available or they may do a poor job resulting from the mental and physical toll serious mental health problems can have. This would only exacerbate the economic crisis. This double edged sword is bad for both suffering citizens and society as a whole and it will need to find resolution. Hopefully as youth unemployment is seen to be a problem external from the youth themselves, people will be able to gain a better understanding and perspective which may lead to better treatment of unemployed youth. Regardless of this possibility, societal perceptions need to shift in order to aid those negatively impacted.

All of the interviewees shared plans or desires to leave the country. For all but 2 of them this was driven purely by economic motivation. This is one of the most important findings of the research and tells a lot about the conditions in the country and what the future implications of the current conditions are. The group that was selected to answer the questionnaire was mixed in their unemployment status. Some had jobs while others didn't, but they all expressed a desire to

leave while taking economic conditions into account. Migration out of Tunisia seems to be one of the biggest results of the economic crisis as people are seeking employment and better opportunities wherever they can. While this could potentially lower unemployment rates as the workforce shrinks, it also could serve as a detriment to long term growth as skilled labor exits the nation (skilled laborers have greater ease in finding employment in other countries). Competition amongst domestic workers may decrease, but overall this could be detrimental to the economic rebound Tunisia is seeking to experience. The locations that many of the participants wanted to go to were typically western nations with thriving economies. These nations also tended to have higher levels of economic freedom (along with political). Social and political freedoms also seemed to be desirable when picking a destination. This raises an interesting point for Tunisia as a nation. The revolution was aimed at many goals that have not seemed to come to full fruition. As mentioned, political backsliding has begun under the Kais Saied regime. If Tunisia wishes to escape the economic crisis they are in, perhaps deeper digging needs to be done.

Digging deeper brings us to the final section of the interviews; what needs to be done going into the future. All of the participants expressed their frustration with the government in this section. Many put an emphasis on changing the entire system and starting anew. While this research is aimed at the Tunisian economic crisis, it is clear that the youth believe this can only be changed by an upheaval of the entire system. In order to bring change to the education sector, government policies, and day to day living standards, there needs to be a change in how the government is being run. As Kais Saied has taken more power, there was a hope for stability in the economy. Since this has not occurred, it seems that young adults want something new. What they desire seems to be the initial goals of the revolution. While this implies that the revolution failed to meet those expectations and bring lasting change, it also implies that Tunisia still needs

to undergo this sort of change. However, the participants also expressed they have very little hope that things will get better and that the next generation will enjoy a higher standard of living than they do. Perhaps this is a factor that contributes to their high desire to leave the country. This low level of confidence in positive change is indicative of the faith in the current government's ability to lead the nation. As elections occur in the coming years, this perception could have a large impact on the results if young people go out and vote (as long as the elections are still fair and free at that point). As well, a lack of faith in an economy is only going to have a negative impact on the economy. An economy requires people to buy into it and invest in it to see long term results. If faith in this system is dropping and people are seeking other opportunities, the economy is going to be hurt in the long run which could result in a negative feedback loop.

To summarize the interviews, the perceptions of the Tunsiiian people are largely negative when looking at the current economic situation. On a personal level, youth unemployment takes a toll on the mental states of individuals impacted by it and societal pressures only increase this mental health risk. This mental health issue needs to be addressed going forward as well as the stigma against people who cannot find work against their own will. On a more macro level, the Tunisian government is being held largely responsible for the current conditions in the country. Poor government policies, an education system that is behind the times, and corruption within the system are all factors that contribute to the poor economic situation and high unemployment rates from the perspective of the young adults. They are demanding an uprooting of the current system in order to pursue something new and better that will bring economic stability and growth. This desire is indicative of the potential future of Tunisia as the young adults will be the primary decision makers in the coming decades. However, the participants in the study did not

have faith in this as they saw no real possibility in change or growth in the future. Perhaps this is because of the seemingly failed revolution. Whatever the cause, this lack of faith does not bode well for the future of the Tunisian economy as an economy seeking growth requires people to buy into it and have faith in its future. Instead, all of the participants expressed a desire to leave the nation and seek opportunities elsewhere. In order to end this migration away from the country, there is going to have to be serious change in the Tunisian government (and through that, the economy) in order to bring people and investments into the nation as opposed to pushing people to flee.

Critique of the Current Economy and Government

Through the research gathered in the first two portions of the *Findings* section, it should be very clear that the Tunisian economy is suffering greatly. Unemployment is high, inflation is high, job creation is low, and economic growth is stagnant. The goals of the Revolution were far from met as economic conditions have only worsened and the government has begun devolving into another authoritarian regime. Many of the issues have already been addressed in the research, but there has to be great change in order to facilitate the change that the participants of the research hope to achieve. The interviews were conducted with the intent at understanding the thoughts of young adults in regards to the economic crisis. Many of the opinions and thoughts collected through the questionnaire mimic the research that was done prior to the interviews. Pulling from this, suggestions and changes to the current economic and government structure going forward are worth discussing in order to meet the demands of the Tunisian youth and give them a reason to stay in their home nation.

