

COUNTRY REPORT

**POSSIBLE FUTURES
FOR SOCIAL COHESION
IN AN AGE OF MIS-
AND DISINFORMATION**

TUNISIA



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SUMMARY

“Without facts, you can’t have truth. Without truth, you can’t have trust. Without trust, we have no shared reality, no democracy, and it becomes impossible to deal with the existential problems of our times.”

– Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate 2021

The Shared Realities Project aims to address the eroding relationship between truth and trust that is playing out across the globe. The project supports stakeholders in developing new and enhanced understanding and awareness of the harmful feedback loop between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation (both on-line and off). In doing so, it works to build resilience and catalyze tangible action to shift from harmful to healthier dynamics.

This report gathers the perspectives of the participants who took part in the first iteration of the Shared Realities Project in 2023 in Tunisia. The aim of this report is to begin to bring the feedback loop between social cohesion and mis and disinformation into view. It helps to reveal how the feedback loop manifests itself in people’s everyday lives; how local vulnerabilities influence outcomes; and what kind of action is needed in response. To that end, this report consolidates and shares the learning gathered through this initial phase of work in Tunisia.

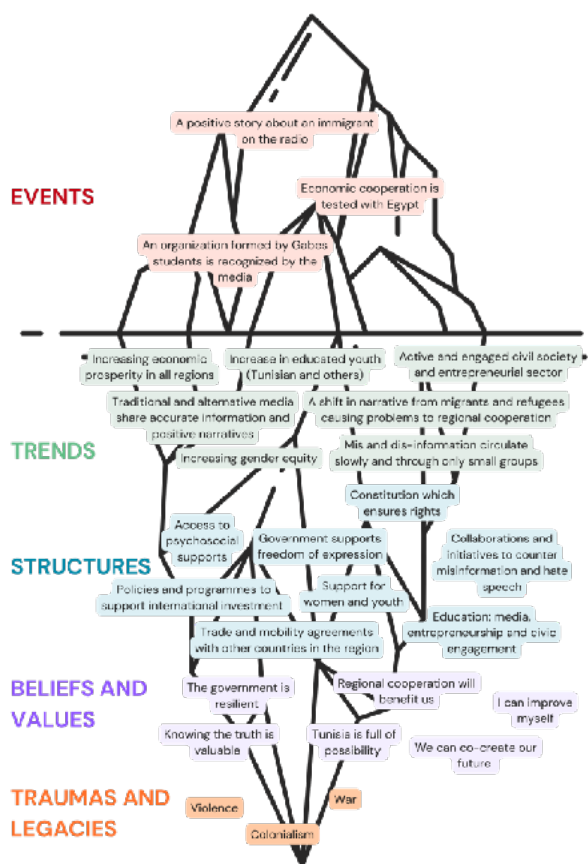
Part 1 of the report shares a first version of scenarios for possible futures for social cohesion in an age of mis and disinformation in Tunisia. Their purpose is to support an open and constructive reflection on the challenges and opportunities for shifting the loop, based on a robust picture of the system and how it could play out.

One of the scenarios tells a story of a healthier future, while the other tells a story of a more harmful one.

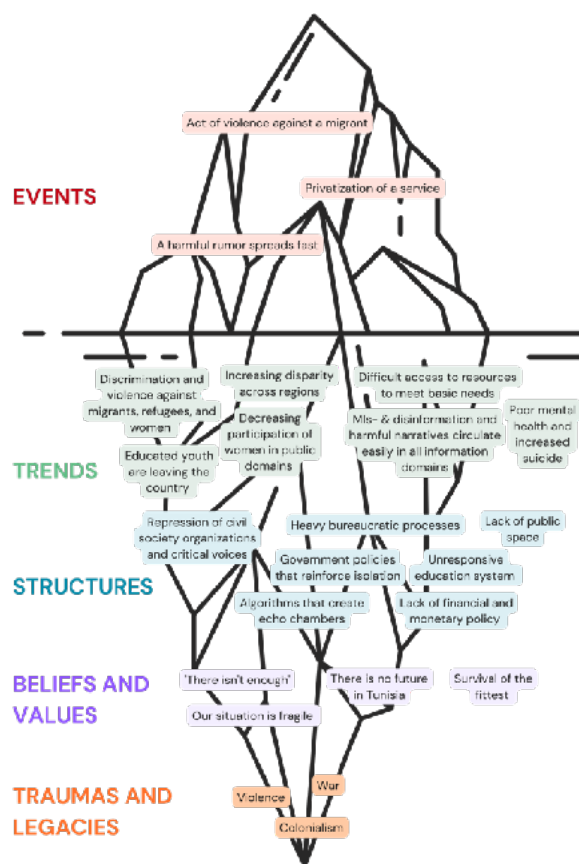
The essence of the healthier future scenario is one of collaboration, openness, transparency, and entrepreneurship. The essence of the more harmful future scenario is one of stagnation, silence, struggle, and frustration.

An analysis of the two scenarios reveals the systemic conditions that would animate each scenario. This analysis brings into focus what can be seen with regards to what structures, beliefs, and values might underlie a healthier or more harmful future. This

provides some initial indications of areas in which to focus interventions to shift from a more harmful to a healthier loop.



An iceberg diagram showing a Healthier Future in Tunisia



An iceberg diagram showing a more Harmful Future in Tunisia

Part 2 of the report, shares what a group of stakeholders identified as the leverage points that they believe that, if addressed, could lead to healthier and less harmful loops. They identified seven leverage areas in which they believe that action could help to shift the loop. The leverage areas that they identified are:

- Opening public administration
- Building greater civic engagement
- Generating a stronger and more inclusive national identity
- Ensuring equal access to education opportunities for young people
- Creating an easier environment for investment and for establishing organizations
- Violence prevention against groups that are being socially excluded
- Improving physical spaces for social engagement

Part 3 of this report details building blocks that the scenarios were built on. The building blocks of these scenarios are what people are most concerned about with regards to the future, and the key drivers that will determine the direction of the

future. This section reveals, in greater depth, the perspectives shared by the interviewees, and provides a foundation for thinking about other stories that might be told about possible futures.

The first building block is stakeholders' key concerns. These are the things that they care most about when thinking about the future of their country. Stakeholders identified issues related to equity and inclusion of diverse groups in society, emigration, and stability and violence in the country as being most important to them. Stakeholders described several groups of people in Tunisia who they perceive to be treated inequitably, or to experience social exclusion. The groups that they expressed concern about were:

- Women
- Youth
- Migrants and refugees
- People with disabilities
- People living in different regions of the country

The second building block is systemic drivers. These are the social, technical, political, environmental, and economic forces that will influence the future of the things that stakeholders care most about. The key systemic drivers that they identified include:

- The action of the government
- Information ecosystems
- Economic conditions
- Infrastructure and development
- People's ability to dialogue and engage with each other
- Whether people have a shared identity

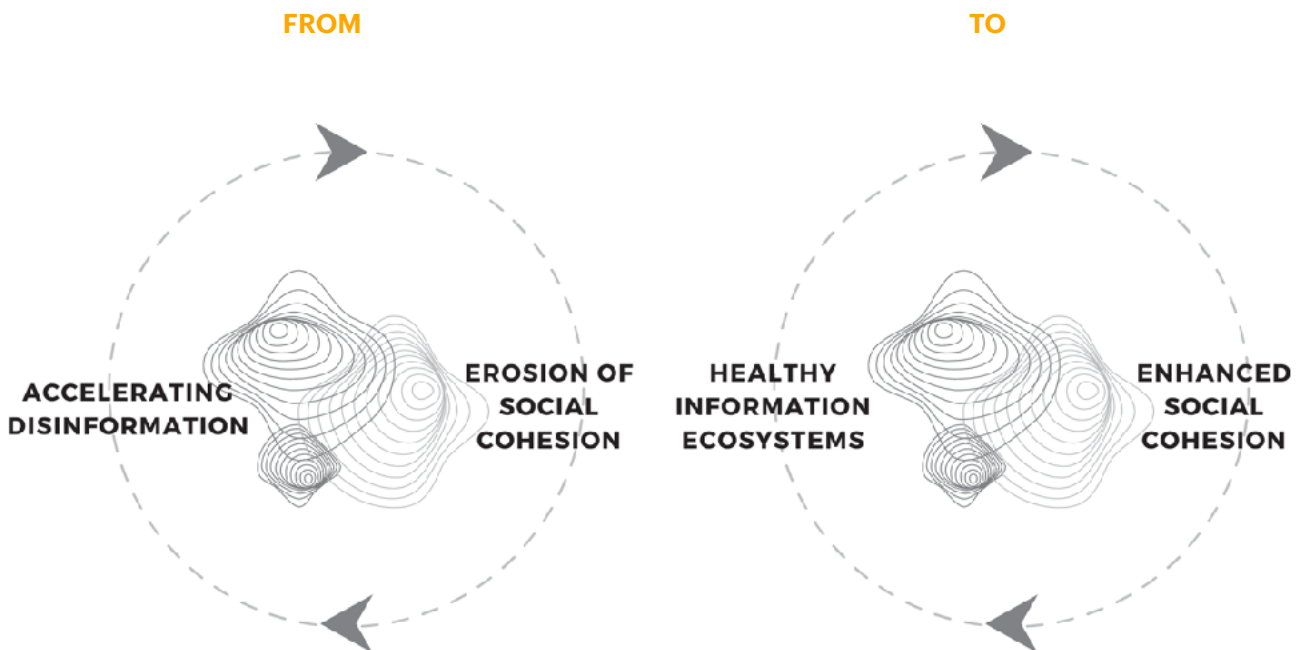
Part 4 notes the gaps in this report and suggests next steps. Useful next steps would be to engage the stakeholders who participated as well as a broader group of stakeholders in deep participatory processes in which, together, they can co-create an even more robust and illuminating view of the system dynamics, and key leverage areas. From that, a solid foundation for collaborative scaling and innovation could lead to impactful and lasting solutions. Some key areas for further investigation include deeper understanding of: Social cohesion, Information ecosystems, Information economy, Data and Technology, and Geopolitics.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROCESS

The Shared Realities Project is an initiative of the Reos Institute aiming to address the eroding relationship between truth and trust that is playing out across the globe. By developing enhanced awareness and understanding of the dynamics between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation (both on-line and off) and creating new scenarios for possible futures for societies impacted by such dynamics, the project aims to build resilience to mis- and disinformation and catalyze tangible action to shift from harmful to more healthy dynamics.

With Shared Realities, our impact goal is to help communities shift from harmful feedback loops to healthy ones.



Shared Realities works with diverse multi stakeholder groups in different geographies to help inoculate individuals and communities against mis- and disinformation; support their agency in creating strategies for coping with harmful dynamics between social cohesion and mis and disinformation; and to generate relationships of trust needed to shift such dynamics in their own contexts in support of healthier societies and information ecosystems.

The larger vision of Shared Realities as a program of work is to engage in three different ways:

- I. Undertaking collaborative, systemic processes in different geographies and regions
- II. Fostering cross-context learning
- III. Influencing discussions at a global level

THE SHARED REALITIES LEARNING PROJECT

In 2023, the first iteration of Shared Realities was carried out in Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan, through a Learning Project. With the support of Porticus and the engagement of many collaborators, in each country we undertook the first steps of a systemic process to lay the groundwork for collaborative action towards healthy information ecosystems and enhanced social cohesion. In addition to this country-specific learning, we also conducted some initial cross-context learning for interviewees from the three countries by sharing the outcomes of this process. In this way the Shared Realities Learning Project endeavors to contribute to global knowledge about the loop.

This report represents a key achievement of this process. It is complemented by similar reports for Jordan and Lebanon, a Cross-Country Report, which identifies similarities and contextual differences across the three countries, and a mapping, which identifies actors in each country that are already working to shift the loop.

In each country, the Shared Realities Learning Project brought together



people from different sectors, professions, and life experiences. By bringing together a diversity of actors who have different kinds of country-based knowledge, experience, and influence, participants were able to generate new understandings, and contextualized insights concerning how global drivers are playing out in each country. Further, this diversity of actors can begin to envision fresh opportunities and influential entry points for shifting the harmful feedback loops between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation in these different contexts.

PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The aim of this report is to help bring the feedback loop between social cohesion and mis and disinformation into clearer focus for participants. In so doing, the report provides meaningful scope and context for observing how the feedback loop manifests itself in people's everyday lives; for understanding how local vulnerabilities influence outcomes; and for envisioning what kind of action is needed in response. To that end, this report consolidates and shares the learning gathered through this initial phase of work in Tunisia.

Part 1 of the report shares a first version of scenarios for possible futures for social cohesion in an age of mis and disinformation in Tunisia. Their purpose is to support an open and constructive reflection on the challenges and opportunities for shifting the loop, based on a robust picture of the system and how it could play out.

Part 2 of the report, shares what a group of stakeholders identified as the leverage points that they believe that, if addressed, could lead to healthier and less harmful loops.

Part 3 of this report details building blocks that the scenarios were built on. The building blocks of these scenarios are what people are most concerned about with regards to the future, and the key drivers that will determine the direction of the future. This section reveals, in greater depth, the perspectives shared by the interviewees, and provides a foundation for thinking about other stories that might be told about possible futures.

Part 4 notes the gaps in this report and suggests next steps.

The appendix provides a broad selection of quotes that illustrate participant perspectives on the building blocks. Readers who want a deeper understanding of how stakeholders see the loop, its current dynamics, and its possible futures will find a greater level of depth, and detail in this appendix.



APPROACH

To compile this report, we conducted interviews with 10 knowledgeable experts. Three of them are relatively early in their careers, with 3 to 8 years of experience. The remaining interviewees have between 10 and 20 years of experience in their respective fields. Half of the experts work on the social side of the loop, primarily focusing on gender and youth inclusion, while 3 experts concentrate on the information side, with a special emphasis on radio. Only 2 experts work at the intersection of these domains. Among the 10 interviewees, 3 are originally from outside the capital, including 2 who currently work in their respective regions. Lastly, all the experts hold leadership positions within their organizations, with more than half of them being founders.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each expert, inviting them to use futures thinking to explore key themes with regards to the loop in their country. These semi-structured interviews were analyzed for common themes, which we next grouped into building blocks for scenarios for possible futures of social cohesion in an age of mis- and disinformation in Tunisia (Part 3 of the report). These building blocks were then developed by an external scenario writer into two different narratives (scenarios) of how social cohesion and mis-/disinformation could unfold into the future in the country (Part 1 of the report). These preliminary scenarios provide a starting point for shared systems understanding, which will be further elaborated through subsequent steps in the process in each country.



1. SCENARIOS

1. SCENARIOS

Scenarios are stories about what could happen over the coming years based on the current reality and the dynamics around key certainties and uncertainties. They are not forecasts or predictions of what will happen. Neither are they visions, preferences, or recommendations of what should happen.

In a complex situation scenario development can be helpful as a way to lift the gaze beyond the current reality and to broaden perspectives beyond the most probable or feared trajectory.

Scenarios can help to expand the imagination, to discover different possibilities, and to restore a sense of hope and agency.

Further, considering different scenarios about the future allows for exploring the full space of future potential, without requiring agreement and without committing to specific positions. Scenarios enable us to deal with the reality that – although we cannot predict or control the future – we can work with and influence it.

The scenarios presented in this report are anchored in participants' understandings of and perspectives on the current situation of social cohesion and information systems in Tunisia. They offer different stories of how the future could play out between the present moment and the year 2030. These stories are neither the most healthy nor the most harmful scenarios that stakeholders in the country could imagine, but they are plausible scenarios of what the future could look like, based on this group of participants' knowledge, experience, and insight.

The scenarios aim to be relevant, challenging, credible, and clear. Their purpose is to support an open and constructive reflection on the challenges and opportunities faced by Tunisian society and to stimulate dialogue and action among actors involved in different ways with Tunisia. In particular, the scenarios are intended to help people explore the question “What areas, if changed, could shift the loop between social-cohesion and information from a harmful one to a healthier one?”

SCENARIO 1: A HEALTHIER LOOP

SCENARIO ESSENCE: COLLABORATION, OPENNESS, TRANSPARENCY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In the world of the a healthier future in 2030 Tunisians are building their future together across the country and engaged with other countries in the region. The government of the country has embraced a new approach to governing - one that is guided by openness and collaboration.

As a result of conditions put in place by the IMF, and pushed by the requirements of private finance institutions, the government has taken steps to be more transparent. Information about government decisions is available on the official government website. Government spending and activities are also documented and can be accessed by request. As a result there is increasing trust in the government and understanding of what the government is engaged in.

There are incidents of mis- and dis-information about government activities, which are created and shared with the aim of undermining or destabilizing the government. While these ripple through formal and informal media channels, the high level of transparency by government and effective fact checking by legacy media and on social media

platforms, and strong media literacy among youth prevent this mis- and disinformation from creating substantial destabilization.

The government, in collaboration with the private sector, is trying to make Tunisia attractive to foreign private investment. Policies have been changed to make investing easier, and a focus of many activities is to attract investment. While government transparency has been a part of the changes to attract foreign investment, there are also additional changes in private sector transparency. Pushed by investor demands, the private sector is increasingly transparent with regards to their activities and finances.

These changes are widely communicated with pride by the government and by other Tunisians. Tunisians living in the diaspora are now investing in their country, with a large group of angel investors getting involved in the country's entrepreneurial sector. This increase in investment from the diaspora has been followed by larger private investors, who see a great deal of opportunity in the growing economy. While many people across Tunisia still experience poverty, there is a strong sense that the future of the country is brighter, and there are more and more young people engaged in entrepreneurship.

Inspired by a vision of an economically prosperous future, the government has put in place a regional cooperation agreement with other countries in

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Northern Africa and the Mediterranean. The aim of this agreement is to increase investment, trade, and collaboration among countries in the region. Conspiracy theories circulate, saying that the regional integration approach is aiming to change the demography of Tunisia. These conspiracy theories have significant traction in small circles. The regional agreement is creating more mobility into and out of the country for residents of Tunisia and neighboring countries.

The government is strongly pushing a narrative that the region is better together. This narrative is picked up and reinforced by civil society actors and some alternative media. As a result attitudes towards migrants are shifting. While there is still a prevalent anti-refugee and anti-migrant narrative among many groups in Tunisian society, these narratives are not driving violence. There is also increasing acceptance of different racialized groups, who are being seen as from the region, and appearance-based discrimination is decreasing. However, there is rising popularity among some nationalist politicians, which advance a “Tunisia first” approach.

There is government support to ensure that this investment is not concentrated in the capital, but also reaches entrepreneurs in other regions of the country. There has been an effort to identify and promote the special traits of each region, and to build the tourism sector across the country. There have been information campaigns



highlighting the beauty and special features of each region, leading to increasing pride in each region, and in Tunisia as a whole.

In this growing economy, there has been an increase in advertising, with more international brands trying to reach increasingly prosperous Tunisian consumers. As a result, media companies have more resources available and are able to pursue new approaches, including partnerships between national and regional media. Media in the regions outside of the capital focus on providing opportunities for Tunisians to engage with one another, supporting local debate about different topics, sharing information about local events, and sharing local news. Partnerships between local media providers and national media outlets, which are able to elevate stories from outside the capital to national attention, including those about local grievances.

In addition, civil society outside of the capital is active in both addressing regional challenges, and in amplifying messages about the needs of regions. As a result, there is more attention being paid to addressing concerns that are outside of the capital region. Included in this attention is investment in better infrastructure to connect the regions of the country. While feelings of being unfairly treated as compared to the capital persist among some people outside of the capital, improving living conditions for all, and attention being paid to some important needs keeps

these feelings from feeding meaningful division.

As a result of the new inter-country agreement it has become easier for young and educated Tunisians to emigrate from the country to other countries in the region. At the same time, it has also become easier for young, educated people from other countries in the region to immigrate to Tunisia. As a result there is a great deal more mobility among young people, with Tunisians leaving the country, but also coming back, and with an influx of young people coming from other countries. Many young people are attracted by the openness, stability, and inclusivity of Tunisia relative to the other countries that are part of the regional agreement. The image portrayed of Tunisia by those living in the country is attractive, open, and thriving. Overall, Tunisia is experiencing a “brain gain” rather than a “brain drain”.

A stronger and more inclusive Tunisian identity is emerging in this context. There is a growing sense of pride in Tunisia as a welcoming and connected country of diverse regions and diverse people. People speak with pride about the country and their belonging in it, even those who are newly arrived.

The openness and collaboration agenda of the government has not only focused on investment and regional cooperation, but also on an engaged civil society. The government has made it very clear that it welcomes an engaged civil society, and critique of the government is tolerated.



This engagement stops short of any form of transitional justice. The government has a strong position that it is focused on the future, not on the past. There is little action to identify, discuss or provide justice for past wrongs, and as a result civil society actors who are a consistent voice for justice are increasingly critical of the government and frustrated by inaction.

It has become relatively easy for civil society actors to receive a license to operate. However, maintaining a license requires a high degree of transparency and accountability. Many civil society organizations complain that they are spending too much of their limited resources on monitoring and reporting. However, this increased transparency does seem to align with donor expectations, supporting strong civil society.

Because donor funds and government initiatives in the country are focused on economic development, there are some social issues that do not receive much attention, except through economic development approaches. For example, women's inclusion is supported through women's economic engagement. However, there is little action to shift attitudes towards women's role in the home, or women's roles in politics. Women are increasingly burdened by short maternity leave, inaccessible childcare, and carrying the double burden of work and home duties. Women in politics and engaging in social activism continue to face bullying and harassment in many domains. While

there has been an increase in women in the private sector, women remain underrepresented in politics, and activism for women's rights is limited.

Conscious that in this context of openness, mis- and disinformation, and online harassment could make the openness and collaboration agenda much more difficult to implement, there have been significant efforts to curb the impacts of mis- and disinformation. Existing initiatives in the country that support fact checking, the identification of harmful narratives, and improving media literacy are receiving additional support to scale-up their activities. Legacy and alternative media work in collaboration with civil society, the government, and the private sector to inoculate people against mis- and disinformation and harmful narratives, to identify mis and disinformation when they appear, and to stop their spread through formal media channels. This collaboration is increasingly sophisticated, and is able to identify and expose deep fakes, in addition to older forms of mis- and disinformation. As a result, though mis- and disinformation continue to spread, and there are harmful narratives circulating, their impact on society is relatively small. Most Tunisians trust the information that they receive from formal media channels, which also have a significant presence in social media spaces. At the same time, social media platforms have not made any changes to their algorithms, which tend to create isolated bubbles. As a result, while there is more accurate information available, there are



also strong political divisions visible in the country, and a number of significant debates appear to be becoming more stuck.

The world of the healthier future is one of a growing private sector, engaged civil society, and promising future. There are grievances, inequities, and challenges in this world, to be sure. Will these trends continue? Are there risks that can disrupt this trajectory? And will remaining challenges be addressed?



SCENARIO 2: A MORE HARMFUL LOOP

SCENARIO ESSENCE: STAGNATION, SILENCE, STRUGGLE, FRUSTRATION

In the world of the more harmful future in 2030 many Tunisians are struggling. They struggle to meet their basic day-to-day needs, they struggle with mental health challenges, and they struggle to find a way forward.

Fearing instability, the government is closed. Information about government policies and actions is largely unavailable, though there are occasional posts on social media, and public statements from government leaders from time to time. The government does not engage at all with journalists or formal media. There is sometimes confusion about the governments' position or approach. Further, there is suspicion that some of the statements from officials are inaccurate. However, the veracity of government statements is rarely questioned publicly.

Critique of the government is not permitted. Those who speak out against the government through protest, in social media, or in legacy media are censored, sometimes mildly with warnings, and other times with imprisonment. In this environment there is almost no public critique, and statements put out about the government are exclusively positive. A growing number of Tunisians appreciate

and praise the government. At the same time, a large number of Tunisians blame the government for the poor state of the economy and worsening living conditions, and feel frustrated and angry that they are being silenced.

