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# Socioeconomic Contention in Post-2011 Egypt and Tunisia: A Comparison

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## 3.1 Introduction

Since the uprisings that provoked the toppling of presidents Ben Ali and Mubarak in early 2011, Tunisia and Egypt have continued to experience serious socioeconomic problems: Both North African countries faced high rates of unemployment of young adults in less-developed regions as well as social instability and a slowdown of economic growth (ILO 2014, pp. 62–64; Schulz 2012). This is also reflected in popular perceptions. In a survey conducted during the 2014 parliamentary elections in Tunisia, Chantal Berman and Elizabeth Nugent asked about citizens' main concerns in 2011 and at the time the survey was carried out. The survey reveals that unlike 2011, when people found democracy, civic freedoms,

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and transitional justice to be most important, Tunisians identified economic growth, employment, and living costs as the most pressing issues in 2014 (Berman and Nugent 2015, p. 7). These findings are in line with results from the Arab Barometer (2011, 2013, 2015), which reveal that Tunisians have become increasingly concerned about economic development since 2011. In the 2015 survey, respondents identified "the economic situation" as Tunisia's most important challenge. Egyptians also named "the economic situation" as one of the two most urgent challenges that their country faces, even though they found that the country's economy had improved since 2013 (Arab Barometer 2015).

At the same time, however, this chapter shows that—while socioeconomic concerns undoubtedly played a very prominent role in the uprisings in both cases (see El-Meehy 2014; Beissinger et al. 2012)—the two countries differ markedly when it comes to the evolution of socioeconomically motivated protests since 2011. When looking at protests in which at least one socioeconomic claim was raised, Tunisia experienced a comparably higher number of such socioeconomic protests between 2011 and 2016 than Egypt. In terms of both absolute numbers and a share of all types of protests, socioeconomic protests in Tunisia have been at a very high level. By contrast, Egypt was marked by massive protests, in which mainly political issues were raised, whereas socioeconomic demands seem to have been less relevant.

At first glance, these differences seem to be easy to explain: In line with the established argument that political opportunities are fundamental in shaping contentious action (see McAdam 1999; Tilly 1977), one could argue that different political developments in those countries led to different outcomes. Since the long-standing dictators were overthrown in early 2011, Tunisia and Egypt have undergone very different trajectories of political transformation. Whereas in Tunisia conflicts and political turbulences generally followed a path of democratic transition, a process of democratization in Egypt was reversed by a military coup in 2013. Since then, Egypt's political regime has experienced an increasingly authoritarian development. Thus, as outlined by Adly and Meddeb (in this volume), both countries developed different regime types in the aftermath of the uprisings. In this sense, the higher number of socioeconomic protests in post-revolutionary Tunisia would simply reflect the much more facilitating political context, as compared to much more repressive Egypt.

However, there is more to the dynamics of socioeconomic protests than such a macro-perspective suggests. As we show in this chapter, a closer look at the actual protest actors, their claims and tactics, as well as at the geographical patterns of socioeconomic protests reveals micro-dynamics

that are much more complex in both cases—and suggest both interesting similarities between the countries and important temporal continuities within the two cases.

The following chapter seeks to map and analyze the evolution of socioeconomically motivated protests in Tunisia and Egypt over a period of six years (between 2011 and 2016). In a first step, the methodological approach is presented in more detail. The analysis is based on the *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project* (ACLED), which provides a detailed data set that entails information on protest events in both Arab countries between 2011 and 2016. In a second step, we present the main findings from our data analysis on socioeconomic protests in Tunisia and Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. The chapter describes the dynamics of socioeconomic contestation in both countries—starting with Tunisia. After looking at the protest numbers in both countries and their evolution over time, we discuss the protest actors and how they changed between 2011 and 2016. We also study the claims of the protesters and how they differ between actors and between countries. We then give an overview of the different tactics used by protest actors to express their demands. Furthermore, we analyze the extent to which geographical patterns of socioeconomic protest can be identified. We compare the numbers of socioeconomically motivated protests in the wealthier regions with those in the impoverished governorates of both countries. In a final step, we discuss the results of the data analysis from a comparative perspective.

## 3.2 Data and Methodology

The comparative analysis of socioeconomic protest in Egypt and Tunisia draws on the ACLED data set, which currently represents the only ongoing comprehensive, qualitative data collection covering protests in both Arab states going back to 2010. It focuses on acts of political violence by state and non-state actors alike, but it also includes non-violent protests. ACLED is a manually coded data set which is based on daily local, regional, and national media in English and French as well as reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian agencies.

Because of the limited available information about the individual protest events provided by ACLED, the database was further refined by means of original research. Using newspapers in English, French, and Arabic, additional data on the actors, demands, and types of the protests mentioned in the ACLED database were collected and manually coded. The coding of socioeconomic protests was based on the definition provided in the introduction

to this volume: Protests were coded as "socioeconomic" when the claims made during the event touched on at least one of the following issues: productive activities (access to land, subsidies, credits, taxes), social services (public services, health, education, water, transportation, price/tariff subsidies), income (wages, collective contracts, pensions, work), and worker rights (such as the right to organize and employment standards). Protests in which none of these demands were raised were coded as "other."

Even though protests obviously differ in terms of number of participants, duration, and so on, every protest in the data set is coded as a single protest. A protest with many participants in the capital city counts as much as a small protest, such as a hunger strike. Instead of considering the specifics mentioned previously as a measure of the significance of a protest, ACLED provides a different possibility. By definition, ACLED only considers protests that have certain political significance for the country at hand. As a result, ACLED's protest numbers are much lower than other country-specific protest databases covering Egypt and Tunisia. As previously mentioned, an advantage of this definition is that all protests in ACLED meet a "significance threshold." In this way, we do not compare significant protest events with very insignificant protests as other databases tend to do.

Because it draws on media articles and reports, a number of possible biases and limitations have to be considered when making use of ACLED. *First*, the reliance on English- and French-speaking media may imply a regional bias within a country. Foreign language sources tend to cover densely populated areas rather than peripheral areas. As a consequence, protests in peripheral areas might be underrepresented in the database (Vatthauer and Weipert-Fenner 2017, p. 9). *Second*, country-specific censorship by the regime and the degree of press freedom in a country are also a possible source of bias. Given the reliance on local media coverage, the database is prone to these effects. A *third* possible bias is that media reporting of protests usually follows public attention, which means that the database portrays only those events that received the most attention—such as violent protests—and not the full range of protests. These biases are certainly important, but they arguably do not significantly distort the analysis presented later.[1] As most biases are stable over time, they do not distort our findings, which are based on temporal comparisons.

[1] To test our findings from the ACLED database we compared them with findings from other sets of data on protest events in both North African countries provided by different national NGOs. In all data sets we found similar dynamics. For further details see footnotes 2 and 6 in this chapter.

