

Results of the pre-referendum campaign activities (from 2 to 23 July) by adopting the right of persons with disability approach

Since the Tunisian revolution of 2011, Tunisia has experienced three legislative elections (October 2011, 2014 and 2019), two presidential elections in October 2014 and 2019, and the municipal elections in May 2018. In these different elections, several political parties and hundreds of independent lists have participated. However, despite the political and social developments, the nascent Tunisian democracy has proved during the last eleven years a non-inclusive democracy in terms of political participation of people with disabilities. It is clear that neither the legislative texts nor the social behaviors have been imbued with this logic.

The current state is thus characterized by a proliferation of barriers to the active citizenship of people with disabilities. This context does not allow them to access their rights; the right to vote, and blocks the establishment of an inclusive democracy. It is undeniable that during elections, access to information and infrastructure is not adapted to their needs as prescribed by the accessibility standards.

There are two major barriers to the active political participation of people with disabilities as voters:

1. Access to information in either sign language, Braille or auditory materials or accessible digital materials.
2. Access to polling places and to places where candidates hold campaigns.

In order to address these barriers, Ibsar and its partners intend to identify the barriers faced by the different categories of people with disabilities (visual, hearing and motor) through the observation of the campaigns leading up to the referendum in July 25, 2022 and the electoral campaigns leading up to the legislative elections in December 17, 2022.

● Regional Electoral Administrations (IRIE)

As an initial stage, observers from each state were asked to visit the headquarters of the regional electoral administration, and to monitor barriers and violations that people with disabilities can encounter during their visit to this location.

26 observation forms were filled out for 26 electoral districts (except for the electoral district of Kairouan), and the results were as follows.

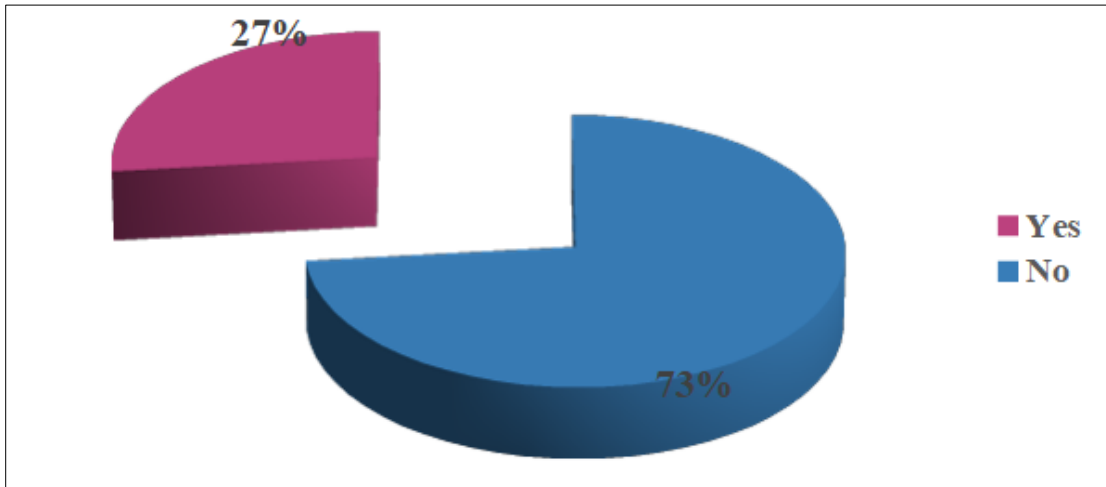


Figure 1: Percentage of IRIE with that has ramps for people with mobility disabilities

As shown in the above figure, most of the regional electoral administrations do not have ramps for persons with motor disabilities. This is what was shown by many of the photos taken by the observers, where the entrance to the administration was not accessible because it contained only Ladders, or because it was surrounded by an iron fence. This prevents people with mobility disabilities in a wheelchair from being able to enter the administration premises.

The same for the lanes and sidewalks for the blind; there are only 7% of them, which is a very small percentage, knowing that despite their presence, they do not comply with accessibility standards, as 38% of them have obstacles that prevent the accessing.

