Higher Education Policies and Welfare Regimes in Egypt and Tunisia

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Social policy has historically represented "the very rationale and purpose" (Anderson 2005, 3) of the modern Arab state and the rapid expansion of welfare policies during the interwar period were closely intertwined with state-building efforts across the region. The social contract, or redistributional policies that confirm "sameness and interdependence across class boundaries" (Trouillot 2001, 127), encompassed access to free basic education, subsidized food, guaranteed employment, and old age pensions as public goods. It also prioritized the expansion of access to tertiary education for the citizenry. As part of postcolonial state-led development models, newly independent regimes invested heavily in the postsecondary education sector and institutionalized educational policies designed to counter historical legacies of exclusion and to expand the ranks of the middle class, which came to constitute the state's social basis of power. Thus, aside from constituting a significant component of social spending in the region, state policies in education have historically represented one of the foundations for state legitimacy.

Following the onset of economic retrenchment in the late 1980s, however, many countries in the region, including Egypt and Tunisia, the two case studies of this paper, witnessed what I term "hidden shifts" in the rules of access to education and, to varying degrees, the advent of new private providers in higher education. Against the backdrop of limited fiscal space, emerging governance models in higher education reflect tensions between alternative ideological views on the role of states versus markets in direct provision in education, and between competing claims by stakeholders in the context of increased integration into the global economy and internationalization of education. The recent uprisings in the region brought to the forefront youth grievances over the increasing inequity of the system and the mismatch of university education and the job market; they also highlighted faculty members' concerns over academic autonomy and freedoms.

This paper seeks to identify some of the patterns and dynamics that drive reconfigurations of welfare regimes away from the twin goals of universalism and distributional equity when it comes to higher education policies in Egypt and Tunisia.[1] The prism of analysis used is that of *insurance-based egalitarian welfare regimes,* which encapsulate the historical development of differential employment-based benefits with egalitarian components in the two countries (El-Meehy 2010). Along the lines of Gøsta Esping-Andersen's influential work, the term "welfare regime" refers to "the institutional arrangements, rules, and understandings that guide and shape concurrent social policy decisions, expenditure developments, problem definitions, and even the respond-demand structure of citizens and welfare consumers" (Esping-Andersen 1990, 80). In other words, the prevalence of policy regimes reflects qualitative differences stemming from variations in the historical institutionalization of welfare responsibilities of the state, the market, and society. More specifically, this discussion seeks to shed light on two interrelated questions. First, what is the meaning and content of higher education as a social citizenship right in the contemporary context of uncertain political transitions and neoliberal development? And second, what are the patterns of continuity and change in Egypt's and Tunisia's welfare regimes generally, and higher education policies more specifically, after the 2010 uprisings?

Conceptualizing the Welfare State

Early studies of the welfare state adopted a functional approach, linking structurally its expansion to historical processes of industrialization. Since the 1980s, a second generation of scholarship has emerged aiming to explain the diversity of welfare state models in the West. Furthermore, neo-Marxist theorists shifted the focus beyond functionalist analysis to political dynamics in order to highlight the role of class struggles and political conflict in shaping welfare expansion (Cameron 1978; Shalev 1983). The "power resource approach" suggested that differences in the development of welfare states could be attributed to the relative strength of leftist parties and trade unions in each country (Korpi 1978; Hicks 1999; Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993). Another strand of the literature highlighted the role of bureaucracy in the development of social policy (Heclo 1975), while state-centric scholars adopted an institutionalist approach emphasizing policy legacies, state capacity, and institutional structures as independent variables in shaping welfare policies across industrialized states (Skocpol 1992; Amenta 1998).

Esping-Andersen's influential book *The Three Worlds of Capitalism* (1990) marked an important turn in the literature on the welfare state. In a departure from earlier comparative studies, which focused primarily on state spending as an indicator of welfare efforts, Esping-

Andersen adopted a regime approach and distinguished among states on the basis of the institutional logic they apply in designating welfare functions to the state, market, and the family. The relevant dimensions of welfare policies in his classification are: degree of decommodification or the ability of workers to subsist independently of markets, resulting levels of stratification of social classes, and state-versus-market orientation of welfare provision.

On this basis, Esping-Andersen contends that states systematically vary from each other and tend to cluster around three ideal types. *Liberal welfare regimes* entail modest financial provision to targeted groups in limited situations. Public provision is residual in that the state only fills the gaps left by the market, but the fact that it targets specific groups means that its provisions are nonetheless redistributive. *Social democratic welfare regimes* are more generous, universal, and aspire to make society collectively responsible for risks that jeopardize the welfare of individuals. Here, the state actively assumes roles traditionally performed by the family and seeks to minimize the role played by the market. Lastly, the *conservative welfare regimes* provide differential benefits on the basis of social insurance not assistance. In such regimes, public policies buttress rather than undermine the roles played by families. Although this typology has been the subject of criticism for overlooking gender dynamics (Orloff 1993) and has been revised by Esping-Andersen himself and other scholars (Castles 1993; Esping-Andersen 1999), his regime approach has significantly influenced subsequent research in this area (see discussion in Huber and Stephens 2005).

Revisiting Welfare Regimes: Higher Education in Developing States

Although scholarship on the welfare state spans over half a century and has resulted in sophisticated understandings of the origins, varieties, and restructuring dynamics of welfare provisions, the literature suffers from two major gaps. The first is the lack of comparative analyses of the design and evolution of social policy in the developing world and the second is the neglect to consider education, including tertiary level, as a domain of the state's welfare responsibilities.

Welfare Regimes in Developing Contexts

Only recently have scholars began to systematically explore the varied political foundations of developing welfare states (Gough 2004; Seekings 2005; Sandbrook et al. 2007; Haggard and

Kaufman 2008) thus calling into question common assumptions that welfare provisions are relevant uniquely to industrially advanced countries and that structural constraints limit the state's autonomy to formulate social policy. While a number of cross-national quantitative studies have explored the link between expenditure levels and a range of political variables, qualitative studies have predominantly focused on the economic and organizational aspects of welfare systems. Efforts to bring the "social" back into discussions of economic reforms and move beyond the marginal status of social policy in public policymaking have been revived by a new wave of writings.

Taking inspiration from Esping-Andersen's work, some recent studies on developing welfare states identify various types of welfare regimes in the South. Attempts to theorize welfare regimes and develop relevant typologies revolve around reformulating the notion of labor decommodification, which, according to welfare state theorists, involves "placing human capital on center stage" based on the logic that "productivity necessitates social security, equality of resources and an active investment in people" (Esping-Andersen 1994, 723).

Adopting a comparative historical approach, Jeremy Seekings (2005), for instance, draws a fundamental distinction between, on the one hand, welfare regimes that extend citizenship-based rights and pursue decommodification of labor through universal social assistance programs and, on the other, those that extend employment-based social rights centered on social insurance and, as a result, excluding most of the poor. Thus Seekings proposes a typology of welfare regimes consisting of three ideal types:[2] *agrarian regimes* defined by the private provision of welfare dependent on access to land and/or kin, which in turn requires supportive state policies; *redistributive regimes*, which extend non-contributory social assistance as a citizenship right; and *inegalitarian corporatist regimes* in which social benefits are unequal and employment-based.[3]

Despite the foundational importance of welfare norms for the legitimacy of the modern state in the Middle East, there have been no systematic theoretical efforts to comparatively investigate the various trajectories of welfare regimes in the region. Instead, the notion of an implicit social contract, whereby the state provides welfare in return for the depoliticization of society, has been widely adopted by regional specialists in reference to "entitlements" granted by paternalistic postcolonial states in the region (Waterbury 1983; Ayubi 1995; Singerman 1995; Bayat 2002; Wickham 2002). Since the 1990s, the debate among scholars has emphasized convergence around a minimal social welfare regime in poor countries (Rudra 2002), thereby obscuring important reconfigurations in the region's welfare regimes, including the dynamics influencing new social policy choices.

The beginnings of the modern welfare regime in both countries date back to the interwar period, which witnessed the enactment of social security legislations in consultation with the International Labor Organization, the expansion of the state's direct involvement in the social arena, and the establishment of food subsidy and distribution systems (El-Meehy 2010). The pursuit of an *etatist* development model, based on economic self-reliance, nationalization, and public employment policies, facilitated the rapid expansion of employment-based benefits. Since the adoption of Arab socialism tied the state's legitimacy to the enactment of "social rights," ideological dynamics created a momentum to extend coverage to new groups and eventually expand egalitarian universal benefits such as subsidies on food and access to education. As a result insurance-based egalitarian welfare regimes crystallized in Egypt and Tunisia.

