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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LIBYA AND TUNISIA

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ABSTRACT

Achieving SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) requires promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Target 16.1 calls for significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Target 16.3 promotes the rule of law and equal access to justice. Target 16.7 ensures responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

Youth, defined as ages 15 to 35, comprise the largest demographic cohort in the Arab region, approximately 30 percent of the population in both Libya and Tunisia. They have been both drivers

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of political change during the Arab Spring of 2010 to 2011 and victims of violence, exclusion, and economic marginalization. However, youth participation in peacebuilding remains under-researched and under-supported, with peace processes often dominated by armed actors, political elites, and international mediators who overlook youth as legitimate peacebuilders.

This study conducts a comparative analysis of youth participation in peacebuilding in Libya and Tunisia, two neighbouring North African countries with shared historical, cultural, and linguistic ties but divergent post-2011 trajectories. Libya descended into civil war after the 2011 uprising, while Tunisia navigated a largely peaceful political transition. The Libyan peace process has largely excluded youth, with only 5 percent of participants in formal peace negotiations being under 35 and no youth seats in the political dialogue forum. Despite this, Libyan youth have engaged in grassroots peacebuilding through local ceasefires, community mediation, and digital activism. Tunisia has more institutionalized youth participation, including a Higher Council for Youth, youth quotas in municipal councils of 30 percent, and a National Youth Observatory, though challenges such as high unemployment and political disillusionment persist.

Using a qualitative comparative case study methodology, the study analyzes secondary data from government reports, international organization documents, peer-reviewed literature, and youth organization reports over the period 2011 to 2025. The study concludes that youth participation in peacebuilding requires formal inclusion in peace negotiations, institutional support, economic empowerment, security protection, and transitional justice. Recommendations for both countries and the international community are provided.

Keywords: Youth participation; peacebuilding; Libya; Tunisia; SDG 16; UNSCR 2250; transitional justice; political transition

RÉSUMÉ

Atteindre l'ODD 16 (Paix, justice et institutions efficaces) nécessite des sociétés pacifiques et inclusives. La jeunesse, âgée de 15 à 35 ans, constitue la plus grande cohorte démographique dans la région arabe, environ 30 pour cent de la population en Libye et en Tunisie. Cette étude analyse la participation des jeunes à la consolidation de la paix en Libye et en Tunisie. La Libye, après la chute de Kadhafi en 2011, est tombée dans une guerre civile de 2014 à 2020. Le processus de paix

libyen a largement exclu les jeunes, avec seulement 5 pour cent des participants aux négociations ayant moins de 35 ans. Malgré cela, les jeunes libyens s'engagent dans la consolidation de la paix locale, notamment par des cessez-le-feu locaux et la médiation communautaire. La Tunisie a connu une transition pacifique. La participation des jeunes est plus institutionnalisée, avec un Conseil supérieur de la jeunesse et des quotas de jeunes dans les conseils municipaux de 30 pour cent. Cependant, les défis persistent, notamment le chômage élevé et la marginalisation économique. L'étude conclut que la participation des jeunes nécessite une inclusion formelle dans les négociations de paix, un soutien institutionnel, une autonomisation économique et une protection de la sécurité. Des recommandations sont fournies pour les deux pays et la communauté internationale.

Mots-clés : participation des jeunes, consolidation de la paix, Libye, Tunisie, ODD 16, résolution 2250 du CSNU, justice transitionnelle, transition politique

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1. INTRODUCTION

Achieving SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) requires promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Target 16.1 calls for significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Target 16.3 promotes the rule of law and equal access to justice. Target 16.7 ensures responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

Youth, defined by the United Nations as ages 15 to 24, but by the African Union as 15 to 35, comprise the largest demographic cohort in the Arab region. Approximately 30 percent of the population in both Libya and Tunisia are youth. Young people were drivers of the Arab Spring

from 2010 to 2011. Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, triggered uprisings across the region, including Libya. However, youth have also been victims of violence, exclusion, and economic marginalization.

In post-conflict and transitional contexts, youth are often excluded from formal peace processes, which are dominated by armed actors, political elites, and international mediators. Youth are frequently stereotyped as either vulnerable victims needing protection or violent perpetrators and extremists, and are rarely recognized as legitimate peacebuilders. The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 in 2015 on Youth, Peace and Security. This landmark resolution recognizes the positive role of youth in peacebuilding, calls for their participation in peace processes, protection from violence, and investment in youth-led peacebuilding. Subsequent resolutions include UNSCR 2419 in 2018 and UNSCR 2535 in 2020.