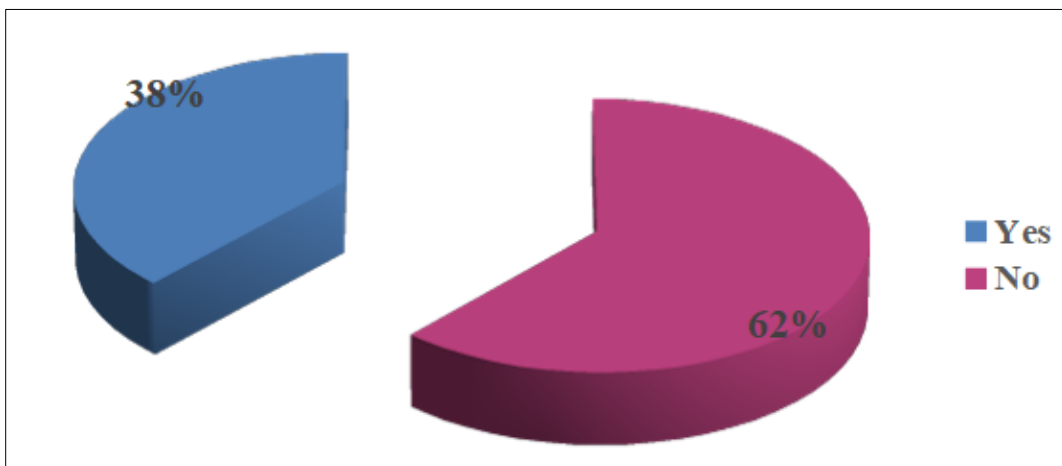


Figure 2: Percentage of obstacles in front of ramps and sidewalks for people with disabilities

- **Referendum campaigns**

As for the referendum campaigns, 533 observation forms were filled out, most of which were organized by independent individuals with 45%, followed by political parties with 30%, and then associations with the rate of 24%. During the access to these activities, 2% of the observers encountered some problems, as they were prevented from entering. Among the reasons for this was an unjustified ban, as some meetings were reserved for members of political parties only.

Access to campaign infrastructure:

As for the activities that were entered and attended, the lanes for persons with disabilities were only by the rate 25.3%. Nevertheless, it was 42.5% hard to pass through, which makes it unusable. The same applies to the blind lanes and sidewalks in the campaign locations, which were only 1%; it is almost non-existent, indicating that these activities are not accessible to the blind.

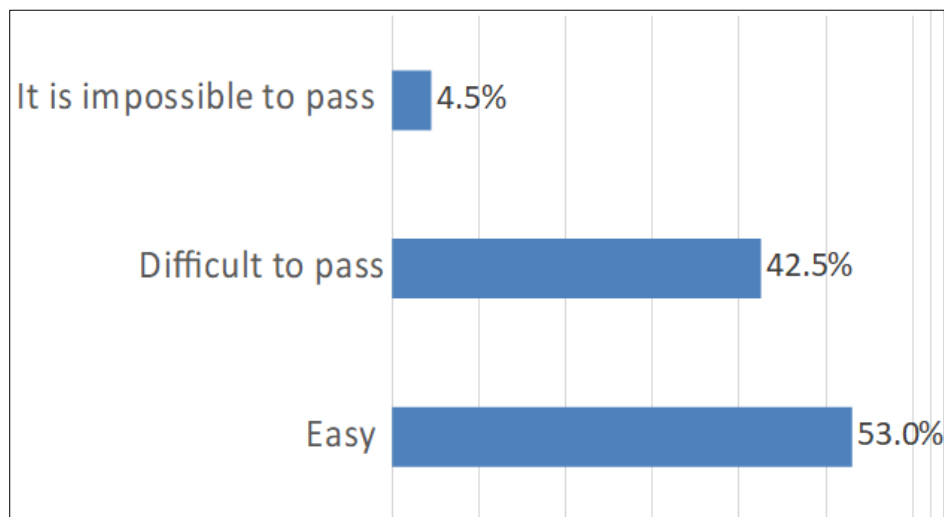


Figure 3: Percentage of passages for people with disabilities

Among the types of barriers that were found in lanes, large percentages were the presence of cars, as well as security barriers and chairs. This indicates indifference toward the presence of persons with disabilities and their participation in public affairs.