Higher Education

Classic works on social citizenship emphasize youth instruction, old age benefits, health care, and poverty alleviation among the core responsibilities of the welfare state. In his essay on citizenship and social class T. H. Marshall singles out the educational system and social services agencies as the state institutions most relevant to the realization of an equitable society (Marshall 2006 [1950]: 3). Nonetheless, welfare state scholars have developed rigorous theoretical frameworks and typologies based on a much narrower scope of analysis focused exclusively on social security, pensions, and labor market policies. The separation of education from social policy is often defended in mainstream literature on the grounds that public education historically predates Bismark's sick pay legislation, thereby making it conceptually different from social entitlements associated with industrial transformations in Europe.

A few scholars have attempted to revise mainstream welfare typologies by integrating higher education policies into the analysis (Iversen and Stephens 2008; Willemse and de Beer 2012). They have problematized the exclusion of higher education from the study of welfare states on several grounds.[4] First, the economic success of countries with high levels of equality and redistribution empirically demonstrated the need to unpack the linkages between human capital formation and welfare state policies. Similarly, businesses relying on highly skilled workers have expressed varying degrees of support or opposition for welfare state institutions, depending on patterns of human capital investment by the state. Second, studies illustrate complementarity between skills-development policies and social protection institutions. For instance, incentives to acquire particular types of skills are closely related to both social protection benefits and economic performance. Also, levels and composition of educational spending seem to have profound implications for the distribution of income across socioeconomic classes in the long run. Finally, looking at the record of education expenditures as a share of social spending in the Middle East—a region with high illiteracy levels—it is evident that traditionally the state's welfare effort in this sector is the greatest. Thus higher education policies should be fruitfully integrated in welfare regime analyses of the region.

Applying concepts of welfare state analysis such as decommodification and stratification to the field of higher education, Nienke Willemse and Paul de Beer (2012) identify the orientation of official human capital investment policies. In order to assess the degree of decommodification, it is crucial to investigate rules and standards of access to education. Welfare efforts in this area, measured by levels of public expenditure and the balance between private and public spending, are also relevant for capturing the extent to which higher education can be readily accessed based on merit. As for stratification, the focus is on the extent to which specific characteristics of the educational system promote hierarchy in labor markets, including the existence of different pathways of access to higher education, the extent to which such pathways emphasize general versus specific skills attainment, and the degree of standardization enforced.

On this basis, the authors distinguish among several higher education policies associated with welfare regime types. A *liberal welfare regime* is characterized by low decommodification and high stratification; the government administers basic universal education, but other levels of schooling, including higher education, are market-based. The minimal role of the state translates into low public spending on the sector and little harmonization among higher education institutions. In *conservative welfare regimes*, decommodification is moderate and stratification is high, since benefits are understood to be linked to occupational status, traditional family support as well as class. Here, student loans and grants are expected to be moderate since the family is considered the cornerstone of social provision. Tuition fees are low and government spending is relatively high. Finally, *social democratic welfare regimes* are characterized by high decommodification in which the "market is crowded out by the state" (Willemse and De Beer

2012, 110); in addition to high public spending, tuition fees are kept low and a generous system of loans and grants is universally accessible.

Hidden Retrenchment and Higher Education Welfare Policies

Higher education policies have traditionally constituted a critical component in the legitimation of insurance-based egalitarian welfare regimes in the Middle East. Egalitarian policies aimed at expanding access to higher education, independent of income, have been integral to the postcolonial state's commitment to promoting equity through expansion of the ranks of the educated middle class. In conjunction with labor market policies, which guaranteed public employment for graduates of universities and institutes, higher education policies were historically quasi-decommodified with the state absorbing the bulk of the cost of student enrollment.

First signs of strain in welfare policies were evident in the 1970s and 1980s, the decades marked by attempts to cut subsidies, declines in public wages, rising higher education fees, and delays in public employment. I contend, however, that the development of welfare regimes in Egypt and Tunisia entered a systematic phase of retrenchment following the fiscal crises in the late 1980s. In 2011, on the eve of the uprisings, both countries had witnessed over two decades of retrenchment or "policy changes that either cut social expenditure, restructure[d] welfare state programs to conform more closely to the residual welfare state model, or alter[ed] the political environment in ways that enhance the probability of such outcomes in the future" (Pierson 1994, 17). The shift of social provision in a residual direction in both contexts did *not* coincide with declining welfare expenditures. Indeed, during the important period of economic reforms between 1990 and 2006, social expenditure rose from 11% to 19% in Egypt and from 14% to 20% in Tunisia. Education spending accounted for the lion's share of aggregate social expenditure in the 1990s, representing on average 5% out of 13% in Egypt and 7% out of 17% in Tunisia (El-Meehy 2010).

In contrast to countries like Jordan and Yemen, where authoritative shifts in social policy unfolded as a result of major restructuring of pension funds, elimination of food subsidies, and increased reliance on cash transfers, economic restructuring in Egypt and Tunisia did not undermine the foundations of the insurance-based welfare regime, and policy frameworks governing pensions and subsidy systems were preserved (Ibid.). Indeed, Egypt and Tunisia experienced patterns of institutional change I collectively refer to as "hidden retrenchment."

With Egypt's implementation of economic reforms and structural adjustment programs in 1991, food subsidies were gradually reduced as the state ceased registering households in the ration-cards system and limited the universal bread subsidy to one type of bread. Following the food, fuel, and fiscal crises in the early 2000s, these reform steps were reversed, the government reopened registration in its quasi-universal food-subsidy system to include 80% of households, while adding more staples to the ration-card system. A draft legislation to create a private pension investment track parallel to the mainstream fixed-benefits system was deemed too politically risky to enact in 2010, despite extensive preparations by neoliberal technocrats under successive Nazif-led governments. Since 2012, significant subsidy cuts have affected the energy sector (diesel, fuel, and electricity), but reforms of the food-subsidy system centered on adopting a smart-card system aimed at reducing leakage rather than restricting access to the poor. In order to counter the effects of higher energy prices on living standards, the state not only raised the minimum wage to 1,200 Egyptian pounds (LE) and expanded the number of food items covered by the ration-card system, but also channeled heavily subsidized in-kind transfers through army-owned supermarkets and other food outlets.

In Tunisia, food subsidies were maintained, but two waves of aggressive reforms in 1993 and 1996 restricted coverage to unattractively packaged items and lower-quality bread in order to ensure self-targeting by the poor. Aside from extending coverage to new groups of workers in the private sector, pension reforms neither aimed to reorient its pay-as-you-go financing, nor restructure its fixed benefits system, nor merge its various contribution-based schemes. In 2012, Tunisia's fiscal crisis led to major cuts in energy subsidies and electricity prices rose. These measures were accompanied by a series of minimum wage increases, benefiting primarily organized workers in the public sector, and by an expansion of the main cash transfer program, Programme national d'aide aux familles nécessiteuses (PNAFN), which is valued at 0.5% of welfare spending and covers 235,000 households or approximately 9% of the population in 2012 (World Bank 2013, 11). Expenditure on food subsidies once again increased to absorb roughly 5% of government spending representing 1.6% of the GDP in 2012.[5] And, most recently, the financial unsustainability of social security funds led to a raise of the age of retirement from 60 to 62 years without overhauling the system.

Notwithstanding these patterns of continuity, the pursuit of neoliberal development model in both countries was accompanied by the introduction of new productivist welfare initiatives designed to facilitate access to markets through, for example, targeted small business loans. Tunisia's active labor markets programs were valued at 3.9% of the state's budget while allocations to Egypt's Public Works Programs and small business credit have more than doubled after 2011.

In fact, the establishment of Egypt's Social Fund for Development and Tunisia's National Solidarity 29/29 Fund, which were originally envisioned as the backbones for restructured welfare regimes in the 1990s, constituted important aspects and triggers of ongoing hidden retrenchment processes. These processes of institutional change entailed *dilution* of universal benefits (e.g. food subsidies in the 1990s), *conversion* of means-tested direct transfer schemes to new constituencies (e.g. cash transfers going to "deprived" constituencies with links to the state as opposed to the "poor") as well as *layering* or the establishment of parallel institutional track for social provision promoting productivist welfare or operating on market bases (e.g. small business promotion). Because these institutional shifts did not lead to an overhaul of the prevailing welfare regimes, I refer to them as forms of "hidden retrenchment."