These frustrated Tunisians tend to engage with one another through private channels on encrypted messaging platforms. On these platforms group chats are created, and new members are added through invitation. In these small, private bubbles, people express their frustrations, and share ideas about how to change the situation. The ideas shared within these groups tend to become progressively more extreme, and in different directions, ranging from religious fundamentalism to radical leftist politics. While these divisions are not generally visible, they are creating deepening cracks in the society.

While critique of the government is largely silenced, there remains active civil society in the country. Civil society is active in education, in media literacy, in general skills training, and in meeting peoples' basic needs. As a result, mis- and disinformation and harmful narratives that come from unofficial sources spread relatively slowly. Civil society largely avoids advocacy activities.

Media is also active. Volunteer-led community radio continues to thrive across the country. Community radio provides a platform for connecting people with events and changes in their communities, provides a space for



storytelling, music, and humor, and provides a space for people to share their views on various local issues. National media is dominated by a small number of national television stations, newspapers, and radio stations. While many Tunisians engage with these platforms through their social media pages, commenting is highly moderated, and the silence on any issues critiquing the government is maintained there as well. Most advertising funds these few dominant national media channels.

The journalists and editors of these channels are trained in identifying mis- and disinformation, and are able to filter out significant amounts of conspiracy theories and information that is demonstrably false. However, these

channels do not filter, critique, or moderate statements made by the government. As a result, any mis- or disinformation coming from government bodies or figures is widely spread across the country. Sometimes the messages shared by the government are highly divisive. When there are incidents of divisive messages being shared by the government, tensions between everyday people rise.

The political stability of the country has not translated into economic stability. The currency has been devalued and there is little access to financing, foreign or domestic. The limited development funds that come into the country achieve very little impact, as they become stuck in difficult bureaucratic





processes within the government. The government policies regarding foreign investment are also difficult to navigate, making Tunisia an unappealing place for most investors. At the same time, because of currency devaluation, the cost of living is very high. Many Tunisians struggle to meet their needs.

The education system is stressed and stretched. In the context of devaluation, recruiting and retaining teachers is very difficult. Class sizes are large, and students are underperforming. There have been no updates to the formal curriculum, and the skills that students gain through secondary education are ill suited to the poorly performing job market. Many students drop out of secondary education, feeling that it is a waste of time. In post-secondary education there are groups of highly motivated students, who aim to gain enough education to leave the country and enter the job market elsewhere.

Existing regional divisions have deepened. In regions outside of the capital, rumors of intentional unfair treatment spread easily, with accusations of diverse motives for subjugating the regions. While people across the country feel frustrated, that frustration turns to anger more easily in the regions outside of the capital, who have growing resentment of the inequity in the country.

Aiming to find blame for the poor conditions in the country, the government supports and spreads narratives that scapegoat migrants and

refugees for the country's problems. These narratives are highly prevalent in legacy media and social media. They feed, not only a lack of services and general exclusion of refugees and migrants, but also violence towards them, including the burning of buildings housing refugees.

Misogynist narratives are also spread easily. Narratives that women are stealing opportunities from men, that they belong in the home, that their engagement in different domains is to blame for the ills of society spread easily on social media. Women experience overt discrimination and harassment in public, on social media, and even in legacy media. Many women withdraw from public domains entirely.

There is a steady stream of Tunisians leaving the country. Young men seeking economic opportunity, educated women, and political progressives are emigrating to other countries. Among those who stay, there are high rates of depression, and increased suicide rates.

The world of the more harmful future feels stagnant and stuck. How long will it stay like this? Will there be changes that lead to worsening conditions? To a more prosperous future? To greater inclusion?

COMPARING THE SCENARIOS

The scenarios above describe two different contexts in which the loop between social cohesion and mis- and disinformation could play out in a future Tunisia. The table below explores some of the implications of each scenario for how the loop could play out around the issues of key concern discussed by stakeholders.

GENDER EQUITY

HEALTHIER LOOP: Women's inclusion is supported through women's economic engagement. However, there is little action to shift attitudes towards women's role in the home, or women's roles in politics. Women are increasingly burdened by short maternity leave, inaccessible child care, and carrying the double burden of work and home duties. Women in politics and in social activism continue to face bullying and harassment in many domains. While there has been an increase in women in the private sector, women remain underrepresented in politics, and activism for women's rights is limited.

EXAMPLE: Tunisia hits a record high number of women CEOs. When a high-profile female CEO runs for national political office, coverage of her run for office has discriminatory tones, and rumors are circulated about her past and about her qualifications. However, these are balanced by messages praising her abilities. She remains in politics and wins the election.

A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: Misogynist narratives, for example saying that women are stealing opportunities from men, that they belong in the home, that their engagement in different domains is to blame for the ills of society spread easily on social media. Women experience overt discrimination and harassment in public, on social media, and even in legacy media. Many women withdraw from public domains entirely.

EXAMPLE: A female journalist writes several high-profile articles about the problem of femicide in the country, and



the many systemic gaps that are leaving women without the needed support. She and women that she quoted are harassed and threatened online. As a result these women question whether their activism is worth the cost. Several decide to withdraw from activism.

MIGRANT AND REFUGEE INCLUSION

HEALTHIER LOOP: An emphasis on regional cooperation and mobility, accompanied by messages that explain the rationale behind cooperation and coinciding with increases in investment, entrepreneurship, and improvements in material conditions, leads to decreasing discrimination against migrants and refugees.

EXAMPLE: In the lead up to, and following the signature of the regional cooperation agreement, the government engages in broad campaign promoting the idea that the region is “better together”. This campaign is undertaken in cooperation with civil society, influencers, and the private sector, including a wide variety of interventions in media, social media, and in face-to-face contexts. While there is some racist push-back against this campaign, it is largely effective, and there is a decrease in racial- and identity-based discrimination.

A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: Aiming to find blame for the poor conditions in the country, the government supports and spreads narratives that scapegoat migrants and refugees for the country’s problems. These narratives are highly prevalent in legacy media and social media. They feed, not only a lack of services and general exclusion of refugees and migrants, but also violence towards them, including the burning of buildings housing refugees.

EXAMPLE: As inflation hits an all-time high, the President issues a statement blaming migrants for the economic problems of the country and announces a new policy of deportation of migrants. In addition to subsequent action by the government to deport migrants and refugees, there are incidents in which racist Tunisians also assault people in the street who are perceived to be migrants.

INTERREGIONAL EQUITY

HEALTHIER LOOP: Feelings of inequity and resentment among regions are diminishing. Increasing investment, increasing promotion of the unique features of regions, as well as increasing attention to addressing regional concerns, as a result of media partnerships and increased civil society action are leading to better living conditions in regions outside of the capital.

EXAMPLE: A long-standing need for infrastructure connecting a remote city to major transportation hub is raised by civil society, and is amplified by local news media. As a

result, an investment opportunity is identified which helps to address the gap, and there is infrastructure created.

A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: Existing regional divisions have deepened. In regions outside of the capital, rumors of intentional unfair treatment spread easily, with accusations of diverse motives for subjugating the regions. While people across the country feel frustrated, that frustration turns to anger more easily in the regions outside of the capital, who have growing resentment of the inequity in the country.

EXAMPLE: When there is news coverage of the opening of a new highway in Tunis, it is met with anger from people in the regions. Rumors that the highway money was meant to be spent on connecting to the region, but rather was spent corruptly on serving high ranking government official's personal financial aims, spread quickly and easily throughout the regions.

EMIGRATION

HEALTHIER LOOP: A cross-country agreement with other regional countries leads to greater mobility between countries. Young, educated Tunisians emigrate to other regional countries, but some return. Young and educated people from other countries immigrate to Tunisia as well. Further, Tunisians who have emigrated outside share messages of the challenges that they face in abroad. As a result, the image of Tunisia outside of the country is one of energy and growth, creating a "brain-gain".

EXAMPLE: A hashtag #TunisiaJeT'aime is very popular on social media for a brief period. The posts share what people love about the country. The image of Tunisia as a desirable place to live becomes widespread among those in the country and out of the country.



A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: There is a steady stream of Tunisians leaving the country. Young men seeking economic opportunity, educated women, and political progressives are emigrating to other countries.

EXAMPLE: Across Tunisian society there is a pervasive feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness with regards to the future of the country. These messages of hopelessness are shared between people, in social media, and in traditional media. Those who try to make change are not supported. Those who have energy or means are leaving the country.

STABILITY AND VIOLENCE

HEALTHIER LOOP: While there are strong divisions between political parties, and active opposition, the political situation is stable, and is expected to remain this way. While femicide continues to be a problem, and there are racially motivated violent acts, there is no large-scale inter-group violence.

EXAMPLE: Elections are being held on the expected schedule. There is active campaigning and significant voter turnout. Observers confirm that it is a fair and legitimate election, and the result is respected.

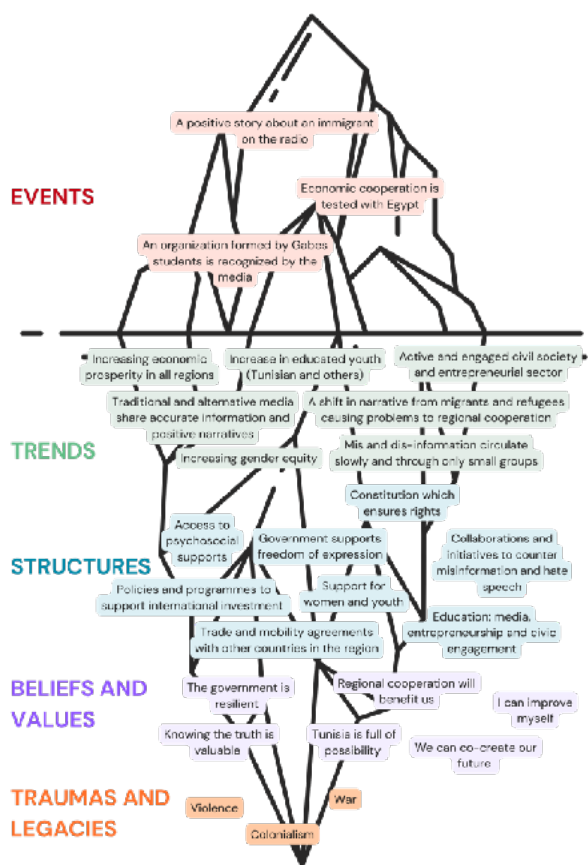
A MORE HARMFUL LOOP: While there is overall stability at the national political level, interpersonal violence, motivated by feelings of resentment is on the rise.

EXAMPLE: Members of a private fundamentalist group that communicates on a WhatsApp channel plan and execute the burning of a house in a migrant neighborhood. In this group there are also many complaints that circulate about the government, and ideas about how to get new political leadership, including by violent means

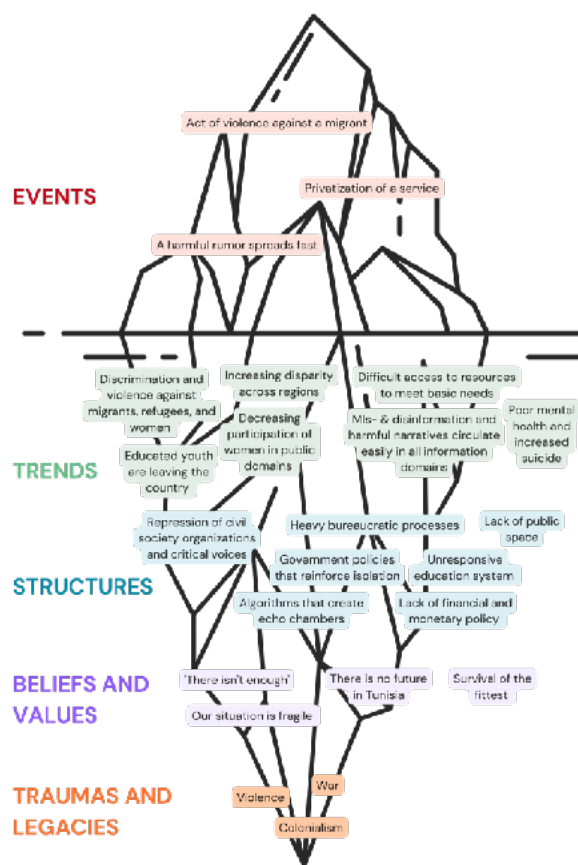
EXAMINING THE SYSTEMIC DRIVERS PRESENT IN EACH SCENARIO

An analysis of the two scenarios reveals the systemic conditions that would animate each scenario. This analysis brings into focus what can be seen with regards to what structures, beliefs, and values might underlie a healthier or more harmful future. This provides some initial indications of areas in which to focus interventions to shift from a more harmful to a healthier loop.