## 3.3 The Evolution of Protest in Egypt and Tunisia

Over the period of six years (2011–2016), 1755 protests (total numbers) were counted in Tunisia compared to 4285 in Egypt (see Table 3.1). In Tunisia, after a small decrease in the number of socioeconomic protests in the years 2013 and 2014, in 2015 and even more strongly in 2016, the numbers rose enormously. The numbers of other protests in Tunisia remained relatively stable over time. In Egypt, we find a more similar trend for socioeconomic and other protests. Both types of protests increased massively in the year 2013, while the numbers remained relatively low in other years. Estimating the significance of socioeconomic contestation in both countries, we find that socioeconomic protests play a bigger role in the Tunisian protest landscape than they do in Egypt. While in Tunisia there are between 3.56 and 35.3 socioeconomic protests per year per million inhabitants, the range in Egypt is between 0.16 and 1.82. In comparison to other protests, our findings suggest that in Tunisia almost every second protest is a socioeconomic protest, whereas in Egypt less than every ninth protest is a socioeconomic one.

If we compare these numbers with the overall population in both countries, we find that Tunisia experienced remarkably higher numbers of protests per million inhabitants than Egypt. The ratio varies from 2.92 (protests per million inhabitants) in 2016 to 21.49 in 2013 in Egypt and from 17.14 in 2011 to 50.51 in 2016 in Tunisia. Moreover, Tunisia experienced remarkably higher numbers of socioeconomic protests than Egypt, whereas non-socioeconomic protests in Egypt outnumbered those in Tunisia by far. However, as will be seen in the following sections, dynamics become much more complex with regard to the protest actors, their claims, and the types of protest.

## 3.4 Socioeconomic Protests in Tunisia

From 2011 to 2014, numbers of "other" protests were always significantly higher in Tunisia than those of socioeconomic protests, with an average of 169 "other" protests each year. This pattern changed in 2015, when 176 socioeconomic protests were counted (but only 145 "other" protests). In 2016, the number of socioeconomic protests (399) in one year more than doubled "other" protests (172). Socioeconomic protests thus increased in absolute numbers as well as relative to non-socioeconomic protests, which marked a new trend in the country's recent protest history (see Fig. 3.1). In January 2016, 124 socioeconomic protests were counted in one month

**Table 3.1** Protest numbers in Tunisia and Egypt (in brackets: per million inhabitants)

| | *Socioeconomic protests* | | *Other protests* | | *Total* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Tunisia* | *Egypt* | *Tunisia* | *Egypt* | *Tunisia* | *Egypt* |
| 2011 | 38 (3.56) | 88 (1.09) | 145 (13.58) | 561 (6.97) | 183 (17.14) | 649 (8.06) |
| 2012 | 71 (6.58) | 13 (0.16) | 189 (17.53) | 293 (3.55) | 260 (24.11) | 306 (3.71) |
| 2013 | 42 (3.85) | 154 (1.82) | 180 (16.52) | 1665 (19.67) | 222 (20.38) | 1819 (21.49) |
| 2014 | 34 (3.09) | 39 (0.45) | 164 (14.89) | 898 (10.34) | 198 (17.98) | 937 (10.79) |
| 2015 | 176 (15.77) | 44 (0.49) | 145 (12.99) | 267 (3.00) | 321 (28.76) | 311 (3.50) |
| 2016 | 399 (35.30) | 75 (0.83) | 172 (15.22) | 188 (2.09) | 571 (50.51) | 263 (2.92) |
| Total | 760 | 413 | 995 | 3872 | 1755 | 4285 |

Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

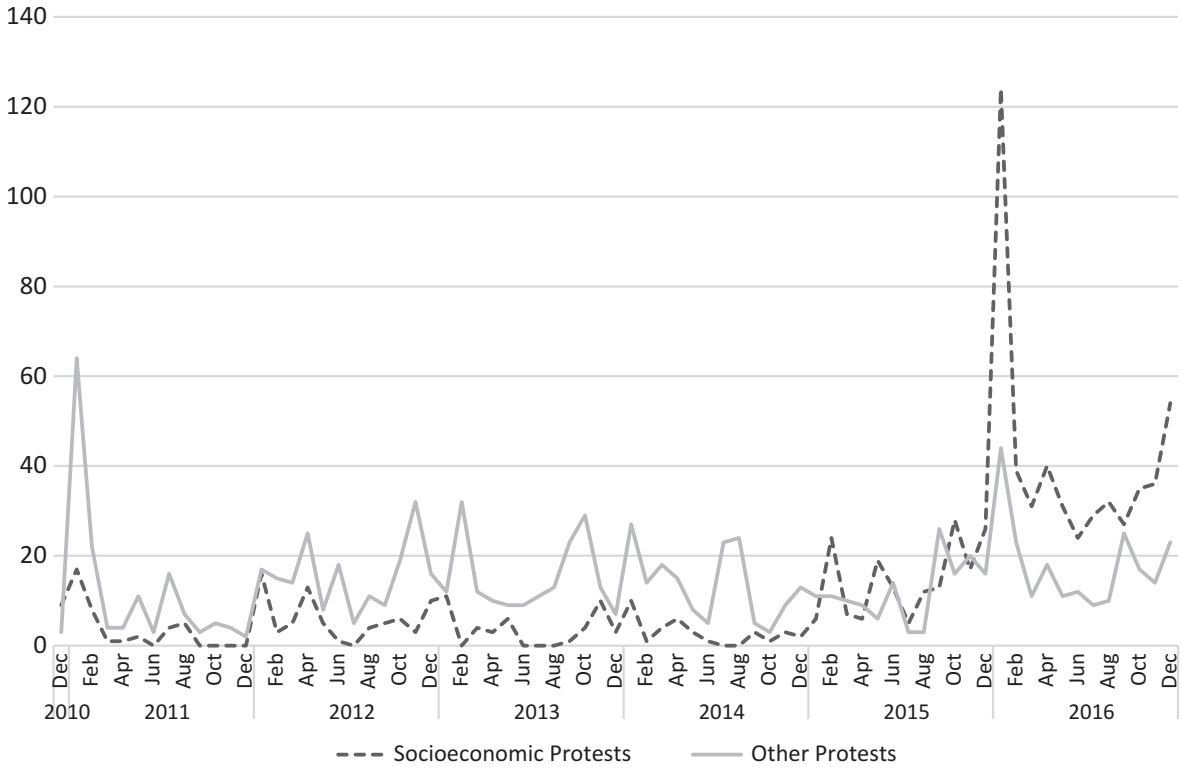


**Fig. 3.1** Protests in Tunisia. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

alone, which surpassed former record numbers, including those during the month of the revolution in January 2011.[2]

In December 2010, protests occurred in Sidi Bouzid and soon after spread to the other regions in the marginalized south and interior. They marked the beginning of the Arab uprisings and pointed to socioeconomic marginalization of those regions. January 2011 was marked by mass protests in the capital city Tunis, where people demonstrated for the removal of President Ben Ali and demanded political change. The protests continued

[2] Since May 2014 the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (*Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux*, *FTDES*) has published monthly reports on protest events all over the country. The so-called OST (*Rapports de l'Observatoire Social Tunisien*) reports contain information on the protest actors and their demands as well as on the types of action. The protest numbers are considerably higher than in ACLED, which might be due to their inclusion of Arabic-speaking media articles, in which small-scale protest actions are also mentioned. Furthermore, FTDES owns local offices in the marginalized regions, in which information and data on protest actions in those regions are collected. However, since both databases ACLED and OST showed very similar trends, ACLED represents a valid set of data for further analysis. For further information, see https://ftdes.net/ (accessed 26 June 2017).

after Ben Ali resigned on 14 January 2011, demanding that the old cadres—including Mohamed Ghannouchi who became the president of the new interim government—give up their power (see Willsher 2011). Until Ghannouchi's removal on 27 February 2011, politically motivated protests dominated the scene, and socioeconomic protests became less common.