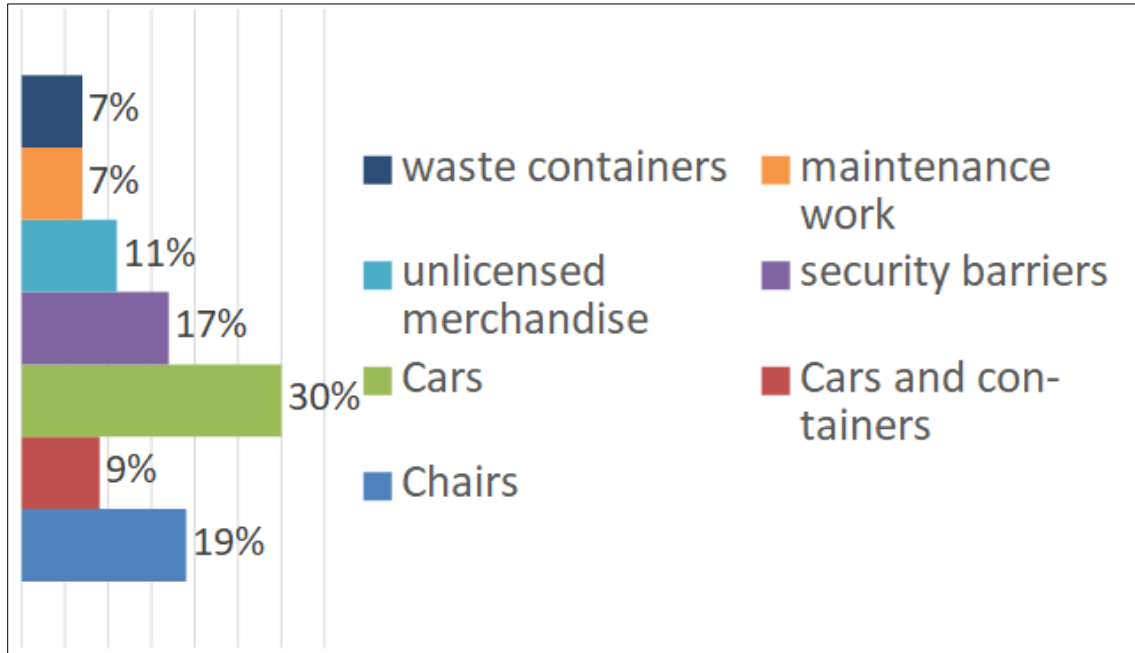


Figure 4: Percentage of obstacles types in front of people with disability lanes

Access to information in campaigns:

With regard to the standards of access to information, it was observed that 99% of the time there was no sign language interpreter.

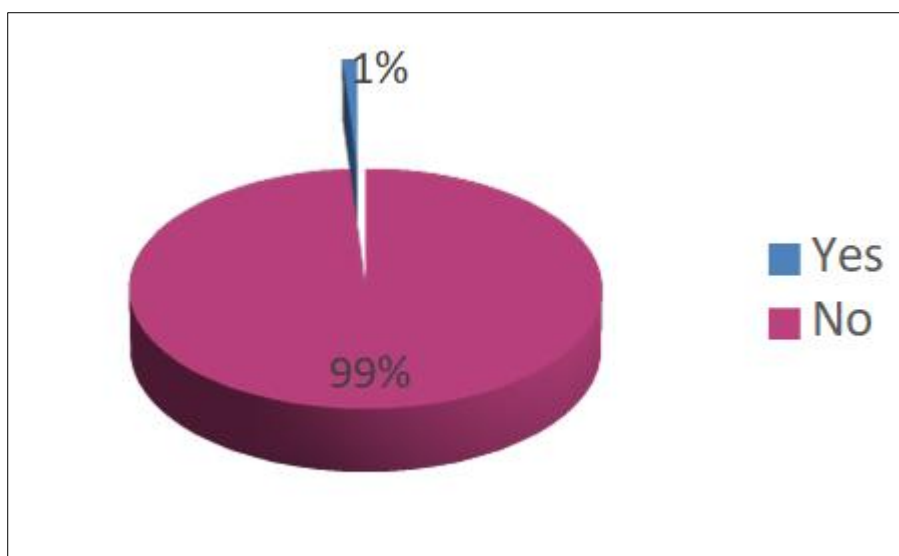


Figure 5: Percentage of campaigns using a sign language interpreter

In addition to only 15% of the activities, posters and explanatory pictures were provided for persons with disabilities.