The image of an iceberg, in which the top part, that which is above the water line, is visible, while the larger element, that which is below the water line, is not visible, has been used to show these deeper drivers.



An iceberg diagram showing a Healthier Loop in Tunisia



An iceberg diagram showing a more Harmful Loop in Tunisia

2. LEVERAGE POINTS



2. LEVERAGE POINTS

“These are places within a complex system (a corporation, an economy, a living body, a city, an ecosystem) where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything.”

— Donella Meadows

Following the presentation of these scenarios to a group of Tunisian stakeholders, the stakeholders were asked to identify leverage areas which, if shifted, could lead to a healthier, rather than more harmful loop. They did this by looking at the structure and beliefs and values levels of the Iceberg system maps above. The stakeholders identified seven key leverage areas that, on the basis of their understandings, they believe could help to shift the loop:

Opening **public administration**

Building greater **civic engagement**

Generating a stronger and more inclusive **national identity**

Ensuring equal access to education opportunities for **young people**

Creating an easier environment for **investment** and for **establishing organizations**

Violence prevention against groups that are being socially excluded

Improving **physical spaces** for social engagement

Across all of these areas, stakeholders identified the national government as the actor with the ability to make the most significant change, and most rapidly. They also noted that, even without government action, civil society actors could make advances in many of these domains. They flagged that in order for them to be effective, it will be important to bridge gaps that they noted exist between civil society organizations and actors and the general public. They also suggested that the most effective action would be undertaken by the government and civil society acting in collaboration. They also noted that in certain domains, particularly those in which shifting narratives would be effective, alternative influencers could advance change effectively. These alternative influencers include religious leaders, rappers, tiktokers and instagrammers.

The first area that the stakeholders identified is the **opening of the public administration**, in both sharing information, and in engaging citizens. They noted that in many of the domains that are important to the future of the country, such as economy, education, social inclusion, and social cohesion, the government will be able to make much more effective changes if it both engages and informs citizens and civil society. They noted that this would lead to greater effectiveness in government information, as well as to greater feelings of cohesion with the government generated through feelings of collective agency and engagement. Further, if public services undergo a digital transformation, many government



services will become more accessible and user friendly. They also shared that it would be important for a wider group of stakeholders to better understand the government and how it works in order to be able to better engage.

The second area that stakeholders identified is the building of a **greater level of civic engagement**. Stakeholders noted that the first area, more engagement and openness from the state, could support greater civic engagement. At the same time, they noted that increased civic engagement would be possible, even in the absence of action by the state. They suggested that greater civic engagement could be generated through formal and informal education, and through information and campaigning which highlights the importance of civic action and engagement to advance a better future.

The third area that stakeholders identified is creating a **stronger and more inclusive national identity**. They noted that a strong and shared national identity, which includes the diverse histories of the people of Tunisia could advance social cohesion.

The fourth area that stakeholders identified is **ensuring equal access to education opportunities for young people**, so that feelings of disparity between different groups of young people diminishes, advancing social cohesion, and so that young people have greater capacity to contribute to a better future for the country.

The fifth area that stakeholders identified is creating an **easier environment for investment and for establishing organizations**. They noted that in the current context it is difficult for new initiatives in business and in civil society to start up. As a result, energy that could be building Tunisia's economy or advancing civic action rather goes into managing and navigating complex and time-consuming bureaucratic processes. They identified that shifting these conditions could help to release energy that could lead to better futures.

The sixth area that stakeholders identified is **violence prevention** against groups that are being socially excluded. They noted that violence breeds further violence and division, as well as feeding tensions. Further, it can sometimes silence those who might otherwise be active and create a more inclusive society. They noted that simply discouraging violence, if it comes from an adequately influential organization or individual, can effectively reduce incidents of violence.

The seventh area that stakeholders identified was in **creating informal connections among people across the country in physical and online spaces**. They noted that improved public spaces and improvement of transportation and cross-country infrastructure could give people in Tunisia more opportunities to meet each other, to engage with each other, and to understand each other, creating greater social cohesion among people.

3. BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE SCENARIOS

3. BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE SCENARIOS

The two scenarios written above, of the healthier and more harmful loop, were chosen among the many that could be. These scenarios are neither the most healthy nor the most harmful that stakeholders in the country could imagine, but rather aim to reveal both helpful and harmful dynamics. In so doing they illuminate some features and dynamics while leaving others unexplored. For example, neither story addresses who the government is or how it was formed. This choice was made because the variety of options that stakeholders could envision was far wider than could be captured in only two scenarios. The constitution is also not addressed in either scenario for a similar reason.

The following building blocks are shared as an inspiration to guide the discovery of other possible stories.

The building blocks of these scenarios are the key concerns of people, what they are most troubled about with regards to the future, and the key drivers that will determine the direction of the future. They create a foundation from which we might tell other stories about

possible futures. They also provide inspiration for thinking about and identifying other concerns and drivers.

The first building block is stakeholders' key concerns. These are the things that they care most about when thinking about the future of their country. Stakeholders identified issues related to what life will be like for different groups living in Tunisia, and whether there will be stability or violence in the country. They expressed concern about:

- Women
- Youth
- Migrants and refugees
- People with disabilities
- People living in different regions of the country

The second building block is systemic drivers. These are the social, technical, political, environmental, and economic forces that will influence the future of the things that stakeholders care most about. The key systemic drivers that they identified include:

- The action of the government
- Information ecosystems
- Economic conditions
- Infrastructure and development
- People's ability to dialogue and engage with each other
- Whether people have a shared identity

Throughout the following section, brief summaries of the perspectives that stakeholders shared are provided. Some illustrative quotes from their interviews

are also provided. A wider range of illustrative quotes is provided in the appendix.

BUILDING BLOCK 1: KEY CONCERNS

Stakeholders were asked about the key issues that they are concerned about when they think about the future of Tunisia. The key themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in this section. These concerns overlap with one another, and many influence each other.

The concerns that they expressed were with regards to the equity and inclusion of diverse groups in society, emigration, and stability and violence in the country.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN SOCIETY

Stakeholders described several groups of people in Tunisia who they perceive to be treated inequitably, or to experience social exclusion. The groups that they expressed concern about were:

- Women
- Youth
- Migrants and refugees
- People with disabilities
- People living in different regions

“It would be possible for everyone to be free to be who they are and to do what they want, in accordance with laws and rules that respect each citizen's rights,

that also hold them accountable towards each other.”

GENDER EQUITY

For women, stakeholders expressed concern about their participation in public life, their economic equality, the weight of domestic work that they carry, and gender based violence. They hoped that there would be greater equity in the treatment women, as well as greater participation in politics, the economy, and that there would be a reduction in violence against women.

“All genders should be taken care of and have their needs considered, and they should have an equal place at the table and have more economic equality. There also should be no more violence against women and gender minorities.”

YOUTH

Stakeholders described a generational gap in the country. They described that youth are not well integrated into society, and that their vision for the future does not resonate with the older generation.

“The older people who used to be at parties would again be in charge - this is the challenge that we are facing right now. There is a huge intergenerational gap. Whatever young people would see and envision for the future, doesn't resonate with the older generation.”

“There is an absence of vision for the country in all domains. Those in charge don't have the capacity and experience



to hold these positions. There is no creativity, and no integration of youth.”

MIGRANT AND REFUGEE INCLUSION

With regards to migrants and refugees stakeholders were concerned as to whether they would be welcomed or treated with fear and racism. They noted that in the current context migrants and refugees, particularly those with racialized identities, are being treated with discrimination and fear.

“The opposite of fear is curiosity. What happens when we feel fearful is that we shrink to protect ourselves. That’s what has been happening in the case of Tunisia. Recently, there was this huge racist clash over the numbers of migrants that are coming from Sub Saharan Africa on their way to Europe. For our whole history the country has been open to Africa and to the Mediterranean. We come at the intersection of a lot of cultures. But when we feel threatened, we shrink.”

“When the president came out on 21st of February, 2023 and started talking about the great replacement theory, that was an example of the racism that is there. There was a group who had been advocating for some time. They were present online, but do not have the reach that the president does. not everyone was listening to them until the president adapted their speech and their theory. And then it exploded online. Everyone was hating black people, even

Tunisian black people, and everyone who supported them. Everyone who gave them shelter or tried to help was also a target of hate campaigns online. What happened is that in a few minutes, things became real in real life. Black students, sub-Saharan students started to be kicked out from their own houses. Racist Tunisians started to hit them in the streets. Looking at them weirdly, that would be the best case scenario. But in other cases, there were assaults, there were attempts to murder them. it was a disaster that we lived for three weeks.”

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

With regards to people with disabilities, stakeholders were concerned about their inclusion in society and whether there would be accommodations to ensure accessibility for them.

“There are laws for people with disabilities, but the laws are not applied. Streets and public places are not accessible for them. There is no life for them in Tunisia today. They would be better off in Europe.”

INTERREGIONAL EQUITY

With regards to interregional equity stakeholders were concerned about whether the regions outside of the capital would benefit from improved levels of infrastructure and development that better match the capital, about whether negative stereotypes of the regions would persist, and about whether there would be resentment between the regions and the capital.



“There is a huge gap between the capital and other cities. There is 80% of tech infrastructure in capital, and other 20% is in the regions.”

“There are 2 Tunisias. There is the Tunisia of the big cities. There is the rural Tunisia that is nothing like the big city. City to city from south to north, you will encounter many ways of living. There is great inequality that creates problems of disliking each other. Someone in the South can say, you have access to everything - we have nothing. That perspective feeds a feeling of entitlement. After the revolution people said, ‘we were oppressed, you have to give us things, and we don’t have to work.’”

“There is a stereotype, a false image, of our region and the regions of the south in general. We are trying to break that stereotype, and to demonstrate the richness of the regions, their potentials, their youth, their women, the culture, the tourist spots, cultural places. In the regions there are not just bad things, habits, and mentalities. There are many things to value and use for the development of the regions.”

EMIGRATION

The second major concern expressed by stakeholders was whether young and educated would continue to emigrate from the country. They noted that the current rate of emigration is very high. Some of the reasons that they provided for emigration being high include poor access to basic resources, a belief that

life is better in Europe and the United States, and because of feelings of disconnection and dislocation.

“1.5 million young people left the country illegally in the past few years. That’s 280% more than previous years. It’s due to a failure of the system and quality of life. It’s from the absence of basic resources.”

“Most of the reasons why people leave is that they think that heaven exists in Europe, which is not true. So if they go and experience and then they come back and decide to stay in Tunisia, because there’s no frustration anymore.”

“Because of trauma, we’ll end up having a huge percentage of suicidal ideation or suicidal attempts. I would say that everyone would commit suicide or they will illegally flee the country. When something is dislocated in you, and if nothing is going right, everything is going to go wrong.”

STABILITY AND VIOLENCE

The third major concern expressed by stakeholders with regards to the future, is whether the country will experience significant instability and violence. They wondered if something would trigger instability and violence. Some of the factors that they could imagine triggering instability and violence included political instability, poor economy, resource scarcity, inflation, and disinformation.

“Will there be a civil war caused by disinformation?”

“Political instability is directly influencing the economic situation. If there is a bad future for Tunisia, political instability will be the first trigger, along with poor decision making, which will cause brain drain and the other things that come with it.”

BUILDING BLOCK 2: SYSTEMIC DRIVERS

Stakeholders were asked about what will influence the future of their core concerns. Said differently, they were asked what would drive the future in one direction or another. The most influential and most uncertain drivers are those that most differentiate how possible futures may turn out and are thus key building blocks for scenarios.