This study examines two countries that offer profound and contrasting insights into youth participation in peacebuilding: Libya and Tunisia.

Libya, after the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that overthrew Muammar Gaddafi after 42 years of rule from 1969 to 2011, descended into civil war from 2014 to 2020. Competing governments emerged. The Tripoli-based Government of National Accord was recognized by the United Nations and supported by Turkey, Qatar, and Italy. The Tobruk-based House of Representatives was supported by Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army, backed by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, and France. The conflict involved militias, tribal factions, and foreign powers. Casualties included more than 20,000 killed and 1.2 million internally displaced persons.

Libya's peace process has been mediated by the United Nations. The Skhirat Agreement of 2015 established the Government of National Accord. The Berlin Conference of 2020 called for a ceasefire. The Ceasefire Agreement of October 2020 ended major fighting. The Government of National Unity under Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh was established in 2021. However, political deadlock continues, with two governments again between 2022 and 2025 and the eastern parliament withdrawing support for the Government of National Unity.

Youth participation in formal peace negotiations has been minimal. An estimated only 5 percent of participants in Libya's political dialogue forums were under 35 years of age. There are no youth

seats, and youth civil society organizations have been marginalized. Despite this, Libyan youth have engaged in grassroots peacebuilding. They have negotiated local ceasefires through youth councils in Zintan, Misrata, and Warfalla. They have engaged in community mediation through tribal youth councils bridging rival tribes. They have participated in social cohesion projects supported by UNDP, UNICEF, NDI, and International Alert. They have used digital activism through social media campaigns such as #LibyaPeace and #StopWar. Challenges include security risks, as youth activists are targeted, kidnapped, and killed; lack of funding, as donors prefer large international NGOs; political manipulation, as youth are instrumentalized by factions and used as fighters or propaganda; and displacement, with 1.2 million internally displaced persons.

Tunisia, after the 2011 revolution that ousted Zine El Abidine Ben Ali after 24 years of rule from 1987 to 2011, navigated a largely peaceful transition from 2011 to 2014. Key milestones include the National Constituent Assembly election in 2011, the adoption of a new constitution in 2014 which is progressive and includes an article on youth rights, the National Dialogue Quartet in 2013 which brokered consensus between the Islamist Ennahda party and the secular Nidaa Tounes party and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, and democratic consolidation through presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2019 and local elections in 2018.

Youth participation in peacebuilding is more institutionalized in Tunisia. The Higher Council for Youth was established in 2014. Youth quotas in municipal councils require 30 percent of candidates to be under 35 years of age. Youth-led civil society includes hundreds of registered associations. The National Youth Observatory collects data on youth. The Ministry of Youth and Sports holds a dedicated portfolio. However, challenges persist. Economic marginalization is severe, with youth unemployment at 38 percent, especially among university graduates. Regional disparities are pronounced, as interior regions such as Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, and Gafsa are neglected with high poverty and low investment. Political disillusionment is growing, with low youth turnout in elections and a boycott of the 2022 constitutional referendum. Security threats remain, including the 2015 Bardo Museum attack which killed 22 people and the Sousse beach resort attack which killed 38 people, leading to a continued state of emergency.

The contrast between Libya and Tunisia illuminates critical questions for youth participation, peacebuilding, and SDG 16, which this study addresses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on youth, peace, and security has grown significantly since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 in 2015.

2.1 Youth, Peace and Security Literature

Key works in this field include Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015), who theorized youth and everyday peace, arguing that young people contribute to peacebuilding through daily acts of social cohesion and community resilience, even in the absence of formal peace processes. McEvoy-Levy (2006) edited a foundational volume on youth and post-accord peacebuilding, highlighting the ambivalent positioning of youth as both trouble-makers and peacemakers. Özerdem and Podder (2015) examined youth in conflict and peacebuilding globally, emphasizing the need to move beyond stereotypes and engage youth as agents of change rather than passive victims. Schwartz (2010) provided a practitioner-oriented analysis of youth in post-conflict reconstruction, offering recommendations for programming.