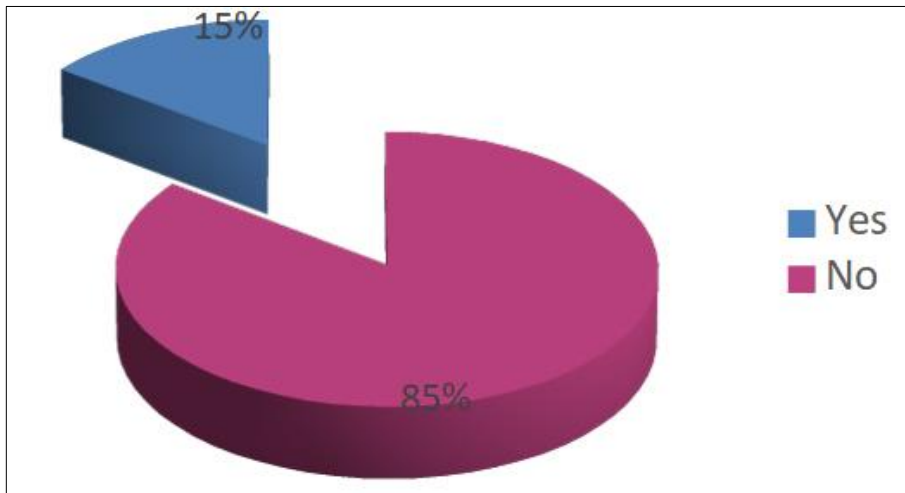


Figure 6: Percentage of campaigns with posters and photos of people with motor disabilities and the deaf

The same for accessing information mechanisms for people with a visual impairment, where the use of audio descriptive techniques was only 4%. In addition, the percentage of documents translated into sign language is only 4%.

As for Braille documents, they are almost non-existent, because only 1% of the campaigns provided access to the information in Braille.

Speeches referring to people with disabilities:

Only 9% of the speakers addressed persons with disabilities during their activities, and most of the used labels were incorrect and in violation of the law, as only 11% of them used the correct designation which is “people with disabilities”. It is also worth noting that in the section devoted to introducing the referendum programs was also followed up on the Tunisian national channel, among many of them only two people mentioned the rights of persons with disabilities.

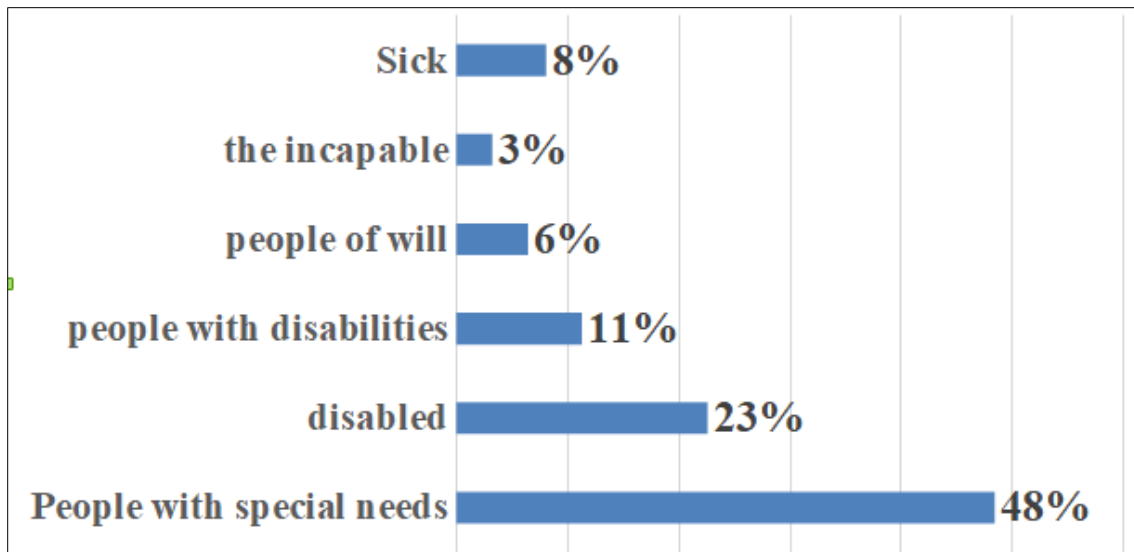


Figure 7: Percentage of used designations for persons with disability

Participation of persons with disabilities in referendum campaigns:

The participation of persons with disabilities in the referendum campaigns is 34%, which is a small rate. As follow, their participation rate estimated according to type of their disability:

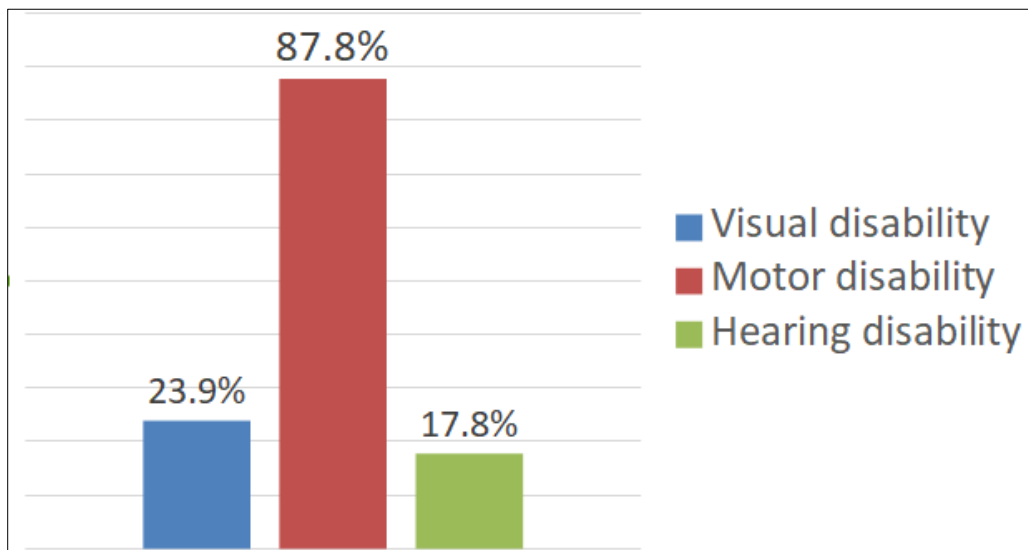


Figure 8: Percentage of persons with disabilities participated in campaigns

Deaf interview outcomes:

Among the work carried out by the Committee of Deaf is to ask questions to the groups of the deaf that they talk to daily, whether on social networking sites or in associations and coffee shops . The

questions were set for them about the extent of their knowledge of the referendum and their participation in it. The sample consisted of 79 deaf people, 30% of whom were women and 70% men. All of them are over the age of 18 years old, which means they can exercise their right to vote. The first thing that was noticed is that 65% of interviewed deaf do not know what a referendum is, and most of them justified their ignorance of this important event by not having a sign language translation in the news and everything related to public affairs.

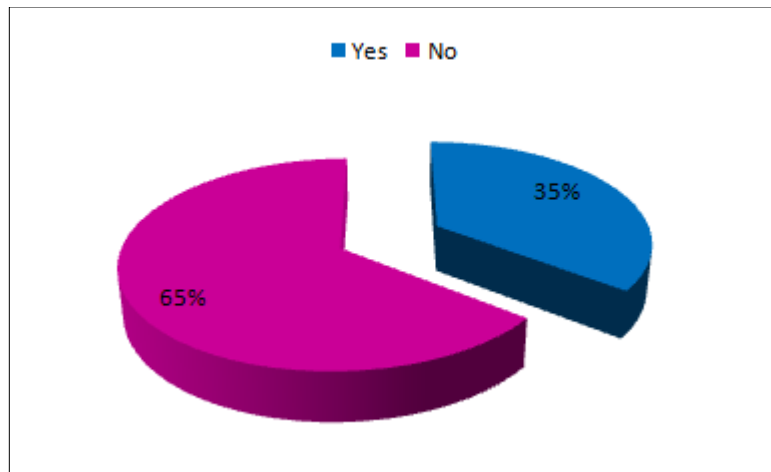


Figure 9: The percentage of deaf people who know what the referendum is

Also upon request, an explanation from those who stated that they knew about the referendum, it was found that 39% of them had a wrong understanding about it, as they believed that it was a presidential election, and some of them thought that the law would be changed.. This is because most of them stated that they obtained this information from their families and deaf friends, meaning that it is an unreliable and unofficial source.

It was also found that 33% of those who are not registered in the electoral register, and the remaining 14% do not know if they are registered or not.

In addition, nearly half of them 49% do not know if they receive short text messages from the Elections Authority, and this is due to their inability to read. The only means of communication is sign language, which was not provided by the High Elections Authority despite the recommendations of the Ibsar Association and its emphasis on the importance of deaf people accessing information through Sign language.

Finally, the deaf were asked if they participated in the activities of the referendum campaigns, and it was found that no one had participated and did not have any knowledge of them.



Figure 10: Participation of the deaf in the activities of the referendum campaigns