Stakeholders identified many drivers that will influence how the future of social cohesion and information systems might unfold. Many of these drivers are interlinked and influence one another. The key uncertain drivers that they identified are:

- What the government does in many domains
- What information is available and through what channels and what impact that information has
- What civil society does
- The state of the economy
- The extent to which infrastructure and other key areas are developed

- The extent to which there is dialogue among diverse people in Tunisia
- The extent to which there is a shared identity in the country

HOW GOVERNMENT IS FORMED

Stakeholders see that the form of the government, and the way in which that government comes to be would be very influential on the loop. They also see many diverse possibilities of how the government will be formed including an ineffective government, a coup d'état, a revolution, a religious dictatorship, and elections leading to an effective government emerging. Given the many directions that stakeholders could imagine, the scenarios do not highlight any specific direction, as many differently formed governments could undertake similar actions. In addition to wondering how the government will be, stakeholders also wondered what the constitution would be.

“There could be a political coup which will use the media to propagate disinformation and use it for change.”

“Will disinformation lead to a political coup which will impact social cohesion?”

“There will be elections in 2026-27. It could be won by a young social democrat candidate.”

“Will there be an authoritarian regime?”

HOW WILL THE GOVERNMENT ACT

Stakeholders described government action, as well as the relationship between government and people as being a key driver in determining the direction of the future of the loop. Stakeholders focused almost exclusively on the national government. They identified many important roles that government action and inaction plays in influencing the future of social cohesion and information.

Uncertainties that they raised include:

Will there be freedom of expression?

Stakeholders noted that freedom of expression is currently threatened, and wondered what its future will be.

“Freedom of expression is threatened in Tunisia. People are arrested for what they say on the radio, or even in music videos on YouTube. They get arrested and released after a day or two, and don’t get charged. But when you talk about fake news, or racism or hate speech or something, they give you a warning.”

“Political opponents are being arrested.”

How will information and the media be regulated?

Stakeholders noted that there are current gaps in information and media regulation, and suggested that a strategic approach could be useful.



“What is the government strategy towards the media to advance social cohesion and to control false information?”

“There is a network of 24 media companies in Tunisia and we worked on a law to organize the media in Tunisia. The aim was to have greater stability, to advance social causes, and to ensure clear and accurate information. Unfortunately, the government did not accept or engage with the project. The bill exists, and it can guarantee social cohesion and truth in information, if the government moves into action with regards to this bill.”

What information will the government provide to people, how will it provide it, and what information will it request of people?

Stakeholders observed that what information the government provides, how it provides it, and how it gathers information from people, and engages them would all significantly impact on the future of the loop. They described this moment as one in which there is little interaction and engagement between the government and people in the country.

“Will new policies be put in place so that people are not learning about changes undertaken by the government the same day, but rather having consultations with people and in most of the society and trade unions etc?”

“The President has been making many false claims since the special measures that he took on 25th of July 2021.”

“There is a kind of feeling of powerlessness because we do not have interactions with institutions of the state anymore. We used to receive trusted information for the future, deadlines information. We are a bit in a blur all the time. And then you have a lot of rumors spreading and you don't know what to trust and what is really happening and how to analyze things and how to think about the situation and it's kind of like a big monster that you can't see.”

Will the government create conditions that enable investment?

Stakeholders saw creating an open and easy investment environment as a significant determinant of Tunisia's economic health, connection to the world, and thus to the overall feelings of wellbeing across the country, which would contribute to people's susceptibility or resilience to mis- and disinformation. They described the current context as one in which investment is challenging because of obstructive bureaucracy.

“They cripple you when you come to Tunisia to invest. And that obliges investors to go away and to seek opportunities elsewhere. To be positive, I would say that we will have different reforms in our constitution that would allow them to have more opportunities.”

How will the government strategize and set policy directions?

Related to what information the government shares and requests, stakeholders also observed that how strategy and policy directions are set would be highly influential with regards to how the country functions, how effective the government is, and to overall conditions, which would influence the loop.

“There is a lack of planning. The approach that is needed is to take in new information, and taking into account the global context, embracing changes, being flexible, and thinking about the present and the future, consulting with trustworthy experts and listening to the different groups of society, not just using populism.”

“Will there be openness in designing the future? Inviting different citizens to be involved in different ways and capacities despite everything that is going wrong.”

“There's a need to rethink how our government operates altogether. There's a need to get more digital and in many ways, there is a need to involve the younger generation in everything. Inherently what we're facing is an intergenerational gap. And the only way to minimize it is to bring those generations together. And then things would start flowing. we should just find a way to reconcile different parties at play.”

How will Tunisia relate to external countries?

One domain that stakeholders saw as highly uncertain was how Tunisia might engage with other countries, especially those in the region. They could imagine both futures of isolation, and of engagement and connection.

“If this trend continues, we'll be isolated from the world.”

“Will there be freedom of movement between neighboring countries, for example not needing more visas between at least North African countries, Arab countries Africa and of course Europe.”

To what extent will there be rule of law?

The extent to which legal justice is fairly executed was described by stakeholders as highly influential in all domains of life.

“In justice, a judge can get money to not be partial. So good people will be in prison. The bad people will be out having a lot of money stealing everything.”

“We have laws that are not implemented. They are applied to poor people, not politicians and businessmen. If they were implemented, this would impact everything.”

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE AVAILABLE, AND THROUGH WHAT CHANNELS, AND WHAT IMPACT WILL IT HAVE?

Stakeholders described the importance of information in driving different possible futures in Tunisia. They described two elements of information systems as being key to possible futures:

1. What information and narratives are present and circulating, and
2. How influential this information and these narratives are.

With regards to what information and narratives circulate, stakeholders raised the following uncertainties:

What information will be present?

They wondered if there would be misinformation and disinformation circulating, as well as harmful narratives.

“Will dominant narratives, stereotypes, representations, and information disorder be challenged through narrative content? Will there be a change towards less misinformation narratives?”

“We’ve detected a high percentage of fake news, especially when it comes to political campaigns or political mayhem, especially after the coup d’état of 2021 Tunisia.”

What information channels will be active and influential?

In particular, stakeholders wondered if independent media and information providers would be active and influential, or if a few, politically aligned, news providers would be dominant.

“Every news channel has an agenda - that is financed by someone. It’s like Fox news/CNN. We know what that channel is promoting. It’s never going to be real information. I think that’s a myth. When two people are talking about their truth. There is no real truth.”

“Will there be trusted information sources that can prevent this kind of misinformation that is ramping up now?”

Will information be fact checked?

They saw fact checking as possibly influential in improving the information environment, and wondered if there would be significant and effective fact checking.

“National Television initiated a partnership with Falso. So did private media outlets, radios, like the number one radio private radio in Tunisia, which is Mosaic FM, and private TV channels, and associated media outlets. In these partnerships, Falso did segments on shows to do daily fact checks.”

“There is a new platform, to work on fact checking and how to deal with this spread of misinformation. And young people who are leaders in their regions will be trained to deal with the spread of false information and fact checking in the Kebili region and all the southern regions.”

What influence will technology have?

Stakeholders wondered if technology would have a helpful or harmful influence.

“Are there systems (like AI) that will purposefully propagate mis/disinformation to impact social cohesion – to impact information and social cohesion?”

“How can artificial intelligence help us to access information?”

How will the information economy function?

Stakeholders wondered how advertisers and other funders and investors would impact the information environment.

“Advertising in Tunisia is focusing on digital platforms more than on TV. For TV, it’s seasonal, in Ramadan. Most of the budgets for Tunisian companies is spent in that time. The ones who are advertising are Coca-Cola, yogurt, milk. We have food or we have communication firms. We don’t have big players that put really big money into advertising. Tunisia is a small market, but it’s a fun one.”

“NGOs are “free” as they get money from international buyers, so they don't really belong to someone or an idea here. So they're free.”

What impact will information have?

Stakeholders wondered if mis- and disinformation that circulates would have significant social impact, or if its spread and impact would be limited. They also wondered if positive and constructive information and narratives would have significant reach and impact to help to drive a healthier future.

“How to simplify messages to citizens and youth so as to reach greater mass for a healthier positive loop?”

“It's always easier to spread fictional information. People usually do not have the patience to understand complex information, and there is no real effort to get less complex information to people. Playing on people's feelings and emotions is the most dangerous thing that has happened since 2011.”

Will people be media literate?

One of the factors that they thought would influence whether information is significantly impactful is whether people are media literate.

“How can we prepare the next generation to use online media, and to think critically and not be biased?”

“Tunisians trust everything they see and hear on social media. The community needs to know how to analyze something that they are reading before judging or spreading. NGO, youth, people in the society in general. Can we educate them because they have influence, even on their parents?”

WHAT WILL CIVIL SOCIETY BE DOING?

Stakeholders wondered if civil society would be effective in creating connections between politicians, the state, the government, and marginalized citizens. They also wondered if civil society would be able to help to build



social cohesion and healthy information spaces.

“It is, first of all, civil society and the organizations and the media which are already working, which are pushing towards positivity, which are pushing towards dialogue.”

Will people be civically engaged?

Stakeholders thought that the extent to which Tunisians engage civically in their country would be significantly influential with regards to how the future turns out. They wondered if those who are currently civically engaged will stay in the country or emigrate, if they will continue to engage actively, and if people will work together towards a better future.

“Most civil society activists have left the country. Some of them seek political asylum in other countries. Some of them quit activism altogether and do normal things. The freedom of the internet no longer exists. It's like North Korea.”

“We need awareness about being a citizen, about one's role as a citizen in the country. We are not following a shepherd. We are our own, and we want to meet like-minded people to think together about solutions.”

ECONOMY

Stakeholders expressed great uncertainty about the economic future of Tunisia. They described the economic wellbeing of the country as highly important to peoples' mental state and

to influencing their resilience to or susceptibility to mis- and disinformation. Uncertainties that they raised with regards to the economy were:

Will people be able to meet their basic needs?

Stakeholders wondered if would be able to sustain themselves and saw this a a major factor that would determine the extent to which they would behave in ways that support or undermine social cohesion.

“If people have their basic needs met, society will be more united. The issues right now are rooted in instability and insecurity.”

“When people cannot sustain themselves they move into fear and racism. If the economic situation goes really well, then people will be open.”

“As long as people's basic needs are not met, there won't be social cohesion. So economic and political stability are prerequisites to changing the loop.”

Will there be support for economic development in Tunisia?

Stakeholders wondered if economic development in the country would be supported by investments by people in the diaspora, if other countries will support economic development, if the government will provide an environment that supports investment and entrepreneurialism, and if Tunisians themselves will embrace a culture of entrepreneurship.



“Will Tunisian people in the diaspora bring more value to Tunisia? I am in my 20s. 90% of my friends and people that I lived with are all abroad now. I’m the only one staying. I’m looking for opportunities to move to have an international experience. Even if I move, I want to contribute to regional projects, to bring value to Tunisia. After 20 years, I want to go back to Tunisia and work.”

“When we talk about basic needs, we need to think about the economy first. In a chaotic and unstable country, would other governments or institutions support us financially?”

“Can we get people to be more entrepreneurs than employees? In our culture - we were taught to find a job, preferably for the government.”

DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Stakeholders also identified the level of infrastructure and development as important to the future of social cohesion in the country, influencing the extent to which people are connected or disconnected, and influencing regional equity. The key uncertainty that they identified in this area is: To what extent will there be infrastructure and the development of key systems?

“First thing would be infrastructure. Enabling people to be more mobile and have access to mobility is the basic thing to do. We have infrastructure - it’s all about maintenance. We are not asking to do all of the changes at once. We should first take into consideration the network

connection and accessibility for all people and raise awareness about how to use it well. Give people access, those without literacy. There is access - but not in all cities. Big cities or not far from the capital - extreme South and north, they still need more effort.”

“Once people’s basic needs are taken care of, we need to tackle huge issues such as our infrastructure, our transportation system, our education system, all the systems that come out from there. So that’s the scenario that, if it happens, will take around 20 years or more to be properly taken care of. In that case, I would say that Tunisia would be really the hub of Africa.”

DIALOGUE

Stakeholders signaled that the extent to which people can speak with, listen to, and engage with each other would have a significant impact on the loop. Their key uncertainty was:

Will people dialogue and listen to each other?

Stakeholders shared the idea that if people can develop the ability to talk with and engage each other in a way that creates mutual understanding, it will support greater social cohesion.