The same developments continued throughout the years from 2011 to 2014, when large protests accompanied the constitution-making process (see Boubekeur 2016). Following the election of the National Constituent Assembly (*Assemblée nationale constituante*, ANC) in October 2011, the Islamist Ennahda party governed the country as part of a troika government with the secular Congress for the Republic (*Congrès pour la république*) and Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties (*Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés*, Ettakatol) (Antonakis-Nashif 2016, p. 131; Boubekeur 2016, p. 113f.). During this period, the government had to deal with deep internal conflicts between the Islamist Ennahda party and the two secular troika members (Boubekeur 2016, p. 115). At the same time, it did not show any evidence of efforts to really alter the country's economic and social policies, but it remained dependent on financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other external actors (Paciello 2013, p. 19). Socioeconomic protests demanding improvement of the economic situation of the country in Tunis in April and in Siliana in November 2012 were heavily suppressed by police forces (Boubekeur 2016, p. 115). After the two opposition leaders Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi were assassinated in February and July 2013, respectively (Antonakis-Nashif 2016, p. 131; Boubekeur 2016, pp. 115–117), people were mostly concerned about the unstable political situation and the future of the country under the leading Islamist Ennahda Party. During the so-called Bardo protests in July and August 2013, oppositional, secular political groups—including the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT)—demonstrated outside the parliament against the current government led by the Ennahda Party (Antonakis-Nashif 2016, p. 131).

In December 2013, the National Dialogue Quartet came together to support the democratic transition in Tunisia in times of political crisis (see Antonakis-Nashif 2016, p. 131). It was organized by four key players in the Tunisian civil society: The Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT, *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail*), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA, *Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat*), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH, *La Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*), and the

Tunisian Order of Lawyers (*Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie*) (see Chap. 5, in this volume).[3] Thus, until the new constitution was finally adopted and Ennahda gave up its power to a new cabinet of technocrats in January 2014 (Boubekeur 2016, p. 119; Schäfer 2015, p. 23), protests concerned mostly political issues such as demands for the removal of Ennahda (Ocampos 2016). During this period, socioeconomic protests played only a minor role. In October and November 2014, the parliamentary and presidential elections were held and a new government was finally installed in February 2015, with Habib Essid from the secular Nidaa Tounes Party as Prime Minister.

The year 2015 was marked by crucial changes: Socioeconomic protests increased, whereas "other" protests decreased slightly in the first quarter of the year. The new government under Essid announced its commitment to reducing unemployment and regional inequalities as well as to undertaking new tax reforms and minimizing public spending (European Commission 2015, p. 43). Nonetheless, its inauguration was accompanied by large socioeconomic contestation in early 2015. Among the most important protest events was a wave of protests in different cities of the governorate of Gafsa in May, when protesters criticized the lack of industrial policies in the neglected hinterland. During this period of time, phosphate production in the Gafsa mining basin came to a complete standstill due to strikes and sit-ins of unemployed workers in front of the factory site, blocking, for example, the railway, which is needed to carry the phosphate (see Chap. 8, in this volume). Unemployed young people, demanding the creation of jobs, became important protest actors. Moreover, workers from the informal sector called for their activities to be regularized and legalized. The introduction of a new tax on transborder trade and the closing of the Ris Jedir border further triggered protests among the informal workers and smugglers in the marginalized south (see Meddeb 2017).

In January 2016, the number of socioeconomic protests grew dramatically and outnumbered those of "other" protests. The first protest broke out in the city center of Kasserine in the marginalized interior of the country after a young unemployed person died in an accident while denouncing corruption in recruitment procedures in the public sector. In slightly more than one week, large protests spread across the marginalized southern and interior regions and finally led to solidarity protests in the capital city and the northern parts of the country. Protesters demanded economic reforms, the

[3] The National Dialogue Quartet received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for its outstanding contributions to the political development of post-revolutionary Tunisia.

creation of new jobs, and an end to the marginalization of the southern and interior regions (see Jöst 2017). Even though socioeconomic protests had already started to decrease at the end of January, the wave of protests had a lasting effect in the following months. Thus, the year 2016 was marked by high numbers of socioeconomic protests—in absolute numbers as well as compared to "other" protests. Non-socioeconomic protests remained only slightly above the level of previous years.

Regarding the types of actors engaged in socioeconomic protests in Tunisia, we observe major changes after December 2010 (see Fig. 3.2). Socioeconomic protests in 2011 and 2012 were almost exclusively organized by "unspecified societal actors," meaning mass protests characterized by unorganized people, as well as by "unions, political parties and protest alliances."[4] Together, these two types of protest actors account for 90 percent (33 protests in total) of all socioeconomic protests in 2011 and 92 percent (65 protests in total) in 2012.

In terms of the demands raised, we observe changes within the category of "unspecified societal actors" during the first two years after the revolution. In 2011, mass protests almost exclusively raised demands for fundamental change and economic reforms. Moreover, protest alliances between different trade unions and civil society organizations presented crucial protest actors. In 2012, however, mass protests were making very different claims, focusing on living standards—including improved health care—the right to employment and individual demands for jobs as well as economic reform. At the same time, protest alliances uniting several trade unions and civil society organizations became marginal. Within the category "unions, political parties, and protest alliances," the UGTT represented the most prominent protest actor in 2012 and 2013.

In 2011 and 2012, government employees and workers in the industrial sector and agricultural and fishing sectors organized barely 5 percent of the socioeconomic protests.[5] Service-sector employees did not play any active

[4] The category "unions, political parties, and protest alliances" includes mostly protest actions organized by one specific trade union or political party. However, few protest alliances between different trade unions and civil society organizations were counted—most of them in 2011. Those protest alliances also fall under this category.

[5] Different groups of workers from the service, industrial, or fishing and agricultural sectors have been placed in a different category from trade unions such as the UGTT. First, those groups of protest actors have been named "employees" in media reporting, mostly without any reference to external support by the trade unions. Second, as Beissinger et al. (2012, p. 15) point out, in most of the cases, people who described their occupation as "workers"