Against the background of hidden welfare regime retrenchment, how did higher education policies evolve in the Egyptian and Tunisian contexts? The following section explores recent shifts in such policies in the two countries through an analysis of transformations on three levels: decommodification of tertiary education, degree of stratification, and governance.

Decommodification

Historically, higher education was institutionalized in the region as a public service whereby states invested in the education of younger generations as a way to build human capital. In recent years, public higher education policies have remained, to varying degrees, officially oriented toward "decommodification" despite rapid increase in annual student enrollment (estimated at 8–9% in Egypt [Hilal 2012] and 6.6% in Tunisia [World Bank 2006, 1]), the authorization of private institutions of higher education in both countries, and the implementation of internationally sponsored reforms aimed at improving teaching and learning.

Tracing coverage rates of higher education policies as reflected by gross enrollment levels reveals that in both contexts the state's historical intervention yielded results. In 2012, over 30% of the Egyptian population aged 19–24 were enrolled in a higher education institution, while their counterparts in Tunisia represented 35% of those in the same age bracket (UNESCO, “Country Profiles”). In the wake of the uprisings, rates of gross enrollment dipped from 34% in 2010 to 29% in 2011 in Egypt and from 36% to 35% for the same period in Tunisia. Compared to OECD countries, where rates of enrollment range from a low of 25% in Canada to a high of 58% in Finland, both Egypt and Tunisia, as developing countries, have clearly made gains in enrollment levels (Willemse and De Beer 2012, 112). Further, both countries clearly have higher rates of enrollment in tertiary education than the average 24% for the Arab region or the world average of 29%.

It should also be noted, however, that these trends mask important gender differences in the two countries. In 2012, Egypt narrowed the gender gap in education with enrollment of 30% of females and 31% of males in the university age group (UNESCO, “Country Profiles”). In contrast, Tunisia’s enrollment patterns for the same year reveal a bias in favor of women given that 43% of females and only 27% of males were receiving tertiary education.

Nonetheless, both the extent to which the two states officially committed to decommodification of education and the degree to which postsecondary education was actually made accessible as a free public good varied. Since 1971 guaranteed free access to higher education has been articulated as a citizenship right in Egypt’s successive constitutions, which also codified guaranteed state employment for all university graduates. The current 2013 constitution, though no longer guaranteeing employment, upholds education as a birth right for every Egyptian, and designates higher education as state responsibility with a minimum state allocation of 2% of the GDP per year. Funding for research, according to the constitution, is to be increased from 0.2% to 1% of the GDP. In line with the egalitarian orientation of higher education policies, since the mid–2000s the state has been expanding the sector through the establishment of five new public universities (Banha, Fayoum, BeniSoueif, Kafr El-Sheikh, and Sohag). This step was undertaken in an effort to accommodate rising numbers of students through a more geographically balanced distribution of educational opportunities.

The Egyptian state’s commitment to expanding higher education enrollment has been maintained, to some extent, since the uprisings. Although the Mubarak-era reform goal of having 100 universities nation-wide by 2020 seems far-fetched, new public universities have been inaugurated in Aswan, Damietta, Sadat City, Suez, and South Sinai over the past three years.

Furthermore, the education sector represented 12% of the 2012–2013 state budget with allocations for higher education accounting for 2% of total public expenditures (Hilal 2012, 13). Successive transition governments committed to raising national subsidies to 4% of the GDP and to cutting subsidies over a five-year period. However, Egypt's public spending on tertiary education has remained constant at a modest 1% of the GDP since the mid–2000s (see El-Araby 2011; Fahim 2009). Further, as a proportion of total education expenditure, higher education spending fell from 28% in 2006 to 24% in 2011 (Hilal 2012, 13) and 17% in 2013.[6]

In Tunisia, since the late 1990s, the state's priority has been expansion of the postsecondary education infrastructure through the establishment of seven new universities by 2006 and another eight planned with a donor support of US $400 million.[7] In contrast to Egypt, the uprisings ushered a major shift in the legal framework of higher education. Indeed, the 2014 Tunisian constitution set a new precedent by departing from the 1959 one and stipulating explicitly for the first time in the nation's history the right to education and a guarantee of academic freedoms.[8] In 2012, Tunisia's expenditure on education accounted for an impressive 20% of the budget. Looking at the evolution of spending on tertiary education over time reveals an opposite pattern to that of Egypt. Allocations to tertiary-level education, relative to total spending on the education sector, rose from 25% in 2008 to 27% in 2009 and 28% in 2011. As a result, between 2008 and 2010, tertiary education represented a bigger share of the GDP, which rose from 1.6% in 2008 to 1.8% in 2010. In the wake of the state's 2012 fiscal crisis, that figure slightly fell to 1.7% in 2012 (UNESCO, "Education"), and higher education allocations in the budget declined slightly from 6.5% in 2009 to 5% in 2013 (MHESR 2013). Nonetheless, official commitment to public spending on advanced training remained intact following the uprisings, and relatively stronger than in Egypt.

Liberalization Policies

Egypt was first to officially liberalize its higher education sector. Following the legalization of private universities in 1992 with Law 101, the state's monopoly was relaxed and new market-driven education institutions were established. Private universities were granted authorization to award nationally recognized degrees as long as the majority of their shares are owned by Egyptian nationals. According to the law, private universities operate on non-profit basis, may accept grants, and recover the costs of their operation through student tuition,[9] which ranges from a modest LE 3,000 to as much as LE 100,000 per annum (Barsoum 2014, 7). Investment in private universities is often deemed a lucrative business in Egypt due to the generous corporate tax exemptions that they receive, large market size, and reliable demand by the country's large middle class.[10] As a result, the number of private universities in the country more than tripled from four in 1996 to fifteen in 2006 and twenty in 2012.

Notwithstanding the significance of this pattern, enrollment in private universities has remained low representing only 2% of tertiary-level students (OECD and World Bank 2010). In addition, 112 private technical institutes accommodate the majority of students who are not registered in public institutions. In 2012, these technical institutes catered to an estimated 18% of all students in postsecondary education. These institutes, in fact, predate the establishment of private universities and operated without licensing for much of the 1990s.

After the uprisings, several factors have slowed the growth of private universities in Egypt. High inflation, job losses, and fiscal pressures have meant that newly established institutions struggled to maintain enrollment levels.[11] In addition, the sharp decline in the number of foreign students has deprived private universities from important sources of foreign exchange and revenue, a situation that fueled significant hikes in tuition fees even at institutions with a long history, such as the American University in Cairo.[12] Other factors such as political uncertainty, growing demands for higher wages for faculty and staff, and frequent strikes by students pushing for lower fees since 2011 have disrupted the flow of investments to the higher education sector.[13]

Aside from liberalization achieved through expansion of the role of private education providers, over the last two decades Egypt has witnessed hidden forms of retrenchment within public universities. For example, the *intissab* (affiliation) programs underwent institutional conversion. Originally catering to individuals whose special circumstances hindered them from registering as full-time university students, they were rapidly expanded to cater to students with lower scores. Since the mid–1990s, government financing of Egyptian universities was capped at 85% of their budgets, a change that coincided with some faculties' decisions to expand *intissab* education and accept students with lower scores in exchange for higher fees, estimated at 20% of actual tuition cost. In 2011, faculties briefly suspended *initissab*, but it was quickly reinstated due to its importance to the university budget. An estimated 42,000 students were enrolled in *intissab* programs in 2012 (Hilal 2012, 21).

Another retrenchment pattern in Egypt's higher education was the emergence of parallel educational tracks, or layering, within public institutions. English- and French-language tracks offer smaller classes and updated textbooks, but for higher tuition fees (ranging between LE 5,000 and 10,000). First introduced in the mid–1990s in the faculties of law, commerce, and economics, starting in 2005 similar language tracks were offered in engineering, medicine, pharmacy, and agriculture. Available figures from 2009/2010 academic year show that 30,625 students were enrolled in these language programs (20). With the establishment of these parallel language tracks public education benefits in the country became unequal. Preliminary findings indicate that these programs, while opening space for higher quality learning, have also diluted the benefits of the mainstream Arabic programs by attracting better skilled staff and high-performing students. Finally, the establishment of open universities with flexible admission criteria constitutes another form of retrenchment through layering that has been particularly lucrative for university administrations. In 2012, 75,000 students enrolled in open universities, with the faculties of commerce, law, and the arts attracting the greatest numbers of students (19).