“People can talk to each other when we take religion and politics out of the picture. People should learn to talk to each other about any subject - then they can really listen. It can be face to face or a zoom meeting.”



“Talk to people directly, not just via Facebook pages, because we know that the algorithm of social media platforms just keeps people who really believe in you and who are really following you, connected to your page or following your page.”

SHARED IDENTITY

Stakeholders noted that there is not currently a strong feeling of shared identity and shared belonging. They suggested that a strong shared identity would improve the future of the loop. Their key uncertainty was:

Will there be a strong shared identity across the country?

“In 2014 we conducted a survey. We went to people and we talked to them. I still remember a huge amount of people that I met, they kept saying the same phrase: we do not feel like we are citizens, we do not feel like we are part of this country.”

“There is an absence of identity. We keep swinging from one to the other. Even history has become murky and the media is contributing to this mis/disinformation.”

“The spectrum here in Tunisia, they do not feel a sense of belonging. That's a huge problem. When you do not feel like you belong to this country and you don't give any care about that, it means that there is a huge problem from inside. It's the core element. The citizens are there. Without the citizens, you do not have a country, you do not have institutions,

etc. And that's happening. That's already happening. International organization is considered as a regulator in absence of the government.”

4. GAPS AND NEXT STEPS



4. GAPS AND NEXT STEPS

This report summarizes and builds upon the perspectives of the group of stakeholders who were interviewed and engaged in this country-discovery phase of the Shared Realities process. The learning shared is intended only as representation of the views of this group of stakeholders. It is neither a reflection of the extent of expertise and awareness on these issues in Tunisia today, nor a technical assessment of the information ecosystem in Tunisia. Rather, it paints an initial picture of the challenges and concerns on their minds in relation to the future of social cohesion in Tunisia, the systemic drivers in view for them, and therefore what leverage areas seem relevant to address in an effort to work towards a more positive future for social cohesion from their perspective.

Mis- and disinformation play an inherent and central role in social cohesion and conflict dynamics.

This has taken on new dimensions in the context of rapidly evolving digital communication technologies which present new challenges related to the scale, scope and speed characterizing our information ecosystems. Many of

the key global drivers involved in this are still either unfamiliar or even invisible to many of us. Therefore, Shared Realities endeavors to support stakeholders in recognizing a fuller range of global drivers that may be shaping dynamics in their own context, so that they may form a more complete picture of the challenges and opportunities for addressing them.

To that end, this step in the Shared Realities Process is accompanied by a curriculum, which provides stakeholders with a basic introduction to some of the key global drivers animating the loop between social cohesion and mis and dis-information. (Not all stakeholders participated in the curriculum.)

These are:

- Social cohesion
- Information ecosystems
- Information economy
- Data and Technology
- Geopolitics

These drivers were selected for the curriculum because they are both central and highly consequential to the dynamics of concern, but often either unfamiliar or invisible due to their highly technical and often concealed nature.

Some of these drivers emerged in discussion during this learning phase with stakeholders in Tunisia, while others did not. This could be for many reasons (including: the expertise, particular interests, or degree of awareness of the individuals involved; the small number of



interviews conducted; the need to use an on-line and interview-driven approach; or the design of discussion guides, among other possible explanations). Nevertheless, these gaps point to useful areas for further learning and exploration with stakeholders in this context, in support of building pathways to a more positive future.

Of the topics covered by the curriculum, social cohesion and the dynamics of it have come out very clearly in the interviews. Information ecosystems, and social cohesion have been touched on substantively. Information economy was also explored, but without revealing how the information economy system works.

It is notable that technology was only minimally mentioned by the stakeholders engaged, with minor mentions of AI. This may be due to stakeholders assessing the importance of technology's influence on information systems and social cohesion in Tunisia as much less important than other factors, which they did explore. It may also be that the stakeholders selected, or questions

asked did not reveal perspectives that do exist on technology's influence on social cohesion and information systems.

Additionally, within the domain of geopolitics, stakeholders did not identify external threat actors, who might intentionally seed distrust and disorder as a possible problem. It could be that does not experience these threats, or that they were not raised by the stakeholders engaged. This is another useful space to explore further.

NEXT STEPS

As noted earlier in the report, the scenarios described in this document are two of many possible futures for social cohesion in an age of mis- and disinformation in Tunisia. Useful next steps would be to engage the interviewees and other stakeholders in a deeper process in which, together, they can co-create an even more robust and illuminating view of the systems dynamics, and key leverage areas. From that, a solid foundation for collaborative scaling and innovation could lead to impactful and lasting solutions.



5. APPENDIX



5. APPENDIX: COMPLETE BUILDING BLOCKS SYNTHESIS

The foundation of this report is the perspectives that stakeholders shared in interviews. These interviews were rich conversations in which stakeholders shared their understanding, experience, and perspectives. This appendix provides a broader set of quotes than those included in the report above. Readers who want a deeper understanding of how stakeholders see the loop, its current dynamics, and its possible futures will find a greater level of depth, and detail in this appendix.

Please note that because interviews were conducted in several languages, some have been translated. Additionally, in some cases, these quotes have been slightly edited to clarify their meaning. However, special care has been taken to ensure that in translating and editing, the meaning intended by the interviewee is not changed.

BUILDING BLOCK 1: KEY CONCERNS

Stakeholders were asked about the key issues that they are concerned about when they think about the future of Tunisia. The key themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in this section. These concerns overlap with one another, and many influence each other.

The concerns that they expressed were with regards to the equity and inclusion of diverse groups in society, emigration, and stability and violence in the country.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN SOCIETY

Stakeholders described several groups of people in Tunisia who they perceive to be treated inequitably, or to experience social exclusion. The groups that they expressed concern about were: Women, Youth, Migrants and refugees, People with disabilities, and People living in different regions of the country.

“It would be possible for everyone to be free to be who they are and to do what they want, in accordance with laws and rules that respect each citizen's rights, that also hold them accountable towards each other.”

GENDER EQUITY

For women, stakeholders expressed concern about their participation in public life, their economic equality, the weight of domestic work that they carry, and gender based violence.

“All genders should be taken care of and have their needs considered, and they should have an equal place at the table and have more economic equality. There also should be no more violence against women and gender minorities.”



“Could there be care work paid for by the state? With men and women sharing equal responsibilities without hierarchy between the genders?”

YOUTH

Stakeholders described a generational gap in the country.

“The older people who used to be at parties would again be in charge - this is the challenge that we are facing right now. There is a huge intergenerational gap. Whatever young people would see and envision for the future, doesn't resonate with the older generation.”

“There is an absence of vision for the country in all domains. Those in charge don't have the capacity and experience to hold these positions. There is no creativity, and no integration of youth.”

MIGRANT AND REFUGEE INCLUSION

With regards to migrants and refugees stakeholders were concerned as to whether they would be welcomed or treated with fear and racism.

“The opposite of fear is curiosity. What happens when we feel fearful is that we shrink to protect ourselves. That's what has been happening in the case of Tunisia. Recently, there was this huge racist clash over the numbers of migrants that are coming from Sub Saharan Africa on their way to Europe. For our whole history the country has been open to Africa and to the Mediterranean. We come at the

intersection of a lot of cultures. But when we feel threatened, we shrink.”

“When the president came out on 21st of February, 2023 and started talking about the great replacement theory, that was an example of the racism that is there. There was a group who had been advocating for some time. They were present online, but do not have the reach that the president does. Not everyone was listening to them until the president adapted their speech and their theory. And then it exploded online. Everyone was hating black people, even Tunisian black people, and everyone who supported them. Everyone who gave them shelter or tried to help was also a target of hate campaigns online. What happened is that in a few minutes, things became real in real life. Black students, sub-Saharan students started to be kicked out from their own houses. Racist Tunisians started to hit them in the streets. Looking at them weirdly, that would be the best case scenario. But in other cases, there were assaults, there were attempts to murder them. It was a disaster that we lived for three weeks.”

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

With regards to people with disabilities, stakeholders were concerned about their inclusion in society and whether there would be accommodations to ensure accessibility for them.

“There are laws for people with disabilities, but the laws are not applied. Streets and public places are not accessible for them. There is no life for

them in Tunisia today. They would be better off in Europe.”

INTERREGIONAL EQUITY

With regards to interregional equity stakeholders were concerned about whether the regions outside of the capital would benefit from improved levels of infrastructure and development that better match the capital, about whether negative stereotypes of the regions would persist, and about whether there would be resentment between the regions and the capital.

“There is a huge gap between the capital and other cities. There is 80% of tech infrastructure in capital, and other 20% is in the regions.”

“There are 2 Tunisias. There is the Tunisia of the big cities. There is the rural Tunisia that is nothing like the big city. City to city from south to north, you will encounter many ways of living. There is great inequality that creates problems of disliking each other. Someone in the South can say, you have access to everything - we have nothing. That perspective feeds a feeling of entitlement. After the revolution people said, ‘we were oppressed, you have to give us things, and we don’t have to work.’”

“There is a stereotype, a false image, of our region and the regions of the south in general. We are trying to break that stereotype, and to demonstrate the richness of the regions, their potentials, their youth, their women, the culture, the tourist spots, cultural places. In the

regions there are not just bad things, habits, and mentalities. There are many things to value and use for the development of the regions.”

EMIGRATION

The second major concern expressed by stakeholders was whether young and educated would continue to emigrate from the country. They noted that the current rate of emigration is very high.

“1.5 million young people left the country illegally in the past few years. That’s 280% more than previous years. It’s due to a failure of the system and quality of life. It’s from the absence of basic resources.”

“In Tunisia we’ve been feeding the youth with the message that the best is somewhere else. It is in Europe, for instance, in France, in Italy, Spain, Portugal and in the States. So it’s not in Tunisia. So I do believe in order to have a bright future for our youth, we need to start telling them that we have our raw materials and we need them as real actors for what’s next. We could show them what might happen, what role they can play and explain to them the context.”

“Most of the reasons why people leave is that they think that heaven exists in Europe, which is not true. So if they go and experience and then they come back and decide to stay in Tunisia, because there’s no frustration anymore.”



“Youth are so connected internationally, they do not look at the national level anymore.”

“Because of trauma, we'll end up having a huge percentage of suicidal ideation or suicidal attempts. I would say that everyone would commit suicide or they will illegally flee the country. When something is dislocated in you, and if nothing is going right, everything is going to go wrong.”

“Brain drain is not just from the capital, but also from other cities. For example, if I am from a city in the South and I don't find opportunities - the opportunity of going abroad or to Tunis is the same. The flight to Paris is 2 hours. It can take a day to go from the south to the north.”

STABILITY AND VIOLENCE

The third major concern expressed by stakeholders with regards to the future, is whether the country will experience significant instability and violence.

“What would be the triggers to upheaval?”

“Will there be a civil war caused by disinformation?”

“To what extent will violence happen?”

“The first thing would be the oil prices. The second thing is the water situation. We're having water crisis. Obviously, such as all the countries across MENA and people are starting to feel it and to sense it and I feel that that's something that never happened before. So I think

that could be a trigger. The third thing is related to their day-to-day groceries and brands. If there's going to be inflation in a situation such as Tunisia where we can't actually move the salaries anymore. Any of these could trigger upheaval.”

“Political instability is directly influencing the economic situation. If there is a bad future for Tunisia, political instability will be the first trigger, along with poor decision making, which will cause brain drain and the other things that come with it.”

“Are we going to end up divided, with people who side with the President on one side, and people who just want to live a decent life on the other?”

BUILDING BLOCK 2: WHAT WILL DETERMINE THE DIRECTION OF THE FUTURE?

Stakeholders were asked about what will influence the future of their core concerns. Said differently, they were asked what would drive the future in one direction or another. The most influential and most uncertain drivers are those that most differentiate how possible futures may turn out, and are thus key building blocks for scenarios.

Stakeholders identified many drivers that will influence how the future of social cohesion and information systems might unfold. Many of these drivers are interlinked and influence one another. The key uncertain drivers that they identified are:



- What the government does in many domains
- What information is available and through what channels and what impact that information has
- What civil society does
- The state of the economy
- The extent to which infrastructure and other key areas are developed
- The extent to which there is dialogue among diverse people in Tunisia
- The extent to which there is a shared identity in the country

HOW GOVERNMENT IS FORMED

Stakeholders see that the form of the government, and the way in which that government comes to be would be very influential on the loop. They also see many diverse possibilities of how the government will be formed including an ineffective government, a coup d'état, a revolution, a religious dictatorship, and elections leading to an effective government emerging. Given the many directions that stakeholders could imagine, the scenarios do not highlight any specific direction, as many differently formed governments could undertake similar actions.