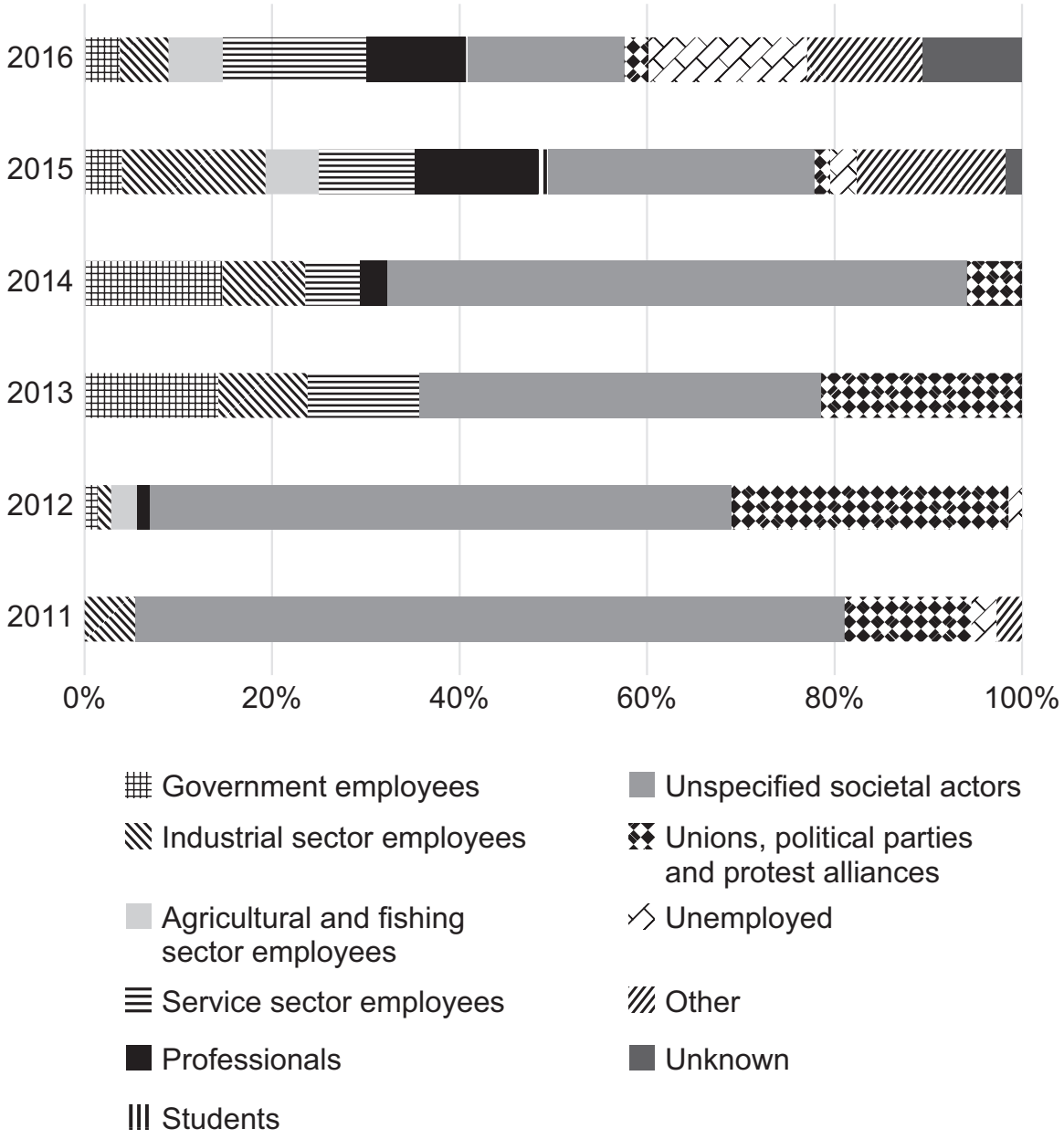


**Fig. 3.2** Socioeconomic protesters in Tunisia. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

role as protest actors during that time. This changed at the beginning of the year 2013. In 2014, workers in the public, industrial, and service sectors became crucial protest actors, organizing 36 percent (15 protests in total) of the socioeconomic protests. By contrast, the role of mass protests and unions, political parties and protest alliances started to decrease slightly.

in the Arab Barometer (2011) were not members of a trade union. By contrast, trade union members were mostly government employees or professionals and people in "other occupations" (Beissinger et al. 2012, p. 15).

Nonetheless, these groups of actors still organized more than 60 percent (on average 25 protests per year) of all socioeconomic protests in 2013 and 2014, raising issues like living standards, the right to employment, or economic reforms. In 2015, almost half of all socioeconomic protests (48 percent) were organized by workers from the public, service, and agricultural and fishing sectors or by professionals (e.g., journalists and lawyers), who had previously played only a marginal role. At the same time, unions, political parties, and protest alliances accounted for barely 2 percent of the socioeconomic protests. Now, even mass protests which had previously raised very different issues mostly called for better working conditions for their participants. Furthermore, in 2015, unemployed people became crucial protest actors. In 2016, this trend became even stronger: Unemployed people, who had not previously played a crucial role as a group of actors, now accounted for 17 percent (85 protests in total) of the socioeconomic protests. In general, mass protests demanding employment increased, so that it can be assumed that a share of those protest actors were also unemployed.

In sum, over the years, protest alliances between trade unions, civil society organizations, and political parties, which organized mass protests in 2011 and 2012, were replaced as the dominant protest actors by individual protest groups representing specific economic sectors (and unemployed people) who were demonstrating in their own right.

Similar developments can be observed in the demands of the protesters which also became much more specific between 2011 and 2016 (see Fig. 3.3). In 2011, slightly more than 60 percent (32 protests in total) of the protests demanded fundamental changes, economic reforms, and the creation of new jobs. In the following years, demands for improved living standards and working conditions became more important issues. In 2012, the number of protests demanding better living standards increased significantly from 8 percent (in 2011) to 28 percent. At the same time, the numbers of protests demanding fundamental changes and economic reform dropped from 60 percent (19 protests in total) to 27 percent. Still, demands for the creation of new jobs continued to be raised in 34 percent of the protests (24 protests). In 2013, demands for better working conditions became most important—accounting for more than 30 percent of the socioeconomic protests. Since 2013, claims for fundamental change have declined steadily, and they finally disappeared from the protest scene in 2016. By contrast, protest actors started to raise more specific demands for jobs, better working conditions, and improved living