Liberalization of higher education in Tunisia officially unfolded in 2000 with a series of legislations authorizing the operation of private universities and institutes.[14] Universities were legally established as private companies whose majority shares are owned by Tunisian citizens.[15] At the time of writing, there were a total of twenty-four private universities, five nursing institutes, and seventeen technical institutes operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. Some specialized private postsecondary institutions have successfully carved a niche by catering to local labor market needs. They emphasize the rates of employment of their graduates and offer practical project-based programs, often in collaboration with local businesses (Trenner 2011, 72). An example is Espirit, which offers executive MBA degree in alliance with the French universities Paris-Dauphine and Paris I Sorbonne.

Additionally, government's incentives based on demand have been considered a viable model for market-driven higher education reforms. In 2008, an innovative vouchers system, Chèques Formation, was established to cover student tuition expenses at accredited private vocational training schools. This step was designed to create competition among providers while improving efficiency and equitable access to private higher education. In line with the goal of ensuring the continued relevance of higher education, funding for training vouchers came from taxes paid by companies (known as professional training taxes) as well as direct contributions both by the state and private firms (Jaramillo and Trenner 2011, 34).

Going further than their Egyptian counterparts, the authorities in Tunisia officially extended a range of special incentives to prospective investors in the sector including 20% allowance of the total project cost, designation of public lands, partial funding of the salaries of national permanent teaching staff for ten years, in addition to tax exemptions for ten years (Abdessalem 2010). Nevertheless, liberalization of higher education remained a tightly controlled process and the sector was not easily accessible by entrepreneurs outside of Ben Ali's close circle.[16] Indeed, legal ambiguities have plagued the development of private higher institutions. For instance, amendments in 2008 abruptly required investors to secure a minimum of 2 million dinars in capital, instead of the original 150,000 dinars, to maintain their license, while raising minimum share ownership by nationals to 65% (see "Tunisia: Potential Education Crisis" 2009). Changes to the law also forbid the establishment of subsidiaries or the use of the word "university" in the name; private higher institutions operated as faculties, institutes, or professional schools.

As a result, the scope of privatization remained limited and the total population of students in private institutions was 21,880 or a marginal 6.9% of all students in public higher education institutions (315,513 students of which 62.3% are female), a much smaller proportion compared to Egypt's 20% (Abdessalem 2010). Until recently, shortage of state-sponsored financial aid programs or loans for students enrolled in private institutions has to some extent restricted access to students from higher income groups, thereby undermining equitable access in both countries. Signs that this has been changing since 2009 include the launching of a student loan scheme by IFC/Crédit Agricole in Egypt as well as the introduction of loan products backed by Tunisian commercial banks offering savings plans to young customers and those enrolled in master's programs (Trenner 2011, 52).

Political Economy of Higher Education Spending

A number of indicators can be used to analyze the volume and impact of public education provision. In Egypt, public spending is low, but given universal subsidies on tuition, which represent between 5 and 12% of university budgets,[17] and the limited market share of private institutions, private contributions have remained relatively small. Available household survey data from 2006–2007 indicates that in 2006 families spent on postsecondary education an average of LE 4 billion. More recent studies estimate that in 2010 spending reached LE 6 billion. Upon comparing private to public financing it is clear however that the former does not exceed a third of the country's total spending. Indeed, the public's share of spending for tertiary-level education amounted to over 64% of total spending in 2006 and almost 66% in 2010. While these figures show a dramatic rise in private spending by families from 8.2% in 2002,[18] as estimated by the World Bank, they also reflect the state's continued dominant position as a provider. Among OECD countries, public spending ranges from a low of 32% in the United States to a high of 97% in Denmark. Egypt's level of public spending on education, while higher than liberal welfare regimes where postsecondary education is heavily privatized, ranks below not just social democratic countries, but also conservative welfare regimes, including France (88%), Germany (85%), and Italy (70%) (Willemse and de Beer 2012, 112).

Given the state's hegemonic role in the sector, investigating the socioeconomic backgrounds of students in public universities is crucial for assessing the extent to which universal access is guaranteed regardless of market value.[19] According to the World Bank, children from the poorest quintile represent 25% of primary school students, yet they represent only 14% of secondary school enrollment and a mere 4% of the higher education student population (see World Bank 2002; Fahim and Sami 2010, 13). 2011 data from the World Bank indicates that among those with access to higher education, 76% came from a family with a higher than median income level compared to only 9% from the poorest quintile (Jaramillo and Zaafrane 2011, 21).

Cupito and Langsten's (2011) longitudinal analysis of the wealth profile of students over the 1988–2005 period suggests that enrollment patterns have systematically continued to favor upper-income groups despite efforts to expand access. According to the authors, young adults from the wealthiest quintile maintained a substantial advantage in university enrollments during the seventeen years of the study and the share of the poorest three quintiles remained unchanged, though there were modest improvements for females from poor families. Even the government's goal of raising enrollment to 40% by 2020 is not likely to keep pace with growing demand by the wealthiest two quintiles or render higher education more inclusive (Cupito and Langsten 2011, 196). The issue of inequitable enrollments is also highlighted in Yasmine Fahim and Noha Sami's analysis of public financing of tertiary education, which concludes that "public expenditure on higher education is a subsidy to the middle class" (2010, 16) rather than the poor. Along parallel lines, a spatial analysis of postsecondary enrollments in 2010 found that half of the students were from affluent urban governorates—Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria—while students from Upper Egypt accounted for just 10% of the total (MoHE 2010).

In Tunisia, private contributions to higher education spending are estimated to be much smaller than in Egypt. According to one study, household spending on public tertiary education is estimated at only 5.7% of total spending on the sector in 2008 (Abdessalem 2010, 4). However, both lack of recent household survey data and the state's official policy of moderate universal subsidization at 85% of university fees and tuition, render a similar comparison of the share of public to private spending less illuminating. Instead, by examining the nature of the student/grant system, this paper aims to assess the degree of tertiary education decommodification by exploring its accessibility by the poor.

Unlike Egypt, Tunisia introduced quasi-free university education in the 1950s in which students incurred small charges, but were eligible for means-tested grants to pursue their studies. While grants for students from poor backgrounds covered just 11% of students enrolled in 1962/1963, that ratio more than doubled to 27% in 1963/1964, and by the early 1970s, more than 50% of students were benefiting from education support from the state (Siino 2004). In the mid–1980s, following a deep economic crisis, government grants were supplemented by subsidized student loans financed by the Ministry of Higher Education. During the 1990s, however, another shift occurred as the bulk of student loans came to be channeled through social security agencies on less concessionary terms.

Officially, both grants and loans are accessible to students whose household income falls below 3,622 dinars.[20] Coverage of grants and loans, according to Tahar Abdessalem, has remained constant at 30% of the student population since the 1990s (Abdessalem 2010, 7). Recent data shows a noticeable increase from 29% in 2010 to 34% in 2012 and 35% in 2013.[21] This could be partially traced back to the shift in means-testing regulations in 2012 whereby net rather than gross household income level became the qualifying criterion for the program.

As indicated in Table 1, geographical analysis of government allocations in the form of student loans and grants in 2012 and 2013 based on correlating their frequency to a poverty index[22] reveals a regional imbalance inconsistent with pro-poor targeting. Whereas governorates in the north account for 34.6% of poverty in Tunisia, they have been allocated 41% to 44.5% of resources designated for students from deprived backgrounds. In contrast, governorates in the center received the lowest share of grants despite having the highest concentration of poverty in the country. Finally, with the exception of loans disbursed in 2013, governorates in the south, where poverty is traditionally the most severe but population density is low, received allocations consistent with local needs.

Table 1. Distribution of Grants and Student Loans across Regions

Region[1]	Share of Poverty[2] (percentage)	Grants Allocated 2012 (percentage)	Loans Disbursed 2012 (percentage)	Grants Allocated 2013 (percentage)	Loans Disbursed 2013 (percentage)
North	34.6	41.5	45.6[3]	44.0	44.5
Center	36.2	27.6	24	27.5	31.3
South	29.2	30.8	30.4	28.5	24.3

Sources: *Higher Education and Scientific Research in Numbers 2012* and *Higher Education and Scientific Research in Numbers 2013* by the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Notes:
1. Students are served by three regional departments for university services under the umbrella of the Ministry of Higher Education. This spatial division does not correspond with the local governments' administrative division of the country into four regions.
2. Calculated by the author based on 2011 census data and absolute poverty levels below $2 a day in 2005 PPP (African Development Bank 2011).
3. An estimate based on 2010 figures from the African Development Bank Group (2012).