"There could be a political coup which will use the media to propagate disinformation and use it for change."

"There are two options. Either someone will use the current constitution to establish another religious dictatorship or there's another constitution with that establishes, again, a democratic rule. So,

it's not going to be easy, it will take time and the economic situation will be further affected."

"Will disinformation lead to a political coup which will impact social cohesion?"

"There will be elections in 2026-27. It could be won by a young social democrat candidate."

"The military could rule the country and it would be so much worse. We would no longer have elections."

"If the current president stepped out, what we'll be facing is a political void, because we are not equipped for it. The coalitions that used to be active before are disempowered. Young people who are active in politics are not anymore, so everyone is fleeing politics."

"Will there be an authoritarian regime?"

In addition to wondering how the government will be, stakeholders also wondered what the constitution would be.

"Maybe there will be a declaration that the 2022 constitution is not legitimate. And we would go back to the semi-parliamentary regime and the 2014 constitution."

"Perhaps we will have different reforms in our constitution that would allow investors them to have more opportunities to invest"

HOW WILL THE GOVERNMENT ACT

Stakeholders described government action, as well as the relationship between government and people as being a key driver in determining the direction of the future of the loop. Stakeholders focused almost exclusively on the national government. They identified many important roles that government action and inaction plays in influencing the future of social cohesion and information.

Uncertainties that they raised include:

Will there be freedom of expression?

Stakeholders noted that freedom of expression is currently threatened, and wondered what its future will be.

“Freedom of expression is threatened in Tunisia. People are arrested for what they say on the radio, or even in music videos on YouTube. They get arrested and released after a day or two, and don’t get charged. But when you talk about fake news, or racism or hate speech or something, they give you a warning.”

“We have the new law, decree law 54 on information systems actually, where it can be very long, very hard and heavy sanctions on people expressing their opinion or spreading rumors. But it goes in only one direction. That is against the President or government.”

“Political opponents are being arrested.”

“I have closed my Facebook account. I don’t feel freedom of expression. People who express their thoughts, are outspoken, and giving their opinions openly are not living in Tunisia. If they were in Tunisia, they would be sentenced to jail immediately.”

How will information and the media be regulated?

Stakeholders noted that there are current gaps in information and media regulation, and suggested that a strategic approach could be useful.

“There are shows where people come together, like columnists and a presenter, and they talk about nothing and sometimes they do engage in hate speech or in hate incitement. We need to regulate that. We need to regulate the media scene.”

“What is the government strategy towards the media to advance social cohesion and to control false information?”

“There is a network of 24 media companies in Tunisia and we worked on a law to organize the media in Tunisia. The aim was to have greater stability, to advance social causes, and to ensure clear and accurate information. Unfortunately, the government did not accept or engage with the project. The bill exists, and it can guarantee social cohesion and truth in information, if the government moves into action with regards to this bill.”



What information will the government provide to people, how will it provide it, and what information will it request of people?

Stakeholders observed that what information the government provides, how it provides it, and how it gathers information from people, and engages them would all significantly impact on the future of the loop. They described this moment as one in which there is little interaction and engagement between the government and people in the country.

“Will there be an administration that is efficient and digitalised instead of waiting for papers and not knowing when you will get which one and when?”

“We don’t have a fact-checking culture. Most people take their sources from Facebook. Even political information. The government doesn’t like to communicate. They leave others to make assumptions. There is no good information. They are creating a void. That void is filled with everything and anything. There is way too much misinformation. I don’t even open facebook any more.”

“Will there be accountability to citizens? A solid system for the benefit of citizens?”

“Will new policies be put in place so that people are not learning about changes undertaken by the government the same day, but rather having consultations with

people and in most of the society and trade unions etc?”

“The President has been making many false claims since the special measures that he took on 25th of July 2021.”

“There is a kind of feeling of powerlessness because we do not have interactions with institutions of the state anymore. We used to receive trusted information for the future, deadlines information. We are a bit in a blur all the time. And then you have a lot of rumors spreading and you don’t know what to trust and what is really happening and how to analyze things and how to think about the situation and it’s kind of like a big monster that you can’t see. We need messages that tell us what will be done to overcome the crisis and what will happen in the next months, not just learning about things the day that they happen.”

“Could we have a future in which we would once again have the institutions that were removed after the 25th of July 2021, like, institution of human rights of torture, of fighting corruption, etc? They would be more digitalized, and more accountable to the citizens in the sense that all data will be available. There would be a stronger monitoring of their activities and it would be like, German organizations, they always think about in 20 years if a citizen will ask them about the very tiny details of their spending, how they will answer. The aim would be to build trusting relationship between the institution of the state and the citizens and this is

feeling empowered to hold these institutions. accountable, to ask questions, to access to information and to work with this data to improve things.”

“Right now there is less transparency and no access to information. Will that change?”

Will the government create conditions that enable investment?

Stakeholders saw creating an open and easy investment environment as a significant determinant of Tunisia’s economic health, connection to the world, and thus to the overall feelings of wellbeing across the country, which would contribute to people’s susceptibility or resilience to mis- and disinformation. They described the current context as one in which investment is challenging because of obstructive bureaucracy.

“They cripple you when you come to Tunisia to invest. And that obliges investors to go away and to seek opportunities elsewhere. To be positive, I would say that we will have different reforms in our constitution that would allow them to have more opportunities.”

“I really hope that the newly elected parliament in Tunisia would work on placing a decree or certain laws, new reforms especially, to include certain laws that would encourage foreign investments in Tunisia. Because unfortunately as foreign investors, when you come to Tunis, we have a lot of chains and shackles. They cripple you

when you come to Tunisia to invest. And that obliges investors to go away and to seek opportunities elsewhere.”

“Opportunities, people who want to invest in new companies, local projects, are all slowed, or stopped by the administration. It’s a huge problem.”

How will the government strategize and set policy directions?

Related to what information the government shares and requests, stakeholders also observed that how strategy and policy directions are set would be highly influential with regards to how the country functions, how effective the government is, and to overall conditions, which would influence the loop.

“Currently most initiatives are bottom-up. When there is change from the bottom up, change makers work for 3-4 years, and then a decision maker becomes aware, and it becomes official. We need more top down initiatives from policy makers.”

“There is a lack of planning. The approach that is needed is to take in new information, and taking into account the global context, embracing changes, being flexible, and thinking about the present and the future, consulting with trustworthy experts and listening to the different groups of society, not just using populism.”

“I’m concerned about public policy in general. Right now we don’t have information about public policy with



regards to social cohesion, information, media, living together. The government has not declared their strategy or vision.”

“It's one person deciding on everything. There is no logic or institutions that can stand on behalf of citizens anymore.”

“Will there be openness in designing the future? Inviting different citizens to be involved in different ways and capacities despite everything that is going wrong.”

“There's a need to rethink how our government operates altogether. There's a need to get more digital and in many ways, there is a need to involve the younger generation in everything. Inherently what we're facing is an intergenerational gap. And the only way to minimize it is to bring those generations together. And then things would start flowing. we should just find a way to reconcile different parties at play.”

“The president has been doing everything by himself, making laws on his own. He has been messing around with the system. Soon he will either cut funding on organizations or even ban some foreign organizations or maybe put some strict restrictions on civil society. And then he will go after the media and then minority groups, L G B T groups for instance, or other ethnic groups.”

How will Tunisia relate to external countries?

One domain that stakeholders saw as highly uncertain was how Tunisia might engage with other countries, especially

those in the region. They could imagine both futures of isolation, and of engagement and connection.

“What would be the relationship between MENA and Tunisia? Is there alignment and a homogeneous spirit?”

“If this trend continues, we'll be isolated from the world.”

“Will there be freedom of movement between neighboring countries, for example not needing more visas between at least North African countries, Arab countries Africa and of course Europe.”

“I see a kind of alliance between Tunisia, Jordan, Cairo, Egypt, and many others in the MENA region. I do believe that we are actually working towards the connection or the intersection between our regions. We have implemented so many projects together. At least here in Tunisia, we have different projects coming from Lebanon, from Jordan, for instance. We are already cooperating together in terms of MENA region countries. The same applies even to the Gulf GCC countries.”

“Putting sanctions and restrictions on freedom of movement will just further isolate us, and create more tensions.”

“There could be open borders between similar countries, for example the MENA region countries and African countries. I think there will be more curiosity towards these cultures and you know, that is less of Eurocentrism and our vision. Our dreams and our expectations

will become different and we'll get to know people who share the same struggles that we do. It will take time but there will be less racism, more collaboration, more economic collaboration, cultural collaboration, etc. And if we open the borders with European countries, there will be, of course, a wave of people going to Europe. But they may then realize that the grass is not always greener and decide to come back with new ideas and new experience and decided to build things for themselves in their country."

To what extent will there be rule of law?

The extent to which legal justice is fairly executed was described by stakeholders as highly influential in all domains of life.

"In justice, a judge can get money to not be partial. So good people will be in prison. The bad people will be out having a lot of money stealing everything."

"We have laws that are not implemented. They are applied to poor people, not politicians and businessmen. If they were implemented, this would impact everything."

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE AVAILABLE, AND THROUGH WHAT CHANNELS, AND WHAT IMPACT WILL IT HAVE?

Stakeholders described the importance of information in driving different possible futures in Tunisia. They described two elements of information systems as being key to possible futures:

- What information and narratives are present and circulating, and
- How influential this information and these narratives are.

With regards to what information and narratives circulate, stakeholders raised the following uncertainties:

What information will be present?

"Will dominant narratives, stereotypes, representations, and information disorder be challenged through narrative content? Will there be a change towards less misinformation narratives?"

"We've detected a high percentage of fake news, especially when it comes to political campaigns or political mayhem, especially after the coup d'état of 2021 Tunisia."

What information channels will be active and influential?

"Every news channel has an agenda - that is financed by someone. It's like Fox news/CNN. We know what that channel is promoting. It's never going to be real information. I think that's a myth. When two people are talking about their truth. There is no real truth."

"In every political campaign there's a survey of advertising, accounts, and propaganda. It's like any political campaign. You know who they are. Now in every political campaign you know who is funding what. The surge of our current president - he didn't use those tactics. They are too exposed. When you



see a sponsored post on facebook or YouTube, you don't watch. He won because he didn't use those tactics. He won by not using advertising. He used group chats. For example, my little brother was talking to me about the presidential campaign and I wanted to know where he got his information. It was through a Whatsapp group. They are talking to young people, they tell them to invite more people and they discuss in a group chat. It's like a referral system. You can't see someone who could be a potential threat."

"Will we have alternative media outlets, and to what point those would still play a role? Because you remember back in the day, back in 2011, the main platform, the main media to understand Egypt actually was Facebook. Right now people, especially young people, are getting out of platforms owned by Meta, so platforms like Facebook and Instagram are not that popular anymore. I'm curious what alternative media outlets would play a role? Will we still have facebook, TikTok? What role are they playing? Will non-state owned media on social media still play a role?"

"There is so much telepoubelle, "trash tv". It is just the trash shows that are always on every TV channel that just does nothing. They promote nothing."

"Will there be trusted information sources that can prevent this kind of misinformation that is ramping up now?"

Will information be fact checked?

"National Television initiated a partnership with Falso. So did private media outlets, radios, like the number one radio private radio in Tunisia, which is Mosaic FM, and private TV channels, and associated media outlets. In these partnerships, Falso did segments on shows to do daily fact checks."

"There is a new platform, to work on fact checking and how to deal with this spread of misinformation. And young people who are leaders in their regions will be trained to deal with the spread of false information and fact checking in the Kebili region and all the southern regions."

"We already have a vision for 2023-2028. We have made an axis called the truth axis that guides how we are going to react in relation to false information in relation to misinformation, fact checking and the propagation of misinformation."