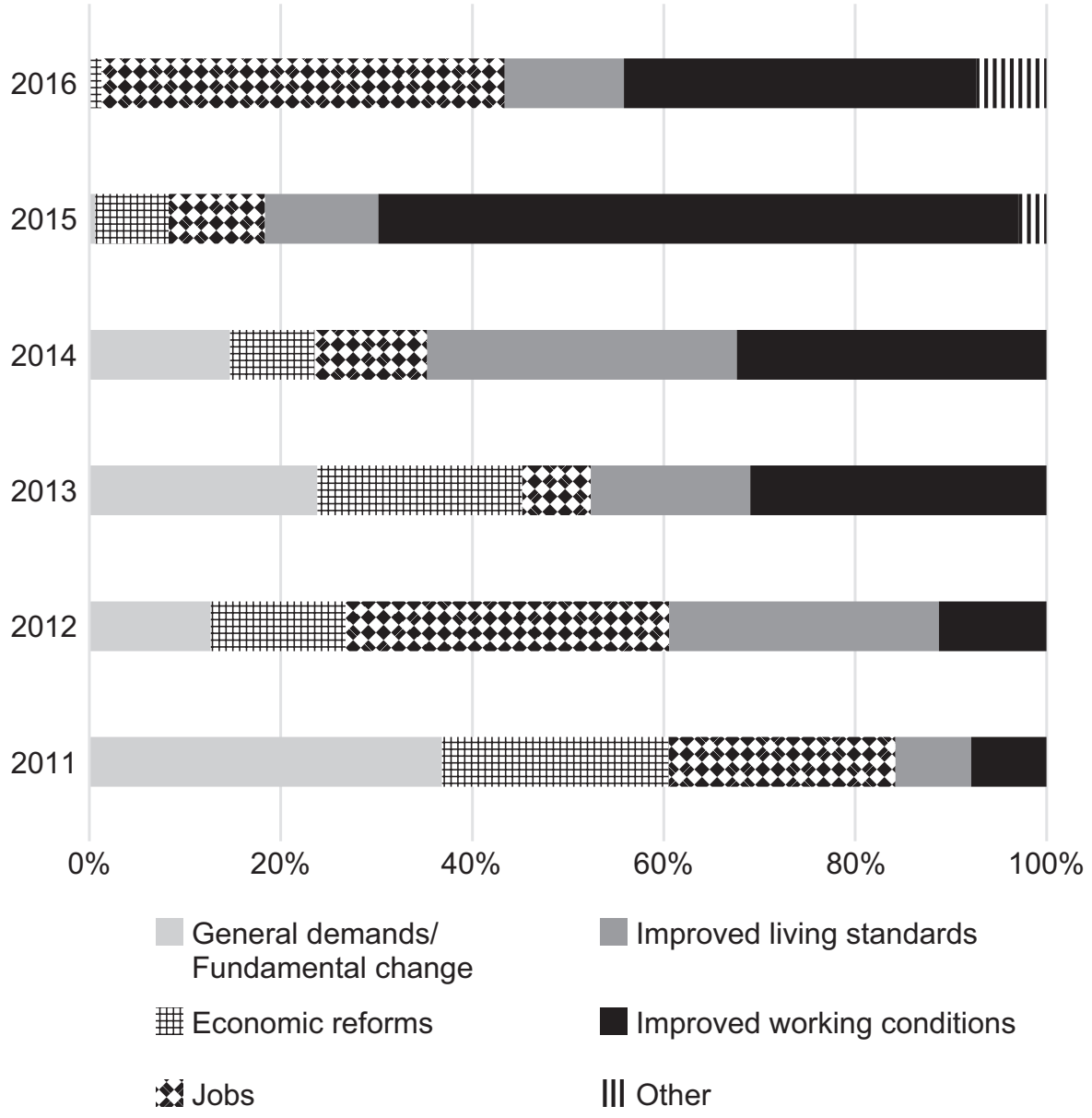


**Fig. 3.3** Protesters' demands in Tunisia. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

standards. In 2015, working conditions peaked, with a share of 67 percent of all socioeconomic protests (113 protests). This category covers issues like higher pay, as well as legalizing work in the informal sector. Demands for jobs—including the creation of new jobs as well as individual demands for employment—were raised most importantly in 2011 and 2012 (29 percent on average). From 2013 to 2015, these demands lost importance before they dominated socioeconomic protests in 2016, holding a 42 percent share (166 protests) of all socioeconomic protests.

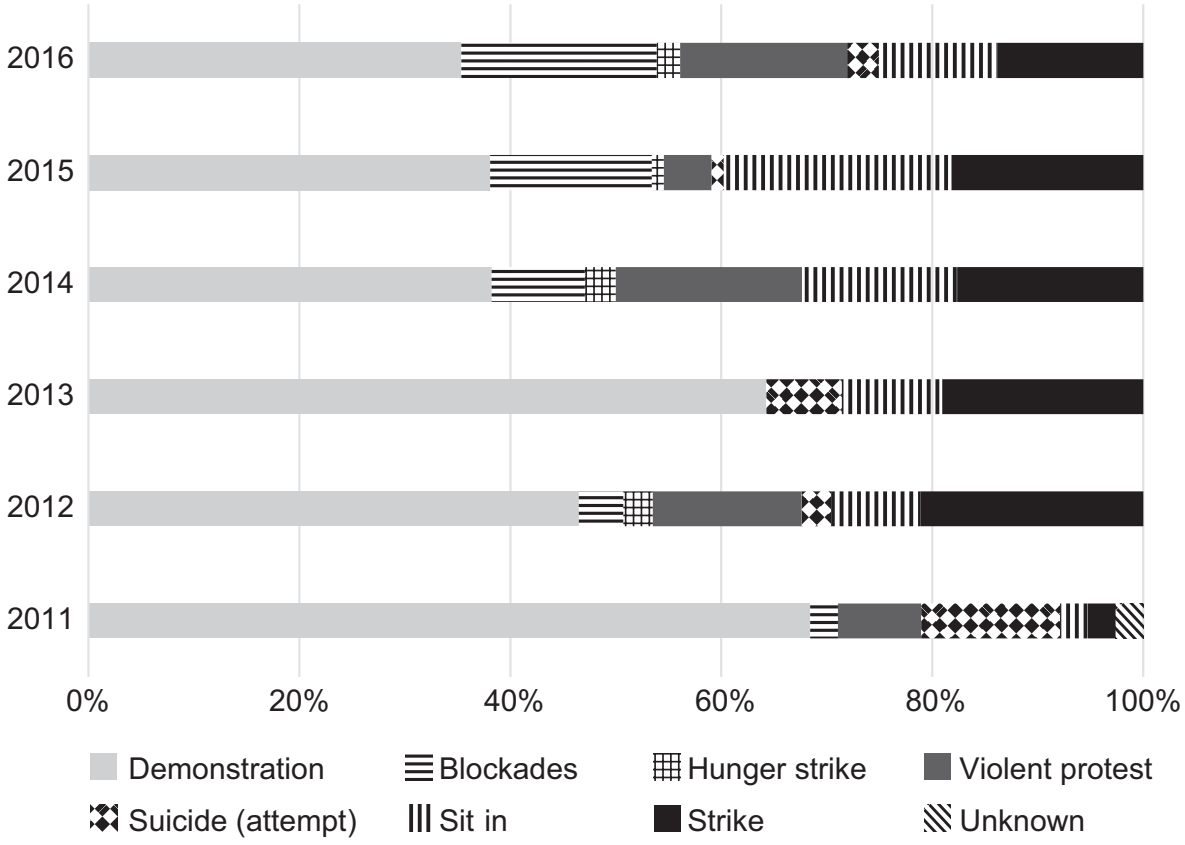


**Fig. 3.4** The types of protest in Tunisia. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

In sum, the demands of the protesters became more specific over the period of six years. This development mirrors the differentiation of the protest actors presented earlier. In 2011, when mass protests organized by various actors dominated the protest scene, very general demands for fundamental change and economic reform were raised. In the following years, when specific groups of actors dominated the protests, their demands became more specific as well.

The years from 2011 to 2016 are further marked by an increase in disruptive protests and a shifting away from non-violent forms of protests to more confrontational tactics (see Fig. 3.4). Until 2013, demonstrations represented the most frequent form of protest, with an average share of 59 percent (between 26 and 33 demonstrations per year) of all socioeconomic protests. From 2014 onward, the protesters started to use more unconventional and confrontational forms of protest to express their demands: Blockages, sit-ins, violent protests, and suicide attempts became much more important—accounting for an average of 45 percent of all socioeconomic protests. In 2014, 42 percent of all protests were disruptive protests,

whereas in 2015, 43 percent, and in 2016, 49 percent were in this category. Nonetheless, on average, 37 percent of all socioeconomic protests were demonstrations, which represent a rather conventional type of protest. Over the years, strikes became a crucial tactic for demanding better working conditions. In 2011, they accounted for barely 3 percent of all socioeconomic protests. However, in 2012, already more than 20 percent (15 protests) of the socioeconomic protests were strikes. In the following years, they had an average share of 17 percent of all socioeconomic protests.