These findings reveal that welfare support programs for education tend to reinforce regional disparities, but there are signs that they may also be reinforcing class differences. While the regional imbalance in allocations can be attributed in part to the geographic concentration of universities in affluent coastal areas in the north, studies show that tertiary-level students most often come from households with higher income (Abdessalem 2010, 7-8). Furthermore, evidence from other targeted welfare programs, which rely on means-testing, shows significant levels of politicization as access to benefits often requires the support of well-connected patrons with links to high-ranking officials (Hibou 2006). Additionally, access to targeted credit programs elsewhere in the region is often easier for employees in the public sector whose salaries are considered reliable collateral (El-Meehy 2010). For instance, Tunisia's grants and loans program has a stream targeting students with relatives who work at the Ministry of Education.

Another indicator for the effectiveness of welfare benefits for students in the form of loans and grants is yielded by comparing the average value of benefits per student to the GDP per capita. In 2013, the Tunisian government spent on average 340 dinars in education support per student. This sum represents 4.4% of the GDP per capita for that year. Comparing Tunisia to other countries reveals that its allocations in loans are lower than in liberal welfare regimes where states compensate for high private tuition fees by extending education support, such as UK (12.9%) and New Zealand (12.1%). Rather, Tunisia's performance is close to that of Belgium (5.1%), Italy (4.4%), and Portugal (3.8%). Along the lines of conservative welfare regimes, education support in Tunisia, while modest, exceeds tuition costs, which are deliberately kept low. However, the analysis of the allocations of loans and grants suggests that Tunisia's higher education policies, while oriented toward moderate decommodification, are actually less accessible to the poor, thereby rendering them less equitable overall.

Admission Rules

Liberalization of higher education policies coincided with hidden shifts in standardized criteria for university admission in Egypt and more explicit restructuring in Tunisia. Officially, enrollment criteria in Egyptian universities are based on the results from *thanaweya amma*[23] (secondary school exam) and quotas per program, which are set by the Supreme Council for Universities. Higher education placement is centralized under the Admission Coordination Bureau of Egyptian Universities. Attending a general secondary school track (as opposed to the technical secondary) is in reality the only chance for students to be prepared for higher education, and studies show that family background and private tutoring have become decisive factors in student tracking (Ersado and Gignoux 2014). In an effort to limit the number of students enrolled, since the late 1980s policymakers have raised the minimum score from *thanaweya amma* required for university admission. However, the creation of parallel semi-privatized tracks such as the system of open universities and *initissab* programs de facto created alternative channels for students with lower scores to access higher education, although at higher fees. As a result, performance in secondary education no longer constitutes the *only* requirement for enrollment in public higher education. Aside from hidden shifts in admission rules, on the eve of the uprisings the government also drafted a plan to implement OECD-endorsed standardized college admission tests, AHELO, starting in 2011/2012 academic year. The move was deemed too controversial, however, by successive transitional governments because of opposition from families who viewed it as an additional hurdle to equitable university access.[24]

In contrast to Egypt's record of hesitant reforms, liberalization of higher education in Tunisia coincided with more explicit restructuring of official access rules. As a result, enrollment is not exclusively dependent on a predetermined pass rate for *al-bakaluria* (BAC),[25] which is held at the end of secondary school and has traditionally served as an entrance exam for public universities (Gyimah-Brempong and Ondiege 2011). Rather, students' results from qualifying exams coupled with grades from coursework from the last three years of secondary school[26] determine their access. Admission is centrally managed by a *système national d'orientation universitaire* (a national university orientation system), which places students according to their preferences, but also based on the quota set by the Ministry for each field of study.[27]

In both Egypt and Tunisia, private educational institutions first appeared in the early 1990s,[28] and required lower grades for admission thus allowing the expansion of access to higher education (Barsoum 2014). Both states slowly developed regulatory frameworks aimed at standardizing teachers' qualifications, ensuring minimum quality of facilities, and accreditation of degrees. In Egypt, access to private universities was tightened starting in 2002 after the Admission Coordination Bureau was assigned responsibility to coordinate the admission process and to determine the number of places for each institution. In Tunisia, a series of legal acts in 2000 officially stipulated that successful completion of *al-bakaluria* and the standardized qualifying exams are required for admission to some faculties in private universities. Also regulated were requirements for students' minimum mandatory class attendance and duration of academic programs in order to ensure standardization across private and public institutions.[29]

Stratification

Higher education is a decisive factor in occupational attainment and thus plays a crucial role in creating social hierarchies. Stratification in higher education refers to the internal organization and levels of access within the system. Countries with a hierarchy of pathways to tertiary education that lead to differentiated occupational opportunities have highly stratified systems that reinforce inequalities. We can distinguish two types of postsecondary education systems, depending on their level of stratification: those that are oriented toward vocational training and those teaching general skills (Willemse and de Beer 2012).

Egypt's educational system is highly stratified with a binary distinction between university and upper-intermediate tracks. While the country's twenty-three public universities provide academic and theoretically grounded studies in four- to six-year programs and absorb more than 75% of the aggregate higher education enrollment, the much smaller upper-intermediate track provides advanced vocation-specific training through shorter two-, four-, and five-year programs (Cupito and Langsten 2011, 186). Although technical colleges complement technical secondary schools, which absorb an estimated 60% of all Egyptian students in secondary-level education, they almost exclusively cater to graduates with lower *thanaweya amma* scores. According to the World Bank, 95% of the students in technical colleges are students from general secondary schools who failed to gain admission to university (World Bank 2011). Indeed, Egypt's educational system is so stratified that graduates of technical secondary schools are not only denied access to first-tier higher education institutions, but also to vocational second-tier ones.

In 2000 there were forty-seven two-year upper-intermediate technical institutes and four four- or five-year higher technical institutes (Cupito and Langsten 2011, 184). Second-tier higher education in Egypt is officially segmented into three vocational tracks: commercial, technical, and industrial. These tracks are widely considered among the worst performing education providers in the country judging from their graduates' unemployment rates, which are higher than any other student category (Ibid.). Studies from the 1990s highlighted that the lack of adequate job skills among graduates is not just due to shortage of resources, weak links to local enterprises, or entrenched bias toward academic training among faculty members (Richards 1992). Rather, the mismatch between the structure of Egyptian industries and the country's comparative advantages have dictated that technical training remain sufficiently general rather than overly specialized in industries with falling rates of return (Richards 1992, 17).

Reforms in recent years have aimed to improve quality of education in technical institutes by consolidating them into eight regional technical colleges and creating new course offerings in line with the needs of the market. At the management level, the institutes' administrations have begun appointing businessmen to their boards of trustees (World Bank 2011). These steps, however, have resulted in limited improvement in student enrollment and have failed to reorient technical education to meet labor market needs. Unlike Tunisia, in Egypt vocational colleges continue to operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education (OECD and the

World Bank 2010), and do not provide options beyond the basic certification degree. Training at these colleges is, accordingly, still widely considered a “second-tier” education since it does not lead to a bachelor’s degree.

In contrast, starting in 2005 and following the Bologna Process,[30] Tunisia’s higher education was overhauled in line with the LMD (License, Master, Doctorate) system. The system, which aims to direct two-thirds of the students toward vocational tracks and a third toward “fundamental” tracks (Ben Sedrine 2009), is more flexible and less segmented between academic and technical education. As part of the reform process, an inter-institutional body was designed to coordinate vocational with general education, on the one hand, and higher education, on the other. Furthermore, a 2008 legislation put in place pathways facilitating student mobility between vocational training and general higher education (EuroMed 2014).

The country’s first-tier academic institutions—universities, faculties, institutes, and *écoles* (chiefly associated with engineering studies)—are increasingly standardized. They all follow the same three-cycle degree system based on the structure of bachelor degrees awarded upon completion of 180 credits, master degrees awarded after a further 120 credits, and doctorates. In addition to these four main institutions, the Virtual University of Tunis now offers distance learning (EACEA and Tempus, n.d.). Holders of *al-bakaluria* technically have the option of switching across faculties, universities, and *écoles* if they meet the minimum admission criteria and reenroll in annual national orientations. The system, however, does not seem to allow flexible admission since only students from math or experimental sciences BAC streams can enroll in five-year programs, while the most popular humanities stream often leads to four-year programs (Jaramillo and Zaafrane 2011, 22).

