

Socioeconomic protests and political transformation: Dynamics of contentious politics in Egypt and Tunisia against the background of South American experiences

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Socioeconomic grievances were among the major forces driving the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. Since the ousting of the dictators, however, political debates have mainly focused on political institutions, questions of identity and civil-military relations even though both countries continue to contend with socioeconomic protests. This project analyzes the neglected socioeconomic dimension of the ongoing transformation process in Egypt and Tunisia. It studies the dynamics of contentious politics, i.e. the interaction of protest groups and political actors, in this issue area. A focused analysis of South American countries and their diverse experiences in dealing with political change and socioeconomic contention will serve to inform and orient the in-depth analysis of the Arab cases. Building on comparative research on political transformation processes and the theoretical framework of contentious politics developed by Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow and colleagues, the research team consisting of Middle East and Latin American experts from Egypt, Germany and Tunisia will analyze to what extent and how socioeconomic contention shapes the ongoing process of political transformation in Egypt and Tunisia. In each step of the research process the project will systematize South American experiences, conduct in-depth studies on the contemporary situation in Egypt and Tunisia, compare the two Arab cases, and draw general conclusions from the inter-regional comparison. Finally, the project will also identify future scenarios for Egypt and Tunisia and develop policy recommendations regarding not only social and political actors in the two countries but also external actors, and present in detail how they could contribute to building an inclusive and peaceful order in Egypt and Tunisia.

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