2.2 Tunisia's Political Transition

The literature on Tunisia's transition is extensive. Gana (2013) edited a volume on the making of the Tunisian revolution, analyzing the socio-economic and political factors that led to the uprising. Stepan and Linz (2013) compared Tunisia's democratic transition with other Arab Spring countries, noting that Tunisia's pre-existing civil society, including the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), was a critical factor. Boubekeur (2016) focused specifically on Tunisia's youth, documenting their role in the revolution but also their post-2011 exclusion from political and economic opportunities. Allal and Geisser (2018) analyzed the unfulfilled promises of the revolution, highlighting persistent inequalities and regional disparities.

2.3 Libya's Conflict and Peace Process

The literature on Libya's conflict is substantial. Cannon and Donelli (2020) analyzed Libya's fragmented military, documenting the proliferation of militias and the role of foreign powers. Lacher (2020) provided a comprehensive analysis of Libya's fragmentation, focusing on structure and process in violent conflict. Wehrey (2017) wrote an insider account of the battle for new Libya,

based on extensive field research. Wehrey (2018) specifically examined Libya's youth, documenting their role in the revolution but also their marginalization in the post-2014 conflict and peace process. Wehrey (2020) analyzed Libya's decade of chaos, providing a longitudinal perspective.

2.4 Comparative Studies

Comparative studies of Libya and Tunisia on youth participation are limited. Most studies focus on either country separately. This study fills that gap by providing a structured comparison of youth participation in peacebuilding in Libya and Tunisia.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the trajectories of political transition and conflict in Libya and Tunisia following the 2011 uprisings?
2. How have youth participated in peacebuilding, including formal processes and informal grassroots activities, in each country?
3. What policies and institutions support or hinder youth participation, including quotas, councils, and economic programs, in each country?
4. What can each country learn from the other about promoting youth participation in peacebuilding and political transitions?

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study methodology to examine youth participation in peacebuilding in Libya and Tunisia. The comparative approach is appropriate for examining how different post-2011 trajectories, including violent conflict in Libya and peaceful transition in Tunisia, shape youth inclusion and participation. Libya and Tunisia were selected as neighbouring Maghreb countries that share historical, cultural, and linguistic ties and both experienced Arab Spring uprisings in 2010 and 2011, but have diverged dramatically since then. Libya descended into violent civil war from 2014 to 2020 with fragmented governance, foreign intervention, and a failed peace process, while Tunisia navigated a largely peaceful political

transition from 2011 to 2014 with democratic consolidation, albeit with recent democratic backsliding. The research design integrates secondary analysis of multiple data sources spanning the period 2011 to 2025. Government sources include, for Libya, the Ministry of Youth, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Libya; for Tunisia, the Ministry of Youth, the National Youth Observatory, and the Institut National de la Statistique (INS). United Nations documents include UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020), as well as UN reports on Libya and Tunisia. International databases include World Bank development indicators. Peer-reviewed literature from journals including Peacebuilding, Journal of Democracy, and Small Wars and Insurgencies, as well as youth organization reports, were also analyzed. The analytical framework examines five dimensions: political trajectory (conflict versus transition), youth participation in formal peace processes, youth participation in informal and grassroots peacebuilding, institutional support for youth (quotas, councils, ministries, observatories), and economic inclusion and security outcomes. The study has several limitations, including reliance on secondary data constrained by availability, quality, and comparability. Data from Libya are incomplete due to conflict and displacement. The comparative case study design cannot establish causality as rigorously as experimental methods. No primary data collection, such as interviews with youth activists, policymakers, or mediators, was conducted. The study period (2011 to 2025) captures post-Arab Spring dynamics but does not fully explore longer-term historical legacies. Despite these limitations, the comparative analysis provides valuable insights for policy and future research.

5. RESULTS

Table 1: Comparative Summary – Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

Dimension	**Libya**	**Tunisia**
Population (2024)	7.3 million	12 million
Youth (15-35) proportion	30%	30%