Unlike graduates of technical postsecondary education in Egypt, who are more likely to be unemployed after graduation, their Tunisian counterparts enjoy good job opportunities and are considered among the best qualified in the region. Indeed, one of the prime objectives of the top-down LMD reform was to consolidate applied subjects and the vocational master programs in order to improve quality of education and employment prospects. The country’s second-tier institutions provide two channels of vocational education. The first is a two-year program leading to the *certificat d’aptitude professionnelle*. Holders of the certificate have the option to pursue advanced vocational training leading to the *brevet de technicien professionnel* or to enter the labor force (OECD 2013). Students can enroll in two-year vocational programs directly after two years of general secondary school education or choose to do so after *al-bakaluria*.

Since the mid–1990s, successive reforms of technical training institutions have built on public-private partnerships to expand second-tier institutions by tailoring skills attainment for particular occupations. Thus, a second channel of vocational education through a network of seven higher institutes of technology (HIT) was established with the support of the World Bank. Unlike mainstream vocational training institutions, HITs provide shorter course of study on a semester basis allowing students to enroll twice a year. Holders of *al-bakaluria* are awarded the *brevet de technicien supérieur* after five semesters of applied studies during which students train and prepare their graduation projects in collaboration with local enterprises (World Bank 1999, 15). In addition, the system flexibly allows holders of the *brevet de technician professionnel* to also be admitted for vocational training in HITs.

Governance

Universities in both countries increasingly embody the tension between government-led and market-driven higher education governance practices. In the context of ongoing welfare retrenchment, the multi-level higher education policymaking process as well as the roles of stakeholders, directly or indirectly involved in how universities define their goals, manage their institutions and monitor achievements, were restructured.

This section focuses on two pillars of higher education governance,[31] which have been the focus of recent reforms in Egypt and Tunisia: namely, autonomy and accountability of university systems. The discussion takes stock of the increasing influence of international reform agendas advanced by the European Union and the World Bank, which instigated a series of organizational shifts in the higher education landscape as states attempted to decentralize and differentiate their regulatory roles from their historical functions as dominant providers of postsecondary education. In addition, the analysis explores the extent to which changes in the higher education governance structure created, to varying degrees, new spaces for the involvement of market-based and other non-state actors.

The rise of "knowledge economies," in which economic growth is driven by information production and dissemination as opposed to physical extraction of natural resources (Powell and Snellman 2004, 201), prompted increased internationalization of higher education in Egypt and

Tunisia over the last two decades. Influential reports, such as the Arab Human Development report *Building Knowledge Societies* (UNDP 2003) and the World Bank's *The Road Not Travelled: Education Reform in MENA* (2008), framed the challenges plaguing tertiary education in terms of fast-paced enrollment rates outstripping funding capacity and low quality of teaching with high student-to-staff ratios as legacies of outdated social contract policies and authoritarian rule (see Kohstall 2012).

Because official changes to universal access rules or explicit end of state subsidies were deemed politically contentious, however, proponents of national reform in education placed emphasis instead on enhancing the quality of education and on making postsecondary studies more relevant to the contemporary social and economic realities. More specifically, reform initiatives focused on developing information and communication technology (ICT) facilities as well as on restructuring systems of governance as prerequisites for the long-term vitality of higher education institutions. Aside from financing the infrastructure for e-learning and instituting incentives for its adoption by faculty members, the World Bank's reform agenda sought to expand the private sector's involvement by rolling back the state's historical role as exclusive provider, developing government regulatory capacity, decentralizing decision making, and aligning higher education opportunities with labor market needs. Although neither country witnessed outright privatization of higher education institutions, liberalization efforts gave birth to new standardizing and reorganization efforts aimed at improving the quality of postsecondary education.

In the case of Egypt, a higher education reform action plan promoted by a newly ascendant neoliberal coalition of technocrats and export-oriented businessmen within the then-ruling National Democratic Party since 2000 (see Rutherford 2013), gained momentum when the World Bank approved a US $60 million loan to finance eleven of twenty-five proposed projects. The Bank's Higher Education Enhancement Project (2002–2008) came on the heels of a comprehensive education reform package valued at US $250 million, which had been in operation since 1997 targeting basic and secondary education. Aside from encouraging the adoption of output-based funding formulas designed to lower financing gaps, the project[32] sought to improve universities' performance through the establishment of two bodies: National Authority for Quality Accreditation and Evaluation of Education (NAQAEE) and the Higher Education Enhancement Project Fund (HEEPF). Both agencies, initially designed as “autonomous” bodies staffed by independent specialists, do not fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education, but operate under the direct supervision of the prime minister. Further, both entities indirectly created space for the involvement of market-based actors in higher education governance.

As a new regulatory body, NAQAEE brought about increased awareness of the importance of delivering improved services in the higher education sector. Although most participants in the interviews conducted as part of this study reported that the administration had invested resources in applying for accreditation, they did not consider the agency’s quality monitoring activities to have had a long-term impact on the workings of universities. Rather, the agency’s establishment actually seems to have led to the introduction of few formal administrative procedures[33] and increases in infrastructure maintenance costs, estimated at 20–25% (Hilal 2012, 11), without necessarily altering teaching methods or raising academic standards. In the words of one faculty member, “the process is all about compiling the right paperwork. Their work has only touched the surface.”

Interviews with faculty members reveal that the NAQAEE has not improved teacher-student ratios because student placement has remained centralized, with limited flexibility for public institutions in particular to determine the number of students enrolled. As for academic integrity, the agency did not support faculty initiatives to limit plagiarism in academia.[34] Participants in the study also considered that, overall, its initiatives to improve curricula have been ineffective. This is in part due to the lack of feedback on course syllabi submitted to its understaffed offices and in part to entrenched interests of senior faculty members in assigning course textbooks authored and published by them.

Furthermore, the NAQAEE has not been very effective in terms of institutional autonomy either. It has not encouraged individual universities to elaborate mission statements that respond to the contexts in which they operate (World Bank 2012, 116). Indeed, the articulation of university missions has remained centralized by the state. Stringent regulations and weak incentive structures have meant that the rising momentum among students for learning new ideas in innovative ways did not result in curriculum innovation. Instead, since 2011, Egypt has witnessed new community-based initiatives by faculty members to teach social science outside official university structures. This, in fact, could be attributed to the presence of the Supreme

Higher Education Councils, which effectively restrict the universities' autonomy both in introducing new programs and in structuring curricula (112).

In fact, one could argue that two factors have particularly contributed to the unaccountability of universities in Egypt in recent years despite the establishment of the NAQAEE. First, poorly designed reform steps did not plant the seeds for mechanisms allowing the monitoring of institutional performance in the long run. For instance, quality measures were not accompanied by larger decentralization reforms whereby budget allocations would be linked to results. Crucially, the agency's establishment did not coincide with the systematic implementation of standardized testing for university students in order to adequately assess outcomes.[35] In the absence of tools for tracking, monitoring, and evaluation, social accountability of universities has remained low. In fact, it is estimated that only 25% of Egyptian universities retained data on average salaries or unemployment levels among their graduates and just 14% of public universities conduct surveys about common school-to-work transitions.[36]

Second, the predominance of security concerns in higher education policymaking has impeded the internal democratization of university campuses. In 2012, following March 9th movement's mobilization, reforms designed to allow faculty to participate in the elections of deans and university presidents signaled improved administrative accountability on campus as well as greater autonomy for faculty. Further, the removal of political controls on student movements created the space for the expression of bottom-up pressures for greater transparency within higher education institutions. These gains, however, proved short-lived and were quickly reversed amidst fears of increasing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in universities and subsequent crackdown on student freedoms. As a result, universities in Egypt have maintained formally inclusive governance structures allowing for the representation of most internal stakeholders in university councils, but without ensuring transparency of decision making.[37]

As for the HEEPF, it was entrusted to implement projects, both donor- and nationally funded, in line with the government's strategy for reforming higher education. The fund officially extends competitive funding for peer-reviewed proposals with the purpose to encourage student innovation and improve quality of education. It was broadly mandated to promote and monitor the implementation of the credit hours system, socially relevant scientific research, curriculum development of technical institutes, student participation initiatives, e-learning technologies, and administrative staff's training in management information systems

(MIS); it was also tasked with assessing the impact of higher education reforms by tracking learning outcomes through the AHELO system.[38]

As of August 2014, HEEPF has financed 6 socially relevant scientific research projects, 19 competitive faculty excellence projects, 111 participatory student initiatives, 9 MIS capacity-building projects, 15 learning assessment initiatives, 179 information technology units, and 154 central projects for information technology. The bulk of the fund's allocations were absorbed by the infrastructure costs related to meeting the ISO9001 quality standards for MIS as well as initiatives to extend information technology on campuses.[39]