In sum, demonstrations as a more conventional form of protest have decreased steadily since 2014. Nonetheless, they have remained the most frequent form of action. At the same time, however, the use of disruptive forms of protest steadily increased between 2014 and 2016.

It is important to say that Tunisia faces huge regional disparities that are reflected in the geographical pattern of protest. The overall development of the coastal regions is considerably higher than in the interior regions of the country. Data from the study on regional development in Tunisia, published in 2012 by the Ministry of Regional Development and Planning, dramatically confirms these findings. According to the research group from the Tunisian Institute for Competitiveness and Qualitative Studies, the interior areas are a third less developed than their coastal counterparts (ITCEQ 2012, pp. 9–10). The study uses development indicators from the fields of education and training, technology, unemployment, income, health, justice, and equality to measure differences in regional development. Whereas Tunisia's northeastern regions achieved an average score of 0.61 (with a maximum score of 1), the southern and western regions reached only 0.40. The three least developed governorates showed an average value of 0.23 (0.16 Kasserine, 0.25 Kairouan and 0.28 Sidi Bouzid), whereas the most developed governorates achieved an average score of 0.70 (0.76 Tunis, 0.69 Ariana, 0.66 Ben Arous).

Comparing the numbers of socioeconomic protests that have been organized in the marginalized interior and southern regions with those of the wealthier coastal regions shows very interesting results (see Table 3.2): Over the period of six years, almost twice (1.79) as many protests took place in the neglected south and interior than in the wealthier coastal regions. Whereas in the Tunisian hinterland up to 333 (in 2016) protests were organized in a single year, the highest yearly number of protests in the wealthier coastal regions was only 169. If Tunis, as the capital where most protests usually take place, is omitted, only 102 protests are counted in the wealthier governorates.

**Table 3.2** Socioeconomic protests by region in Tunisia

| | *Protests in marginalized regions*[a] | *Protests Per million inhabitants* | *Protests in wealthier regions (w/o Tunis)*[b] | *Protests Per million inhabitants* | *Protests in Tunis* | *Protests Per million inhabitants* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2011 | 21 | 4.83 | 9 | 1.70 | 7 | 6.75 |
| 2012 | 49 | 11.22 | 4 | 0.74 | 18 | 17.24 |
| 2013 | 20 | 4.56 | 4 | 0.73 | 18 | 17.12 |
| 2014 | 22 | 5.00 | 4 | 0.72 | 8 | 7.56 |
| 2015 | 108 | 24.30 | 33 | 5.84 | 35 | 32.91 |
| 2016 | 333 | 74.27 | 102 | 17.73 | 67 | 62.79 |
| **Total** | **553** | – | **156** | – | **153** | – |

Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED. Numbers of inhabitants are taken from Tunisia's National Statistical Institute (Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie—INS). See INS (2017).

Notes: [a]Marginalized regions include Béja, Gabès, Gafsa, Jendouba, Kairouan, Kasserine, Kebili, Kef, Medenine, Sidi Bouzid, Siliana, Tataouine, Tozeur, and Zaghouan. [b]Wealthier regions include Ariana, Ben Arous, Bizerte, Mahdia, Manouba, Monastir, Nabeul, Sfax, Sousse (excluding Tunis)

If we take the population numbers into account, we see that up to 74.27 protests per million inhabitants took place in the marginalized regions in 2016. By contrast, the ratio in the coastal regions only reached a maximum of 17.73 in the same year, if Tunis is omitted. The governorate of Tunis shows a ratio of 62.79 protests per million inhabitants in 2016, which is also extremely high. Thus, most protests took place in the marginalized regions (4.4 million people) and in the capital city (1.05 million people). The coastal regions, however, where more than 5.5 million people live, organized considerably fewer protests. Despite the regional differences described earlier, we clearly observe some national dynamics as well: Numbers of socioeconomic protests have been increasing steadily all over the country since 2014.

## 3.5 Socioeconomic Protests in Egypt

Compared to Tunisia, socioeconomic protests in Egypt have played only a minor role in the country's post-revolutionary protest history—at least in the English- and French-speaking media coverage, on which the ACLED data set is based. From 2011 through 2016, as seen earlier (Table 3.1), only 413 socioeconomic protests were counted compared to 3872 non-socioeconomic

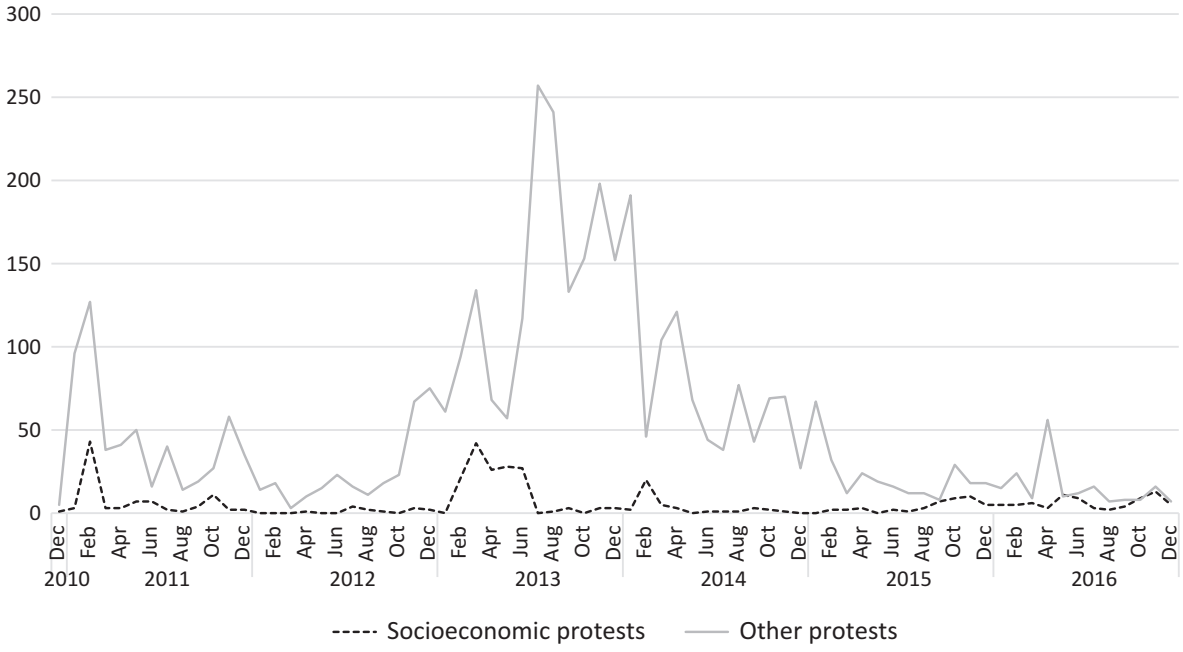


**Fig. 3.5** Protests in Egypt. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

protests. The number of socioeconomic protests increased from 13 in 2012 to 154 in 2013. At the same time, a minimum of 306 "other" protests (in 2012) and a maximum of 1819 (in 2013) were counted. During the six-year period, only two major peaks were observed, in February 2011 and March 2013, with the number of socioeconomic protests per month only peaking to around 40 one time (see Fig. 3.5). By contrast, non-socioeconomic protests remained at a significantly higher level until February 2015, with five major peaks between February 2011 and March 2014. Since then, protest numbers have been on the decline, with only one more minor peak in April 2016.[6] Thus, socioeconomic contestation did exist in post-2011 Egypt, but, compared to "other" protests, socioeconomic protests did not achieve much importance—neither in terms of absolute protest numbers nor in relation to other protests between 2011 and 2016.