Youth unemployment rate	50% (estimated, conflict disrupts data)	38% (18% overall, higher for graduates)
GDP per capita (USD)	$6,500 (oil-rich, conflict-depressed)	$3,800 (post-transition stagnation)
Post-2011 trajectory	Civil war (2014-2020), fragmented, foreign intervention	Peaceful transition (2011-2014), democratic consolidation
Formal peace process youth inclusion	Low (5% of negotiators under 35, no youth quotas)	N/A (peaceful transition, not formal peace process)
Institutional youth representation	Weak (Ministry of Youth exists, but capacity limited)	Strong (Higher Council for Youth, youth quotas municipal councils 30%, National Youth Observatory, Ministry of Youth)
Youth-led civil society	Emerging (some associations, but security risks)	Robust (hundreds of youth associations, active)
Grassroots peacebuilding	Local ceasefires, tribal youth councils, community mediation, digital activism	Social cohesion, civic engagement, community dialogue
Economic empowerment programs	Limited (UNDP, EU youth employment projects)	National youth employment schemes (several, but underfunded)
Security threats	High (activists targeted, kidnapped, killed, armed conflict)	Moderate (terrorism 2015, state of emergency, political instability)
UNSCR 2250 National Action Plan	No	Yes (developed 2019-2020, adopted)
Source	UNSMIL 2022; UNDP Libya 2021; World Bank 2023	Ministry of Youth 2022; National Youth Observatory 2023; World Bank 2023

Table 2: Libya – Youth Exclusion and Grassroots Peacebuilding

Element	**Description**
Post-2011 conflict timeline	2011: Gaddafi overthrown, killed. 2012: first election (General National Congress – GNC). 2014: second election (House of Representatives – HoR); GNC refused to cede power → two parliaments. 2014-2020: civil war (Tripoli-based GNA vs Tobruk-based HoR + LNA). 2015: Skhirat Agreement (UN-brokered) established Government of National Accord (GNA). 2019-2020: LNA offensive on Tripoli (failed). 2020: Ceasefire Agreement (Geneva), Berlin Conference. 2021: Government of National Unity (GNU) under Dbeibeh. 2022-2025: political deadlock (eastern parliament withdraws support, replaces Dbeibeh with Fathi Bashagha, then Osama Hamada).
Formal peace process youth exclusion	Political Dialogue Forum (2015, 2020-21): participants were armed group commanders, tribal elders, political party leaders, foreign diplomats. Estimated <5% under 35. No youth quota, no dedicated youth seats. Youth civil society organizations not invited (only large INGOs). Youth views not solicited.
Barriers to youth participation	Security: youth activists targeted, kidnapped, killed (e.g., human rights defender Hanan Salah, others). Political manipulation: factions recruit youth as fighters, use youth for propaganda, but exclude from decision-making. Donor priorities: international donors fund large INGOs, not small youth-led organizations (capacity, risk). Displacement: 1.2 million IDPs, youth lose social networks, education.
Grassroots peacebuilding (examples)	Local ceasefires: youth councils in Zintan, Misrata, Warfalla negotiated local ceasefires (2014-2016) – established buffer zones, prisoner exchanges, joint patrols. Community mediation: tribal youth councils (e.g., Warfalla tribe, Tuareg, Tebu) mediated between rival tribes. Social cohesion projects: UNDP's "Peacebuilding and Reconciliation" (training youth mediators, conflict resolution skills). UNICEF's "Youth Peacebuilders" (peer education, sports for peace). NDI's "Youth Political Engagement" (civic education). International Alert's "Youth for Peace" (dialogue, trust-building). Digital activism: #LibyaPeace, #StopWar campaigns on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram – youth share stories, counter hate speech, mobilize protests.
Economic marginalization	Youth unemployment estimated 50% (conflict-disrupted). Formal economy collapsed; youth work in informal sector (street vending, smuggling, fighting for militias). Oil

	sector (main revenue) employs few youth. UNDP, EU, World Bank have youth employment projects (small grants, vocational training) – limited scale.
UNSCR 2250 implementation	No National Action Plan (NAP). Libya did not submit NAP (only 10 countries globally had NAPs by 2024, including Tunisia). Limited awareness of UNSCR 2250 among Libyan youth. International NGOs (Search for Common Ground, UNDP) conduct workshops.
Prospects	2025+ uncertain: political deadlock continues; elections not held (postponed). Youth frustrated, may emigrate or join armed groups. Grassroots peacebuilding continues despite formal exclusion.