Fieldwork suggests that the results of these efforts have been uneven due to not only insufficient funding, but also political instability, lack of reform vision, and limited administrative autonomy. Indeed, there are signs that some units within the HEEPF, such as the Information and Communication Technology Project (ICTP), lost close to 40% of their donor-financed budget, which disrupted already existing agreements.[40] As a result, many MIS remain inoperative while some universities and faculties continue to lack internet access even in cases when e-learning equipment has been installed. Similarly, projects related to faculty excellence, which were disbursed through competitive grants programs, were short-lived. In fact, participants in the study noted that the programs had limited overall impact since they were not accompanied by legal-regulatory changes to the traditional university hierarchy, which leaves decisions about hiring and promotion of faculty firmly in the hands of the Supreme Council for Higher Education as well as the Ministry of Finance.[41] Indeed, the fund's professional development activities seem to have been recently narrowed to the coordination of training courses provided by private instructors to faculty members who, prior to promotion, are required to enroll in six such courses. There is consensus among participants in the study, however, that these courses tend to be poorly designed and do not fully meet faculty needs and result in significant costs to the faculty members who have applied for promotion.[42]

Absence of clear political vision has also slowed down reforms, with some fund representatives advocating more aggressive market-oriented initiatives, while others prioritizing equitable outcomes. These tensions, while not unique to the post-uprisings period, hindered, for instance, initiatives for introducing computer tablets to university students after 2011 and slowed the implementation of USAID-financed career development centers. Additionally, political uncertainty and frequent leadership changes seem to have undermined the fund's autonomy as well as the capacity of its staff to push through potentially controversial initiatives. The observed increased centralization of decision-making powers after the uprisings has meant that grants for every project supported by the fund now require the approval of the minister in charge. As a result of these factors, the reform agenda has lost momentum and projects have been rather unevenly implemented. For instance, the credit hours system and initiatives aimed at encouraging scientific research took root in engineering and sciences faculties, but had negligible impact in the social sciences.[43]

Tunisia went further than Egypt in reorganizing its higher education sector. Along the lines of the World Bank's reform agenda, in 2008 the country launched a two-stage decentralization reform[44] of its tertiary education to improve performance, accountability, and efficiency of providers. First, state-owned higher education institutions were required to be legally relicensed as Public Academic and Technological Institutions (PATIs), provided that they meet specific quality control criteria related to educational, academic, administrative, and financial management capacities. Second, newly created PATIs operate on a contractual basis with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research; these contracts can be renewed on the condition that the PATIs have shown satisfactory performance. According to the revised law, "the two parties conclude a framework contract which authorizes universities and institutions to devise four-year-long teaching and research strategies" (EACEA and Tempus, n.d., 5).

Further, negotiated contracts include implementation plans, which specify administrative and financial costs within a medium-term expenditure framework. Annual allocations from the Ministry are partially contingent on the attainment of goals in the research and teaching plans, and educational institutions are expected to identify sources of self-financing.[45] Within this new policy framework, universities are expected to cooperate more closely with local businesses and communities in order to ensure that course options match local labor needs. Early impact analysis, however, indicated that performance contracts did not actually amount to more than "another instrument to channel the same funds to the same institutions" (Jaramillo and Trenner 2011, 31). Studies show that, far from practicing transparency and despite the adoption of contractual incentives, only a small minority of public universities actually shared information about their budgets with their faculty or students (World Bank 2012, 66). Overall, the country's contract-based policy framework seems to have been poorly institutionalized such that the Ministry quickly shelved it in the wake of the Revolution.

In order to monitor quality of education, a new organization for evaluation, accreditation, and quality assurance was envisioned, according to a 2008 legal act, to operate under the umbrella of the Ministry, but never materialized. As a result, as a recent report notes, the country's mechanisms for measuring quality of education are limited and "located more at the university level (faculties and institutes)" (62). Even though Tunisia's institutions statistically track graduate employment by principal sectors of employment as well as periods of unemployment, they restrict the public's access to this data (64). Although bilateral cooperation programs introduced good practices, the *ancien régime*'s seemingly hasty implementation of the LMD system was not accompanied by the establishment of viable mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of new curricula (Marshall 2011).

As a result, attempts to align curricula with international standards have been uneven and more successful in the sciences disciplines than in the social sciences. Additionally, critics allege that reforms triggered by the top-down Bologna Process did not include systematic training for professors or adequate information about the restructured system, which in turn has meant that neither teaching strategies nor the overall quality of education has improved (Melyani 2013).

The absence of viable mechanisms for monitoring quality, ensuring accountability, and promoting transparency within Tunisia's higher education sector reflects the failure to implement ambitious restructuring reforms during Ben Ali's regime. The combination of weak technical capacities and authoritarian-style of top-down reforms seems to have hindered decentralization steps toward the differentiation of functions between the state's role as a regulator and its historical role as a provider. Along the lines of Egypt's experience, the higher education reform agenda in Tunisia has also created an ideological cleavage within the state over the most adequate strategies for attaining global competitiveness, and has been met by resistance from skeptical ministry officials. Indeed, according to one higher education specialist in Tunisia, ministry officials are deeply divided into two camps. One supports modernization of the national education system based on the development needs of the country, and the other advocates for more radical reforms in overhauling the system through greater reliance on private providers and adoption of international standards.[46]

In fact, one could argue that the absence, until 2011, of representation in university governance of key stakeholders—faculty, students, and private actors—has reinforced the tendency to limited accountability. Unlike Egypt under Mubarak's regime, Tunisia under Ben Ali did not formally allow the establishment of associations or unions representing professors, administrative staff, and students.[47] Also, even though policymakers in Tunisia clearly placed emphasis on the importance of the market, the private sector remained excluded from decision-making structures within the university.[48]

Tunisia's higher education governance system under Ben Ali granted universities a limited margin of autonomy. Traditionally, faculty members have been appointed on the basis of regime allegiance rather than merit. Despite emphasis in the 2008 legislation on decentralizing higher education, faculty in Tunisian universities are in reality not entirely in charge of setting curricula. Rather, a centralized body in the Ministry retains this mandate.[49] Unlike the situation in Egypt, heavy restrictions on teaching programs are also applied to private institutions, whose programs tend to be directly copied from the public institutions (World Bank 2012, 60).

University autonomy became the subject of struggles in Tunisia's post-authoritarian transition. In response to increased student demands for learning new ideas, faculty members have more frequently contested the Ministry's powers in this area and have acquired some measure of autonomy in creating their own curricula. As a result, the country has witnessed an increase in the numbers of visiting professors invited to teach skills in course design to local faculty members.[50] Universities, however, have also suffered setbacks in recent years as they came under pressure by radical religious groups on campus, which, sometimes violently, contested academic rules and demanded distinct treatment from faculty and administration.[51]

Finally, Tunisia has witnessed the increasing influence of external stakeholders in the governance of its higher education sector. In the wake of the Jasmine Revolution, the country experienced sharp economic deceleration to -2% in 2011 and a worsening budget deficit fuelled by increases in wage bills, rising food and oil prices as well as falling revenues from traditional exports to the Euro-zone.[52] In this context of declining resources, the government has turned to the EU to bridge gaps in the financing of its education according to the Oxford Business Group. With severely reduced government scholarships for students studying abroad, the country increasingly relies on bilateral agreements with foreign governments in order to sustain skills transfer as well as university reform momentum. As a result, since 2011 enrollment in new initiatives such as the US $10 million Thomas Jefferson scholarship program of the US State Department (CEMAT 2013) and other exchange programs has spiked. However, limited coordination among foreign governments providing support for higher education in Tunisia has resulted in career gaps for faculty and students, in part due to conflicting requirements and lack of continuity across donor-sponsored initiatives.[53] Furthermore, the rising influence of external actors such as donors, foreign foundations, and international agencies in steering access to resources and programs outside Tunisia have brought to the forefront tensions within the Ministry of Higher Education around not only reform strategies, but also the viability of national mechanisms to guarantee equal opportunities and equitable access to education in the post–Ben Ali era.

Conclusion

The above comparative analysis of higher education policies in Egypt and Tunisia emphasized divergent patterns of change within the larger contexts of ongoing welfare regime retrenchment in both countries. I have argued that even though the social protection components[54] of their *insurance-based egalitarian regimes* have been restructured along similar patterns, the two countries have pursued distinct higher education reforms in recent years.

