



Capacity Building Workshop:
Policy Analysis, Scenario Building & Networking Meeting

EGYPT'S CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE BRINK?
POLITICS FROM BELOW FIVE YEARS AFTER
THE REVOLUTION

Berlin, 16 July 2016

in



berlin graduate school
muslim cultures and societies

cooperation with

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SOCIAL SCIENCES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This event aims to bring together young professionals from NGOs, development, cultural and foreign policy as well as scholars and students interested in the current state of the civil society in Egypt five years after the January 25 Revolution. Small groups of 10-15 participants will discuss specific aspects of recent political developments in Egypt in three thematic workshops jointly organized by German and Egyptian experts. The workshops are each organised by teams of young researchers and professionals and will offer an open environment to exchange opinions and experiences. They further aim towards identifying trends and perspectives for Egypt's civil society as well as best practices for professionals,

donors and partners working in or with actors in Egypt's transforming political landscape.

A thorough analysis of the country's current situation will feed into discussions on strategies of how local and international journalists, scholars and NGOs as well as development and foreign organisations could have a positive impact. In the evening, all workshop participants are invited to a joint discussion between political decision-makers and civil society representatives, as well as academic scholars and journalists from both Egypt and Germany.

WORKSHOPS

1. EMERGING WORLDVIEWS AND LEGITIMACIES IN EGYPT

ORGANISED BY AMRO ALI, (SYDNEY DEMOCRACY NETWORK / ALEXANDRIA)
AND LUCIA SORBERA (UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY)

The workshop examines the irreversible effects of the 2011 revolution on various Egyptian public spheres. Despite the following years of repression, the event has ruptured the political and social timeline, creating new sources of historical legitimacies, injected novel subjectivities, reconfigured social networks, and created a profoundly new political language – the revolution in effect destroyed the previous dominant situation which can be easily clouded in the midst of state crackdowns.

This slowly-crystallising “camp” – its most obvious, though by no means only, proponents being activists and civil society – mirrors the same claimed goals as officialdom: democracy, social justice equality, and prosperity. The fundamental difference is that the regime proposes a future paradise when Egypt will be a flourishing democracy and hence justifies the repression, which citizens will have to endure until said paradise has been reached. On the other hand, those who follow the revolution's line of thinking reject that notion and argue that democracy is a practice enacted on a daily basis rather than being reached in some distant future.

Furthermore, regardless of the increasing difficulty in exercising independent thought, this does not undermine the appeal to the 2011 legitimacy, which represents a critical juncture that continues to send waves of energy to the present active population, with vivid memories of sacrifices, victories, and betrayals of their hopes. This new space of thinking emerges where citizens realise they cannot be rationalised as means towards political or ideological ends, as they have rights by virtue of their new, albeit fragile, understanding as citizens, and therefore there is a pressing urgency in their worldview and a civic sense of responsibility for others.

2. STRATEGIES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN EGYPT

ORGANISED BY JANNIS GRIMM (BGS MCS / FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN)

Since the military coup of July 2013, a plethora of presidential decrees have restricted the public sphere in Egypt to become nigh-on invisible. State institutions and investigating bodies have increasingly abused their powers against civil society representatives in what has been termed by observers as an attempt to “slowly strangle the work” of Egyptian rights groups and an “assault on civil society”. Activists have moved from being the witnesses of assaults and human rights violations by the security forces, to being their primary targets. Against this background, and with a view to the democracy-fostering function that is commonly attributed to civil society in transition literature, the following questions will serve as a framework for discussion in the workshop: Has civil society lost the battle? How can we conceive of co-opted and regime-affirmative social actors? What about the “uncivil society” that threatens state sovereignty in parts of the country? Can CSOs be supported from outside? And if so - who and how?

The workshop aims at developing a set of policy-relevant research questions and guidelines for further inquiry into the complex field of civil society under authoritarianism. Subfields that are identified will be discussed in-depth with representatives of Egyptian nongovernmental organisations, academics and young German executives. Ultimately, we hope to lay-out the rough skeleton for a comprehensive web-dossier on the possibilities for and limits of supporting social actors in Egypt that are still working towards a more inclusive and participatory order, which would be published by POLIS 180 and to which workshop participants could contribute.

3. ACADEMIC AND MEDIA FREEDOM UNDER THREAT IN EGYPT

ORGANISED BY ILYAS SALIBA (BGSS / WZB BERLIN)

With traditional publishing houses being closed and raided, with ever more prominent Egyptian journalists banned or hindered from traveling outside of the country, and with an Italian PhD student, Giulio Regeni, found tortured to death on the roadside of a highway, the crackdown on freedom of speech in Egypt has finally gained some international attention. The working environment, especially for journalists, academic scholars, and researchers concerned with social, economic and political issues is critical – to say the least. Yet, despite very visible incidents of physical violence against dissenters and a range of orchestrated lawsuits against vocal academics and journalists, the international outcry has been fairly limited – as have been the repercussions for perpetrators of repression and violence. Consequently, the security situation for scholars and journalists in Egypt is further deteriorating.

This workshop is a common exercise. It is based on a joint assessment and analysis of the current working conditions in Egypt for journalists and academics.

After initial inputs by two young academic professionals and practitioners, an exchange of views amongst the workshop participants aims at pooling and grouping threats and dilemmas affecting current research into a typology for further discussion. Building on shared experiences the workshop then tries to systematize best practices and security measures that can be applied to counter the threats identified earlier. In a third step prospects for improving awareness within Egypt and abroad for the increasingly perilous conditions under which researchers and journalists are pursuing their work in Egypt are being discussed and proposals for a sustained exchange on the issues of academic freedom and media freedom in Egypt will be developed.

PANEL DISCUSSION

ENGAGE OR WITHDRAW? PERSPECTIVES FOR GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

The evening discussion brings together political analysts, politicians and civil society actors from Egypt and Germany to discuss perspectives for German-Egyptian cooperation, focusing on the role of civil society. Renowned discussants will give insight into their personal and professional experiences in Egypt over the course of the last years in varying contexts and from different perspectives. The panel aims to avoid falling back into the pre-2011 stability paradigm that dominated much of the state-centered cooperation through jointly reflecting on trends and identifying models for sustainable cooperation across borders and professions that bear the potential to impact the Egyptian political realm positively. Engaging with the preliminary results, debates and main questions of the afternoon sessions, the panel discussion encourages a joint debate amongst participants of all workshops and a select audience of additional guests.

ENVISIONED OUTPUT

With its interactive format, the event seeks to promote a network and a sustainable platform for young scholars, students, professionals, and activists involved in Egyptian civil society. In an intense working phase, the participants will not only prepare the later evening event and develop a set of questions for the panelists. Moreover, they will identify relevant fields for further research and engagement.

The workshop groups will eventually split into smaller task groups that turn the questions into a policy consulting output.

Over the course of the next months, the task groups may contribute to a thematic dossier that sheds light on Germany's relations with Egyptian civil society. The organisers of the workshops will consult with interested participants and set thematic foci. An expert peer-reviewing process will ensure the quality of the dossier. In a final step, the thematic dossier, published electronically by POLIS180, shall be presented to and discussed with high-level policy decision makers in a distinct event.

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