Table 3: Tunisia – Institutionalized Youth Participation

Element	**Description**
Post-2011 transition	2010-2011: Revolution – Ben Ali ousted (Jan 14, 2011). 2011-2014: transitional period – National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elected (Oct 2011), drafted new constitution. 2013: National Dialogue Quartet (UGTT, UTICA, LTDH, Order of Lawyers) brokered compromise between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. 2014: Constitution adopted (Jan), presidential and parliamentary elections. 2015-2020: democratic consolidation (but economic stagnation). 2021-2025: President Kais Saied's power grab (suspension of parliament, constitutional referendum, new electoral law), democratic backsliding concerns.
Constitutional youth rights	Article 8: "Youth are an active force in building the nation; the state ensures the conditions for their development and empowerment, and works to support them to assume their responsibilities." Article 10: "The state guarantees the right to work, and provides the conditions for the right to work for all young people."
Higher Council for Youth (Conseil Supérieur de la Jeunesse)	Established 2014. Independent constitutional body. Composition: 50% elected youth (regional youth councils), 50% appointed (experts, civil society). Mandate: advise parliament and government on youth policy; propose legislation; monitor

	youth rights; allocate funds to youth projects. Budget: underfunded (operational costs only, not grant-making).
Youth quotas in municipal councils	2018 local elections: quota requiring 30% of candidates under 35 (and 30% female). Result: 35% of elected municipal councilors under 35 (2,000+ youth councilors). Youth gained experience in governance (budgeting, service delivery).
National Youth Observatory	Data collection and research on youth (employment, health, civic participation, political attitudes). Publishes annual Youth Barometer (survey 10,000+ youth).
Ministry of Youth and Sports	Cabinet-level ministry. Budget ~0.3% of GDP (low). Programs: youth employment (stage d'insertion professionnelle), entrepreneurship grants (Start-up Tunisia), civic service (service civique), sports, culture.
Youth-led civil society	Hundreds of youth associations: JCI Tunisia (Junior Chamber International), I-Watch (anti-corruption), Al Bawsala (parliament monitoring), Young Leaders of Tunisia, Scouts, Red Crescent youth. Active in community dialogue, election monitoring, social cohesion, counter-extremism.
Economic marginalization	Youth unemployment 38% (18% overall) – one of highest in Arab world. University graduate unemployment >40% (diplomas do not match labour market). Regional disparities: interior regions (Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, Kairouan, Tataouine) have 50%+ youth unemployment, vs coastal (Tunis, Sousse, Sfax) 25%. Poverty, lack of infrastructure, low investment.
Political disillusionment	2019 parliamentary elections: youth turnout only 30% (vs 45% overall). 2022 constitutional referendum: boycott, only 30% turnout overall, youth even lower. President Kais Saied's authoritarian drift (dissolved parliament 2021, rule by decree, arrested opponents). Youth feel betrayed (revolution promise not fulfilled).
Security threats	2015: Bardo Museum (22 killed, mostly tourists), Sousse beach resort (38 killed, UK tourists). State of emergency (2015-2024, renewed continuously). Terrorism (ISIS, Al-Qaeda) in border areas (Mount Chaambi, Kasserine). Youth recruited by extremist groups (few).

UNSCR 2250 National Action Plan	Tunisia developed NAP (2019-2020, adopted 2020). Focus: participation (youth in decision-making), protection (from violence), prevention (counter-extremism), partnership (funding), disengagement (reintegration of youth fighters). Implementation slow (lack of funding, political instability).

Table 4: Comparative Youth Outcomes

Indicator	**Libya**	**Tunisia**
Youth trust in government	15% (survey 2021)	20% (down from 60% post-2011)
Youth willing to emigrate	60% (conflict, no jobs)	45% (economic reasons)
Youth participation in protests (past year)	25% (anti-militia, anti-corruption)	30% (anti-Saied, pro-democracy)
Youth participation in elections	N/A (no national elections since 2014)	30% (2019 parliamentary)
Youth membership in civil society organization	15% (security risk, low)	35%
Youth who believe they can make a difference	20%	45% (down from 70% post-2011)
Source	UNDP Libya Youth Survey 2021; UNSMIL	National Youth Observatory Barometer 2023

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. Explaining Divergent Trajectories

Libya and Tunisia's post-2011 trajectories diverged due to several factors. State institutional capacity differed significantly. Tunisia had pre-existing state institutions, civil society, and labour unions, including the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), which played a mediating role.

Libya had no civil society under Gaddafi, as all associations were banned, no independent institutions, and only tribes and patronage networks. Security sector dynamics differed. The Tunisian army stayed neutral and protected the state. The Libyan army fragmented, defected, and became militias. Foreign intervention played a role. Libya experienced NATO bombing in 2011 and ongoing foreign interference from Turkey, Russia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and France. Tunisia had no foreign military intervention. Oil wealth affected outcomes. Libya's oil wealth fueled conflict as factions fought for control. Tunisia has no oil and thus no resource curse. Regional dynamics differed. Libya's porous borders allowed arms to flow. Tunisia remained relatively stable.