My comparative analysis of the political economy of higher education expenditures in both settings and the evolution of the rules of access to education places the two countries close to *conservative welfare regimes* by OECD standards. These regimes extend moderate levels of decommodification to their citizens while preserving traditional class divisions and maintain the significant contribution of the family and the market in higher education provision. Nonetheless, Egypt's ratio of public spending for education (in relation to total tertiary education spending), numerous private postsecondary educational institutions, inequitable access to public institutions, and a highly segmented structure of the higher education sector render its system less egalitarian than that of Tunisia. Although Tunisian governments did not go as far as the Nasser reforms in Egypt from the 1950s in universalizing access with its subsidy program, it has overall performed better in decommodification, access, and standardization of its higher education. Further, the restructuring of Tunisia's education system has reinforced its superior performance in vocational training, which flexibly allows for progressive attainment of both general and occupation-specific skills without imposing strong stratification.

I have argued that higher education reforms played out differently in the two settings. Whereas Egypt employed competitive financial incentives and accreditation by newly created "independent" structures, Tunisia adopted decentralizing contract-based arrangements with the Ministry of Higher Education to encourage programs relevant for the labor market and improve quality of teaching and learning. In both contexts, developments after the uprisings show that the sustainability of reforms is in question due to the lack of resources, reform visions, and political will, in addition to political instability as well as opposition from within the government, faculty members, and broad segments of society. With ongoing recentralization, reluctance of private actors to channel investments, and deteriorating economic conditions, the state's hegemonic role in the sector seems likely to be maintained in the short to medium terms.

Finally, the preceding analysis suggests that the future of higher education governance systems in both countries is increasingly uncertain. Efforts to enhance academic accountability in Egypt have failed to introduce viable long-term monitoring mechanisms, all the while falling short of reinvigorating faculty performance. In Tunisia attempts to link funding to performance proved insufficient in the absence of an effective quality-control institution and a broad consensus over the reorganization of university-state relations. Whereas stakeholders in Tunisia are beginning to formally organize on campuses and are struggling to exercise their voice in decision making, Egypt's formally inclusive university structures continue to be hijacked by heightened security concerns that undermine nascent participatory practices. In both contexts, despite more than a decade of market-oriented reforms, emerging governance practices on university campuses do not formally engage private actors.

University autonomy has continued to be the subject of struggles in both countries. On the one hand, Egypt's March 9th movement helped achieve greater administrative autonomy from the state in the aftermath of January 25th, but its success was limited and short-lived. Decisions over promotions, enrollment, and beginning and end dates of academic years have remained to a large extent outside the university's purview and in the hands of government agencies. Tunisia's historically centralized governance system, on the other hand, has become increasingly contested by faculty and students seeking to exercise greater autonomy as well as by radical religious groups on campus who threaten to curb academic freedoms.

Notes

1. The analysis presented in this paper is based on original findings from interviews that I conducted with stakeholders in higher education in Egypt and Tunisia as well as on secondary data. Participants in the interviews asked not to be identified. Ms Neige Pointet provided research assistance for this project.

2. Seekings contends that countries tend to combine elements of two if not all three kinds of regimes.

3. According to Seekings, there are two versions of inegalitarian corporatist regimes: “the more market version (either provident funds as in Singapore etc., or employer-based schemes) and the more statist one (formal social insurance)” (2005, 13). The author also refers to a potential fourth category, the *Islamic charity regime*, which allows individuals to maintain a minimum income separate from the market, state, or kin, but he does not develop this argument further.

4. Primary and secondary education is to a large extent uniformly organized in developed countries, but welfare regimes are presumed to have implications for the sector of higher education.

5. Calculated by the author based on information from the World Bank (2013, 10).

6. Calculated by the author based on information from the Egyptian Ministry of Finance (2013).

7. This figure refers to funding pledged from the EU and a World Bank loan for US $76 million. The initial phase of the second education reform support project in the country was carried out between 2006 and 2011. The project was restructured in 2011 and is ongoing (World Bank 2006, 1).

8. Particularly in Articles 38 and 46.

9. The literature nonetheless classifies some private higher education institutions as “for profit” entities.

10. Based on information from an interview of the author with higher education specialist in Egypt, over Skype, October 24, 2014.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. They seem to have been in operation since the early 1990s without official licensing. Law 59/2008, which amended Law 73/2000 on private higher education, forbids these institutions to accept grants or endowments.

15. According to Law 59/2008.

16. Ben Ali's family exercised considerable power over private investments; for example, the First Lady established University of Carthage, one of the biggest private universities in the country.

17. Most programs charge small tuitions—around LE 400 annually; however, students enrolled in *intissab*, language, or open university programs pay higher tuition (Hillal 2012, 16).

18. This figure refers to tuition and admission fees paid by households (cited in Fahim and Sami 2010).

19. The discussion here focuses on the question of access to higher education, but studies suggest that poorer university students are more likely to receive lower quality training.

20. Regional departments for university services carry out the means-testing process, which is based on income, household size, number of children in school, and distance from the university campus.

21. Calculated by the author based on information from the Tunisian Ministry of Finance (2013).

22. Calculated by the author by multiplying rate of poverty based on $2/day and population.

23. Currently, the results of the last two years of secondary schooling are taken into consideration, as opposed to just the final one.

24. Interview of the author with higher education specialist in Egypt over Skype, October 24, 2014. At the time of writing, explicit reforms of admission rules remain on hold and the official plan is to begin AHELO in 2015.

25. University admissions required a pass rate of 35% in the secondary school completion examination (World Bank 1999).

26. Following one year of general study, students specialize in one of seven fields during the last three years of secondary school.

27. The purpose of the compulsory orientation rounds is vague (see "Launching" 2014).

28. The American University in Cairo (AUC) has existed for eighty-two years as a private university, but Egypt only legalized the establishment of other private universities in 1992 with Law 101.

29. Nonetheless, the degree to which these regulations are actually enforced is unclear. Indeed, a recent report, *Tunisia: From Revolution to Institutions* by Zack Brisson and Kate Krontiris (2012), states that those who were unsuccessful in the *al-bakaluria* exam are still allowed access to private universities.

30. The Bologna Process aims to create an European Higher Education Area "based on international cooperation and academic exchange that is attractive to European students and staff as well as to students and staff from other parts of the world" (EHEA, n.d.).

31. The World Bank has adopted five indicators to benchmark governance models in higher education: 1) university mission and goals; 2) management orientation or strategic process, selection of decision-makers, and incentives for staff members; 3) autonomy on academic, financial, and human resources level; 4) accountability or the extent to which the university is being held responsible to academic staff, civil society, and government bodies; and 5) participation, which refers to the extent to which different stakeholders are taken into account in decision-making processes (see World Bank 2012).

32. The project included a legislative reform component aimed at decentralizing the higher education sector and introducing new funding formulas. The draft legislation was proposed in 2009, but faced broad resistance from the NDP's old guards and opposition parties who perceived the reforms as threats to national institutions.

33. Procedures were designed to monitor faculty attendance, office hours, and timely preparation of course syllabi.

34. Interview of the author conducted in Cairo, September 18, 2014.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Representatives of the private sector tend to be inadequately represented in public universities, while alumni groups tend to be excluded in private universities (see World Bank 2012).

38. See http://www.heep.edu.eg/

39. This information was compiled by the author from http://www.heep.edu.eg/ and excludes initiatives channeled under the NAQAEE.

40. Interview conducted over Skype with a higher education specialist in Egypt, October 24, 2014.

41. Interview conducted in Cairo, September 22, 2014.

42. Interview conducted in Cairo, September 8, 2014.

43. Interview conducted in Cairo, September 18, 2014.

44. Known as the Higher Education Act of February 25, 2008.

45. According to Decree 2716 from August 4, 2008 on the Organization and Operating Principles of Universities and Higher Education Institutions and Research.

46. Interview conducted over Skype with higher education specialist in Tunisia, October 14, 2014.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. See, for example, the text of the call for proposals for the conference The Defence of Academic Freedom in Tunisia—Status and Prospects, which took place in Feb. 27–28, 2014 in Tunis, available at: http://www.tunisie-des-lumieres.org/spip.php?article28 (accessed Nov. 16, 2014).

52. Ibid., 15. Although a comparison of foreign reserves and public debt levels reveals that after the uprisings Tunisia's economy fared better than that of Egypt, the absence of strategic rents, and massive aid flows from the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council eventually forced the government to enter into a stand-by agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

53. Interview conducted over Skype with higher education specialist in Tunisia, October 14, 2014.

54. These are food subsidies, pensions, cash transfers, and productivist initiatives.

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