Much of what will be said has been touched on already, and it will require further study to properly implement in the country. The core of the problem from the perspective of the interviews is clearly the current government in power. Problems that predated the revolution under Ben Ali have still remained unresolved which has contributed to the poor economic conditions Tunisians are being plagued with. High legal barriers to entry and government interference through public ownership or monopolization have really damaged the economic growth and employment opportunities of the nation. With the government instability of the past and the potentially authoritarian regime of the present, FDI has continually decreased and doesn't seem to have a chance of increasing anytime soon. While economic problems aren't solely on the government's shoulders, many of the current problems are resulting from government policies that aim to protect certain parties instead of enabling long term growth. The people of Tunisia seem to understand this link and desire to hold the government accountable. Perhaps the biggest next step is getting out and voting in the next election to change the seat of power, and hopefully policies can follow on that. As people have noticed these massive issues, it can be hoped that leaders will look to fix them and meet the demands of the people. However, this hope may fall to shambles if people continually support a government that looks to consolidate power. There may come a point where the people lose so much power that they cannot be properly represented without drastic actions. Political activism and civic duty hold a tremendous amount of weight and power in the current climate. As Tunisia is at a crossroads for their future, the youth need to be involved in the political scene in order to get the changes they have asked for. This looks like voting, petitioning, campaigning, and perhaps even protesting. Only through these actions will the government be forced to bring about lasting change in the current climate. As this was the case when the revolution first started, it is also the case now. The

transition to democratic ideals and practices also carries with it a set of birthing pains. If the growing pains can be worked through, the desires that the interviewees described can be accomplished.

The problems with the education system also stem from the government as they are in charge of determining what is taught in schools. In order for the economy to experience growth and for the nation to head towards a positive future, the youth need to receive education they view as valuable. Many of the participants described the education as lackluster and ill fit to prepare people for the modern workforce. In order to meet the needs described in the interviews, the government needs to reconstitute how education is handled within the country. This means the material that is being taught along with the disparity between coastal and inland regions needs to be changed. As the government is forced to answer to the people it governs, again it is up to the Tunisian people to advocate for themselves and what they need. Through the methods listed earlier, change can come about in this portion of government. While the participants did not see a hope for the future generations of Tunisia, they also must come to realize that they play a large role in that. The way to get them to stay in the country is to relieve economic pressure and change the system as a whole, which they need to be a part of. This leaves the Tunisians entering into the adult world with a choice, fight for what they want, or leave and pursue it elsewhere. Clearly this choice is incredibly difficult and does not have a right answer. Both ways are fair and people need to do what they desire, but the former is what is required if the people hope to see their nation recover from the economic and governmental issues at hand.

Conclusion

The research conducted met many of the initial expectations going into the project. It was obvious from the start that there were many structural problems in the nation that led to the current economic crisis of high unemployment in young adults. Further research only supported this position and pointed out some of the specific problems such as poor government policies, government instability, and inadequate education. Interviews were the main object of research and revolved around the youth of Tunisia. These young adults were asked questions relating to their view on the current economic situation in Tunisia, their future, and what they felt the future of Tunisia would be like. All of them gave overwhelmingly negative responses to these questions; they had very poor views of the current situation and the future of Tunisia. Problems listed by the interviewees were exactly in line with the research prior to the interviews (government, its influence on the economy, and the education system). As well, the interviewees described negative impacts on their mental health due to the unemployment crisis and their attempt to get out of it. All of these issues are of dire importance to the Tunisian youth. The mental health issues are incredibly important and need to be addressed for the sake of the individuals impacted and society as a whole. The broader issues involving the economy and government need to be resolved in order to keep young adults in the nation and spur on economic growth for the sake of the country. The nation is at a crossroads where it will either realize the ideals of the revolution or remain in the stagnance of the past. Current generations play a large role in this even though they don't see a bright future. Kais Saied and potential future governments need to solve the issues that are plaguing the youth in order to keep outward immigration low and promote economic growth. The perspective of young adults is harshly negative, but it can only change through their activism in their government.

Further Areas of Discussion

There are multiple areas that deserve further discussion based off of the current research conducted. Government change was discussed and that brings about a massive topic that deserves conversation in light of revolution ideals not taking full hold. The topic of democratization in Tunisian culture is worth discussing. The revolution did not produce real governmental results and that needs to be investigated in order to create long term solutions and change. Additionally, specific government policies need to be addressed. This research did not aim to call out specific pieces of legislation, but rather it looked at broad political practices of governments. With the first topic in mind, specific government policies need to be looked at that limit the economic growth and job creation within the country. These policies need to be identified and then proper change needs to be further discussed. Lastly, there needs to be further research on the education system of Tunisia. According to the interviews, this system is largely inadequate. There needs to be further research figuring out where the system fails the students. From here, solutions need to be investigated along with necessary knowledge and skills for the modern job market so that the students are properly equipped for life after graduation. These three areas are some of the most important when considering the future of Tunisia in light of the current research.

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