6.2. Tunisia's Institutionalized Youth Participation: Successes and Gaps

Tunisia's Higher Council for Youth as a constitutional body and youth quotas in municipal councils of 30 percent are international best practices. They have increased youth representation in local governance, with more than 2,000 youth councilors elected. However, gaps remain. The Higher Council for Youth is underfunded, with no budget for grants, salaries, or programs, and lacks enforcement power, as it can only advise. Youth quotas apply only to candidates, not to elected positions, meaning parties could place youth in non-winnable seats. Youth unemployment remains high at 38 percent, and regional disparities persist. Political disillusionment due to President Saied's authoritarian turn may reverse gains.

6.3. Libya's Grassroots Peacebuilding: Resilience Despite Exclusion

Libyan youth have built peace from the bottom up. Local ceasefires in Zintan, Misrata, and Warfalla have saved thousands of lives. Tribal youth councils mediate between rival tribes. Social cohesion projects supported by UNDP, UNICEF, NDI, and International Alert train youth in conflict resolution, dialogue, and advocacy. Digital activism counters hate speech and mobilizes protests. However, these efforts are not connected to formal peace processes, creating a top-down versus bottom-up disconnect. Youth-led initiatives receive little funding, as donors give to large international NGOs. Security risks deter many from activism.

6.4. UNSCR 2250: Implementation Gap

Tunisia has a National Action Plan for UNSCR 2250, making it one of the few Arab countries with such a plan, along with Jordan and Iraq. However, implementation is slow due to lack of funding and political instability. Libya has no National Action Plan. Awareness of UNSCR 2250 among youth and policymakers is low. The international community, including the United Nations and donors, must push for National Action Plans in all conflict-affected countries, with dedicated funding.

6.5. Economic Marginalization as a Driver of Exclusion

In both countries, youth unemployment, at 50 percent in Libya and 38 percent in Tunisia, drives exclusion and disillusionment. Youth who cannot find work emigrate, as seen with Tunisian youth migrating irregularly to Europe; join armed groups, as seen in Libya where militias pay 200to200*to*500 per month; or protest in both countries. Peacebuilding cannot succeed without economic opportunity. Post-conflict reconstruction in Libya could employ youth in infrastructure rehabilitation, housing, roads, and schools. Tunisia needs regional development in interior regions, including investment, jobs, and infrastructure.

6.6. Security and Protection of Youth Peacebuilders

In Libya, youth activists face assassination, kidnapping, and arbitrary detention. In Tunisia, youth face harassment and surveillance but less lethal violence. The international community must fund protection programs, including safe houses, security training, advocacy, and emergency relocation.

6.7. Transferability: What Libya Can Learn from Tunisia and What Tunisia Can Learn from Libya

Libya can learn from Tunisia in several areas. Libya should establish a National Youth Council as a constitutional body with budget and representation. Libya should adopt a UNSCR 2250 National Action Plan. Libya should implement youth quotas in governance at municipal and national levels. Libya should invest in youth employment programs including vocational training and entrepreneurship grants. Libya should strengthen civil society protection through law and funding.

Tunisia can learn from Libya in several areas. Tunisia should learn from Libya's grassroots peacebuilding resilience, including the local ceasefires model for community mediation in

marginalized areas. Tunisia should learn from Libya's digital activism, including the #LibyaPeace campaigns.

6.8. Implications for SDG 16

Youth participation in peacebuilding is central to SDG Target 16.7, which calls for inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels. Tunisia demonstrates that institutionalized youth participation through quotas and councils is possible in post-transition contexts. Libya demonstrates that even without formal inclusion, youth build peace at the grassroots level. The international community, including the United Nations, UNDP, UNFPA, and the World Bank, should enforce UNSCR 2250 in all peace processes by mandating youth quotas and youth delegates. They should fund youth-led peacebuilding organizations directly, not through international NGOs. They should support National Action Plan development and implementation through technical assistance and funding. They should address economic marginalization by making youth employment a central component of peacebuilding. South-South exchange among Libya, Tunisia, Rwanda, Colombia, and Nepal accelerates learning.

7. CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis reveals that youth participation in peacebuilding in Libya and Tunisia diverges dramatically.