[6]A few other databases on labor protests in Egypt since 2011 are provided by Egyptian NGOs. In their reports on workers' protests, the Economic Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) analyzed labor protests in post-revolutionary Egypt. ECESR counted significantly more labor protests than ACLED. These differences in protest numbers, again, might stem from the fact that they coded Arab-speaking media coverage, in which even small-scale strikes and protest events have been reported on. Yet, we observe very similar trends in both databases. Consequently, we decided to work with ACLED, which represents the most comprehensive of all three databases.

In January 2011, massive protests marked Egypt's revolution, in which the independent trade unions as well as workers from different economic sectors acted as important protest actors (see Beinin 2011, p. 194; Bishara 2014, p. 3).[7] During the Egyptian uprisings, youth activists also played a key role as Nadine Abdalla (2016) and others have shown. The January protests were inspired by the wave of protests that started in Tunisia in December 2010. Furthermore, those protests built upon what Dianiela Pioppi (2013, p. 54) calls a newly formed "culture of protest," which partly emerged out of the period of youth and workers' movements prior to the uprisings.[8] The first major peak in socioeconomically motivated protests in Egypt falls exactly into this revolutionary period, when tensions were high and people raised political as well as socioeconomic demands in mass protests at Tahrir Square in Cairo. During the last three days of the Mubarak regime, groups of workers who organized nationwide strikes played a key role as protest actors, acting independently from the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) (Bishara 2014).

Until December 2012, we find only minor peaks in June, July, and October 2011 and very small ones in July and November 2012. Whereas socioeconomic protests were of little importance, "other" protests continued throughout the years between 2011 and 2012. Violent protest actions were reported from the city center of Cairo, where various actors protested in favor of a speeding up of political changes and against the military's attempt to retain its influence after the overthrow of the regime in February 2011 (El-Mahdi 2014). In January and June 2012, the first parliamentary and presidential elections since the fall of the Mubarak regime were held (Paciello 2013, p. 9). Neither the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which became the majority party in the legislative elections (Pioppi 2013, p. 57),[9] nor the newly elected President Mohammed

[7] For the role of workers' strikes and the independent trade unions in Egypt during the 2011 uprisings and beyond, see Chap. 6 (in this volume).

[8] Egypt's 2000s were marked by workers' movements demanding higher wages and the payment of bonuses and "other wage supplements critical to bringing income to a level that can sustain survival" (Beinin 2011, p. 191). Those protests, as Beinin (2011, p. 192) argues, lacked "a national or regional trade union or political organizational framework." In the same vein, workers' protests that accompanied the ouster of Mubarak in 2011 were held by workers who demonstrated as individuals without any organizational support (Beinin 2011, p. 194).

[9] After the first round of parliamentary elections and only four months after its first session had taken place, the parliament was dissolved by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which thus gained legislative power before Mursi became president (Pioppi 2013, p. 58).

Morsi tackled the economic challenges Egypt was facing during this period (Paciello 2013, p. 9). Pioppi (2013, p. 60) argues that this was partly because the MB-FJP was mostly concerned with its attempt to consolidate its power, while struggling with the former elites and the state institutions as well as with internal problems. In addition, as Stephan Roll (2016, p. 28) argues, the MB-FJP had to deal with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which continued to control the constitutional process. Instead of implementing alternative programs to strengthen the Egyptian economy, the government took unpopular decisions to reduce subsidies for energy resources and to ration gasoline, in an attempt to guarantee further IMF loans (see Elhelwa 2013; Pioppi 2013; Paciello 2013, p. 11).

Between February and March 2013, the number of socioeconomic protests steadily increased. In contrast, president Morsi's attempt to weaken the power of the judiciary in November 2012 through a new constitutional declaration provoked non-socioeconomic protests (Kirkpatrick and El Sheikh 2012). The announcement of the declaration was followed by massive protests and the formation of the National Salvation Front, representing an "anti-Brotherhood platform" for secular forces (Pioppi 2013, p. 61). Moreover, in spring 2013, the *tamarrod* (Rebel) movement was founded which united businessmen as well as youth activists and security forces (Pioppi 2013, p. 65), who called for the removal of the president (Brown 2016, p. 25). The movement obtained the financial support of Naguib Sawiris, founder of the "Free Egyptians Party" and majority shareholder of one of the leading newspapers "Al-Masry al-Youm" (Richter 2013). Roll (2013, p. 6) makes the point that different established interest groups such as the Egyptian business elite had planned the failure of the Morsi regime long beforehand. Knowing about the crossholdings between media companies and business elites, Carola Richter (2013) further argues that different private media channels and newspapers owned by those who had reaped benefits from former President Mubarak, stirred up public opinion against President Morsi in the month previous to the military coup.

In June 2013, Morsi's appointment of new governors—ten were MB members (Pioppi 2013, p. 63)—caused violent anti-Brotherhood protests in different governorates (ACLED). On 30 June 2013, the first anniversary of Morsi's inauguration as president, mass protests were initiated by the *tamarrod* movement, which enabled the overthrow of the Morsi regime by military forces (Brown 2016, p. 25). Immediately after the coup on 3 July 2013, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait

provided financial assistance to Egypt. According to Roll (2016, p. 33), this lends additional support to the idea that SCAF was already preparing to take power prior to this.

The military coup in July and insecurity concerning the future of the political system accounted for a constant wave of politically motivated protests in the second half of the year. Massive protests in support of Morsi and against the military coup were held for several months (see Grimm and Harders 2017). As a reaction, Interim President Adly Mansour signed a new Protest Law (No. 107/2013) in November 2013, which put every type of protest—including non-violent protests as well as any other kind of public meeting—under the control of the government. With the new law the security services have the power to "cancel or postpone the demonstration, change the location, and modify the activity path" on the basis of a "potential threat" to the security situation in Egypt (Hamzawy 2016). The new Protest Law triggered further protests in November. At the same time, continuing demonstrations supporting the Muslim Brotherhood were brutally dispersed by police forces. The summer of 2014 saw a peak in non-socioeconomic protests which occurred in the period when al-Sisi became president. Until mid-2015, Egypt experienced a steady decline in total protest numbers. Whereas socioeconomically motivated protests remained at the same—even though low—level, non-socioeconomic protests dropped down to the lowest level since 2012, with only one minor peak in April 2016. In August 2015, the new Anti-Terrorism Law (No. 94/2015) was signed by President al-Sisi. The law "contains many draconian articles, including ones that criminalize news reporting that contradicts the government's official accounts" (Mandour 2015). Furthermore, it criminalizes individuals participating in politically motivated protests as well as "anyone who privately urges another to participate in such actions" (HRW 2015). By 2013, violent repression had already been used by the al-Sisi regime in addition to legal repression as a strategy for controlling the people and to avoid any form of public resistance: "The authorities have killed unarmed civilians; used sexual violence against women, men, and children with greater impunity; and conducted forced disappearances at unprecedented levels" (Mandour 2015).