"When the President made his statements about migrants, we tried to help by advocating on TikTok and on Facebook that the report was based on false claims, on information that is not right and not accurate. We were able to do this because we did fact-check the report."

What influence will technology have?

"Are there systems (like AI) that will purposefully propagate mis/disinformation to impact social cohesion – to impact information and social cohesion?"



“Organizations will use AI... Tunisian organizations will counter disinformation that comes from abroad and the platforms will be designed and led by Arabs so the West can't influence us and abuse us.”

“How can artificial intelligence help us to access information?”

How will the information economy function?

“Advertising in Tunisia is focusing on digital platforms more than on TV. For TV, it's seasonal, in Ramadan. Most of the budgets for Tunisian companies is spent in that time. The ones who are advertising are Coca-Cola, yogurt, milk. We have food or we have communication firms. We don't have big players that put really big money into advertising. Tunisia is a small market, but it's a fun one.”

“International buyers are influencing the media and not the lobbies. People leading advertising agencies, who have money control, to collect all the ads and spread them equally on all the media.”

“Information economy - funded based on statistics. We are a small market. Even our big companies are small companies. People put advertising on the things that the audience likes.”

“A lot of media companies have financial problems in Tunis. And a lot of journalists don't get paid for the work they are doing. So maybe they can go to platforms for fake news where they can get paid and they work there.”

“NGOs are “free” as they get money from international buyers, so they don't really belong to someone or an idea here. So they're free.”

What impact will information have?

“We fact-checked the Presidential statement, and we fact-checked some videos and claims that were circulating on social media. Some people responded positively to the report and to some of the details. But with others, their political biases and ideological biases are stronger than reason. They believe what they're being told, especially if it comes from the President.”

“There are people who scroll through false information and who do not master research techniques, and those who work on social networks without the exact techniques or without doing the exact research or who are biased.”

“There is a significant level of illiteracy in Tunisia. To reach people, often information needs to be conveyed through visuals.”

“I can imagine that there will be a platform that brings together all these actors in Tunisia, from civil society and the media. They can work together, find a project for raising awareness, build the capacity of actors and influencers and disseminate clear information that contributes to social cohesion.”

“How to simplify messages to citizens and youth so as to reach greater mass for a healthier positive loop?”



“It's always easier to spread fictional information. People usually do not have the patience to understand complex information, and there is no real effort to get less complex information to people. Playing on people's feelings and emotions is the most dangerous thing that has happened since 2011.”

Will people be media literate?

“We use social media in Tunisia, but we aren't aware of the power of social media and how it could impact society in general. This misconception and lack of awareness around social media platforms has contributed to an unhealthy use of social media.”

“What is the best approach to include online Tunisian citizens in digital education to fight for social cohesion and against mis- and disinformation?”

“We provide training for national and international organizations on several subjects like verification, fact checking, cognitive biases, and how to combat hate speech online.”

“How can we prepare the next generation to use online media, and to think critically and not be biased?”

“Tunisians trust everything they see and hear on social media. The community needs to know how to analyze something that they are reading before judging or spreading. NGO, youth, people in the society in general. Can we educate them because they have influence, even on their parents?”

WHAT WILL CIVIL SOCIETY BE DOING?

Will civil society be effective?

“I think we, civil society, have been doing lots of things wrong. I think what we have to be is a bridge of connection between politicians, the state, the government, and the marginalized citizens. We failed at doing that for 10 years. We locked ourselves in a box for at best 500,000 Tunisians. But we're 12 million Tunisians. We excluded other people, like what politicians have been doing in Tunisia, and we have to fix that point.”

“I am optimistic because the media and civil society have worked hard for years, despite all the shortcomings, despite all the inconveniences.”

“It is, first of all, civil society and the organizations and the media which are already working, which are pushing towards positivity, which are pushing towards dialogue.”

“Will foreign funding for civil society be prohibited by law in Tunisia?”

“We did this self evaluation of civil society for what we have been doing for the past 10 years. We have made mistakes and we have declared that we have made mistakes. We now have this belief in the basis of democracy, in transparency, accountability, etc. We know how we should react when facing any danger to democracy, social issues or political economic issues. We're now more unified, and we have a task force to



interact and react rapidly if anything happens.”

Will people be civically engaged?

“Most civil society activists have left the country. Some of them seek political asylum in other countries. Some of them quit activism altogether and do normal things. The freedom of the internet no longer exists. It's like North Korea.”

“We need awareness about being a citizen, about one's role as a citizen in the country. We are not following a shepherd. We are our own, and we want to meet like-minded people to think together about solutions.”

“I can imagine that there would be a cultural revolution. We have new generations that are more internationally connected. Generations having and knowing solutions, who are deciding to get together to think about the future, putting pressure, going on the streets, deciding that this is not the present or the future that we want, having a revolution, asking for institutions and a Constitution that takes into account human rights, economic justice, social justice, etc., and working on establishing a solid basis for democratic rule. It's like deciding to capture the past and start over again, and deciding that the laws and the systems and the Constitution and the people in power do not represent us anymore. That we need systems, people, rules and laws that represent us. This means actually taking the time to think and strategize about the future together.”

ECONOMY

Stakeholders expressed great uncertainty about the economic future of Tunisia. They described the economic wellbeing of the country as highly important to peoples' mental state and to influencing their resilience to or susceptibility to mis- and disinformation. Uncertainties that they raised with regards to the economy were:

Will people be able to meet their basic needs?

“Whether people are well fed and well taken care of, including emotional and physical well being, is an economic question that needs to be answered first and foremost.

“If people have their basic needs met, society will be more united. The issues right now are rooted in instability and insecurity.”

“When people cannot sustain themselves they move into fear and racism. If the economic situation goes really well, then people will be open. They will be more curious, they will be more welcoming, and they will see the benefits in interacting with other cultures, regardless of where they come from. When that is not the case, they treat people as ‘other’. This is happening in Europe as well.”

“The economic situation will be so bad there is going to be a lot of social unrest.”

“It's more about the huge inflation rate, the volatility of the currency, people not being able to buy basic goods. The rate of poverty is rising.”

“I am concerned about inflation. The loan with the IMF is not being signed yet. If it is signed, what consequences will it have on the cost of living and the living situation of people?”

“As long as people's basic needs are not met, there won't be social cohesion. So economic and political stability are prerequisites to changing the loop.”

“Inflation is going up, poverty is going up, unemployment is going up and everyone is fleeing the country.”

“Tunisians are unable to provide for their families. So when I think about the economy, I will try to minimize the impact of inflation so that we can provide a better, stable ground for investors to come to Tunisia.”

“Historically in Tunisia, what usually happens is that there is a certain economic and financial tightening that happens. The one thing that always triggers everything is the cost of bread. When the bread becomes expensive, that's when people go crazy. So I'm interested in how that would affect the future for sure. For me personally I believe that we are getting closer to an upheaval.”

“There are social strata and a huge economic gap that's been developing and that is emerging in Tunis. As a citizen, if I feel mistreated if I see another

person having more privilege than I do. This will lead to a negative situation. It will nurture “Hokod tabaki” or “class grudge”, rage and agony keep being fed into your soul.”

“Will a deal with the IMF be signed?”

Will there be support for economic development in Tunisia?

“Will Tunisian people in the diaspora bring more value to Tunisia? I am in my 20s. 90% of my friends and people that I lived with are all abroad now. I'm the only one staying. I'm looking for opportunities to move to have an international experience. Even if I move, I want to contribute to regional projects, to bring value to Tunisia. After 20 years, I want to go back to Tunisia and work.”

“What concerns me is the political instability that didn't give entrepreneurs a comfortable climate to work in. Political instability causes diplomatic problems and can be challenging when it comes to investment. It has an influence on the entrepreneurial scene. Also economic challenges come from political instability. One of the indicators that we are working on is to create new jobs since we have had high unemployment rates after the Revolution.”

“If we are going along with dis- and misinformation and broken relationships, what is happening economically? Would other countries support Tunis economically?”



“When we talk about basic needs, we need to think about the economy first. In a chaotic and unstable country, would other governments or institutions support us financially?”

“Can we get people to be more entrepreneurs than employees? In our culture - we were taught to find a job, preferably for the government.”

DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Stakeholders also identified the level of infrastructure and development as important to the future of social cohesion in the country, influencing the extent to which people are connected or disconnected, and influencing regional equity. The key uncertainty that they identified in this area is:

To what extent will there be infrastructure and the development of key systems?

“First thing would be infrastructure. Enabling people to be more mobile and have access to mobility is the basic thing to do. We have infrastructure - it’s all about maintenance. We are not asking to do all of the changes at once. We should first take into consideration the network connection and accessibility for all people and raise awareness about how to use it well. Give people access, those without literacy. There is access - but not in all cities. Big cities or not far from the capital - extreme South and north, they still need more effort.”

“Once people’s basic needs are taken care of, we need to tackle huge issues such as our infrastructure, our transportation system, our education system, all the systems that come out from there. So that’s the scenario that, if it happens, will take around 20 years or more to be properly taken care of. In that case, I would say that Tunisia would be really the hub of Africa.”

DIALOGUE

Stakeholders signaled that the extent to which people can speak with, listen to, and engage with each other would have a significant impact on the loop. Their key uncertainty was:

Will people dialogue and listen to each other?

“People can talk to each other when we take religion and politics out of the picture. People should learn to talk to each other about any subject - then they can really listen. It can be face to face or a zoom meeting.”

“It is first of all civil society and the organizations and the media which are already pushing towards positivity, which are pushing towards dialogue, a force of proposal, to give proposals, whether at the level of civil society, at the level of the media, or at the level of projects in terms of regions.”

“Talk to people directly, not just via Facebook pages, because we know that the algorithm of social media platforms just keeps people who really believe in you and who are really following you,



connected to your page or following your page.”

SHARED IDENTITY

Stakeholders noted that there is not currently a strong feeling of shared identity and shared belonging. They suggested that a strong shared identity would improve the future of the loop. Their key uncertainty was:

Will there be a strong shared identity across the country?

“In 2014 we conducted a survey. We went to people and we talked to them. I still remember a huge amount of people that I met, they kept saying the same phrase: we do not feel like we are citizens, we do not feel like we are part of this country.”

“We need Tunisian’s who are more aware about their culture to be Ambassadors. People are changing as consumers, tourism is changing, and Tunisia is a good destination for tourism. If people are not aware of their culture and history, they cannot share a good image. The contemporary tourism industry needs to connect with the culture of Tunisia. People want people who can tell the story.” “Maybe, awareness-raising campaigns could be enough. Since people are connected. Raising awareness needs to be taken from the policy makers. We have national TV, national Radio. Why not take the initiative of elaborating ideas with the intention of contemporary standards, telling the story of our country? All people will relate and be Ambassadors. I don’t think

that there are points where people disagree. In different cities, it could depend on the period of time. We are North African. Berbers used to be in the most part. We used to speak Amasiri. This is more conserved in the South. We had an Italian invasion, and some friends told me that in bus stations in Malta - the Malta speakers are more like Tunisian dialect. People in the capital are more Francophone. Tunisia is a merger of different countries. Centre of the country is the 3rd capital of Islam. We are aware of the cultures. In each city people relate more to one culture or another. We have a mix of different cultures.”

“Cultural identity. The more we are not aware, the more we will be lost in this technological and information invasion. The accessibility and globalization is good when people have a personal anchor. If they don’t have this anchor - they will be lost.”

“There is an absence of identity. We keep swinging from one to the other. Even history has become murky and the media is contributing to this mis/disinformation.”

“Shared value and identity. When traveling, I feel the difference in a country where people are more aware of their country, culture, background, values. We are not cultivated as well. Within this huge flow of information we have, if I don’t have a basis regarding my culture, my values, the history of Tunisia and the traits of Tunisia, I will be lost within this whole flow of information. To efficiently live within this flow of



information, people need to have a strong anchor.”

“The spectrum here in Tunisia, they do not feel a sense of belonging. That's a huge problem. When you do not feel like you belong to this country and you don't give any care about that, it means that there is a huge problem from inside. It's the core element. The citizens are there. Without the citizens, you do not have a country, you do not have institutions, etc. And that's happening. That's already happening. International organization is considered as a regulator in absence of the government.”

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