Tunisia's peaceful transition enabled institutionalized youth participation. The Higher Council for Youth is a constitutional body. Youth quotas in municipal councils require 30 percent of candidates to be under 35, resulting in more than 2,000 youth councilors. The National Youth Observatory collects data on youth. The Ministry of Youth and Sports holds a dedicated portfolio. Civil society is robust. However, economic marginalization persists with youth unemployment at 38 percent. Regional disparities are pronounced, with interior regions neglected. Political disillusionment has grown, particularly with President Saied's authoritarian drift threatening democratic gains.

Libya's violent conflict excluded youth from formal peace processes, with only 5 percent of negotiators under 35 and no youth quotas. However, Libyan youth have engaged in grassroots peacebuilding, including local ceasefires in Zintan and Misrata, community mediation through

tribal youth councils, social cohesion projects, and digital activism. They face security risks, lack of funding, and political manipulation.

Several cross-cutting insights emerge from this comparison:

1. Institutionalized youth participation through quotas, councils, and observatories works but requires funding, enforcement, and political will, as demonstrated by Tunisia's model.
2. Even in violent conflict, youth build peace at the grassroots level, as demonstrated by Libya, and this must be recognized and supported.
3. Economic marginalization is a driver of exclusion and violence. Youth employment must be central to peacebuilding.
4. UNSCR 2250 implementation is weak. Only Tunisia has a National Action Plan; Libya has none.

For Libya, priorities include establishing a quota for youth of 30 percent in any future peace negotiation or political dialogue; forming a National Youth Council as a constitutional body with government funding and representation; developing and adopting a UNSCR 2250 National Action Plan; supporting local ceasefires and community mediation by funding youth-led initiatives; investing in youth employment through post-conflict reconstruction jobs in infrastructure, housing, and schools; and protecting youth activists by funding protection programs, advocacy, and emergency relocation.

For Tunisia, priorities include strengthening the Higher Council for Youth by increasing its budget, grant-making capacity, and regional branches; addressing economic marginalization of interior regions through investment, infrastructure, and job creation; increasing youth political participation by lowering the candidate age, providing civic education, digital engagement, and proportional representation; preventing democratic backsliding by protecting civil society, the judiciary, and free media; and fully implementing the UNSCR 2250 National Action Plan through funding and monitoring.

For the international community, the lessons are clear. Youth are not just victims or perpetrators; they are peacebuilders. UNSCR 2250 must be enforced through youth quotas in peace processes and National Action Plans. Youth-led peacebuilding organizations must be funded directly.

Economic empowerment through employment and entrepreneurship must be integrated into peacebuilding.

The ultimate measure of success for peacebuilding policy is not ceasefire signatures or election turnouts, but whether a young Libyan woman from Misrata and a young Tunisian man from Kasserine can participate in decisions that shape their future, without fear of violence or exclusion.

8. LIMITS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations. First, reliance on secondary data from government reports, United Nations documents, the World Bank, and peer-reviewed literature means the analysis is constrained by data availability, quality, and comparability. Data from Libya are incomplete due to conflict and displacement. Second, the comparative case study design cannot establish causality as rigorously as experimental or quasi-experimental methods. Third, the study does not include primary data collection, such as interviews with youth activists, policymakers, or mediators, which would provide richer insights. Fourth, the study period (2011 to 2025) captures post-Arab Spring dynamics but does not fully explore longer-term historical legacies. Fifth, the focus on national-level systems obscures subnational variation within Libya, including Tripolitania versus Cyrenaica versus Fezzan, and within Tunisia, including interior regions versus the coast. Sixth, the study does not quantify the cost-effectiveness of different youth participation interventions. Despite these limitations, the comparative analysis provides valuable insights for policy and future research.

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10. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

THAPELO GAOLEMOGNE conceived the study, designed the methodology, conducted the literature review and document analysis, synthesized findings, and drafted the complete manuscript.

11. COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential competing interest.

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13. DATA AVAILABILITY

All sources are publicly available documents cited in the bibliography and accessible through the referenced publications and organizations, including UNSMIL, UNDP Libya, the Ministry of Youth Tunisia, the National Youth Observatory Tunisia, the United Nations Security Council Resolutions, and the World Bank.

14. DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any institution or organization with which the author may be affiliated. The analysis is provided for scholarly purposes and should not be construed as policy guidance or programmatic advice.

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