In the second half of 2015, socioeconomic protests began to increase slightly. In August and September, government employees demonstrated against the proposed Civil Service Law (No. 18/2015). Throughout the whole year, protests were organized by public service employees, unions, and NGOs. Yet, as in 2011, when ETUF put pressure on the workers not

to protest (Bishara 2014, p. 3), ETUF did not support the protests (Charbel 2015; also see Chap. 6, in this volume). After massive protests in January 2016, the parliament rejected a law which contained the possibility of extensive job cuts in the public service and restricted basic labor rights (Kasseb 2016; El Din 2016). After amendments had been made, the new law was finally approved in October 2016, despite ongoing opposition by labor unions (Youssef 2016).

In Egypt, socioeconomic opposition since 2011 has been dominated by labor-related protests. Whereas in Tunisia "unspecified societal actors" and "unions, political parties, and protest alliances" accounted for most of the socioeconomic protests in the immediate aftermath of the Arab uprisings, in Egypt government employees as well as workers in the industrial and service sectors organized more than half (58 percent) of the socioeconomic protests in 2011 (see Fig. 3.6). Between 2012 and 2016, this share of protests driven by public-, industrial-, and service-sector employees has fluctuated between 38 percent and 61 percent. Professionals make up an additional 10–24 percent (between 3 and 18 protests per year) of the socioeconomic protests between 2011 and 2016. In the years 2011 and 2013, unspecified societal actors accounted for 16 percent of socioeconomic protests (14 and 24 protests per year). In 2014, they had a significantly smaller share (3 percent/1 protest per year), which increased once again in 2016 (21 percent/16 protests per year). By contrast, protests by unemployed workers have been marginal over the whole period, accounting for only 1–4 protests per year and completely disappearing from the scene in 2014.

In sum, since the share of "unspecified societal actors" has been significantly smaller in Egypt than in Tunisia, protests have been more homogenous. Already, in 2011, different groups of actors acted on the protest scene with different worker groups as central protest actors. Mass protests with unspecified societal groups as their main actor did not play a decisive role in Egypt.

Thus, despite some minor changes in the share of the different protest actors, no major changes could be identified in the Egyptian case. The same holds true for the demands of the protesters, which clearly reflect the predominance of labor-related protest (see Fig. 3.7). Other than in Tunisia, where protesters expressed general demands for fundamental changes in 2011, demands for improved working conditions dominated the socioeconomic protests in Egypt (60 percent/53 protests in 2011). Over the following six years, protesters continued to primarily demand improved working conditions—including demands for higher pay as well

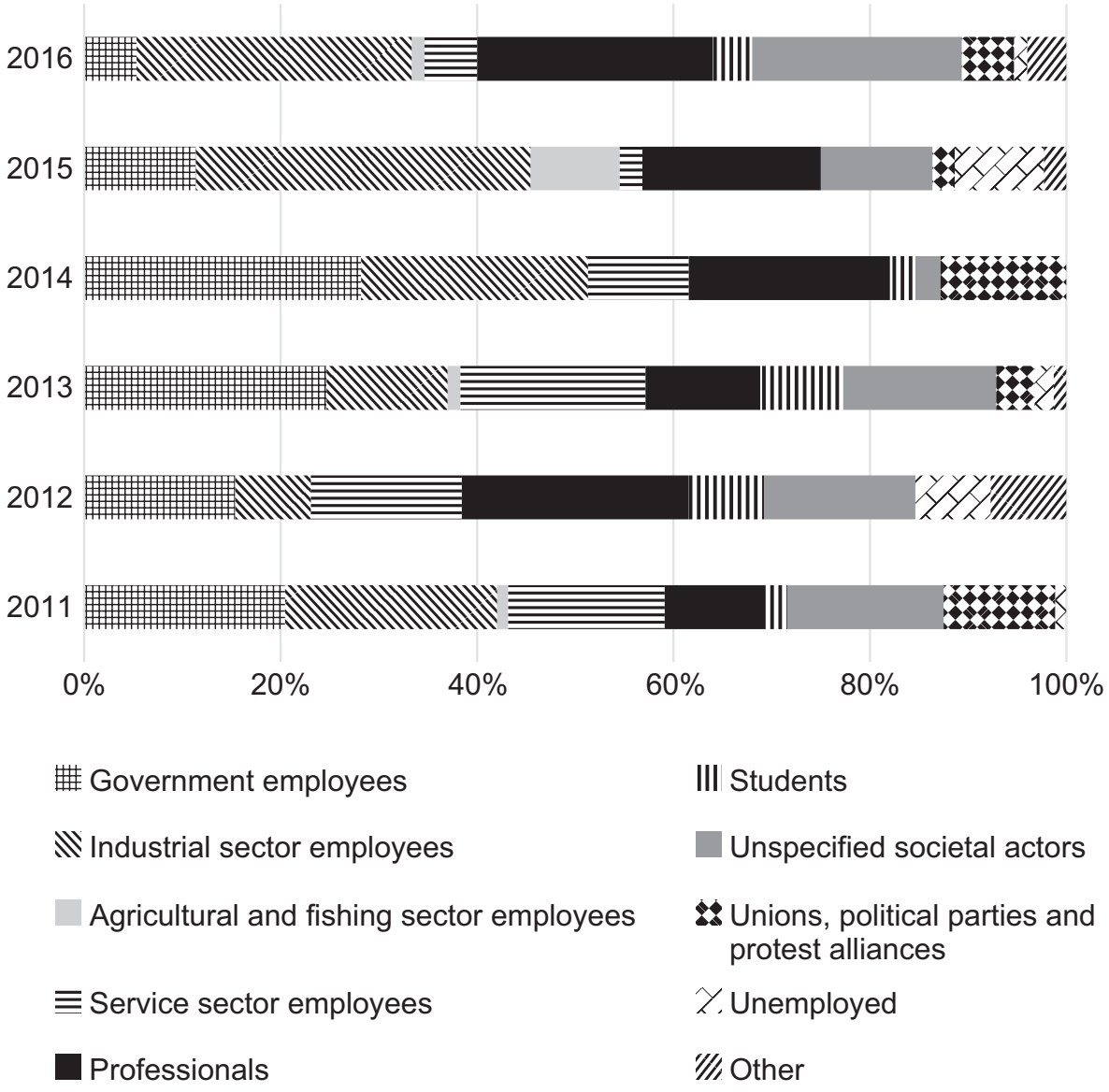


**Fig. 3.6** Socioeconomic protesters in Egypt. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

as safety measures at the workplace. Such demands finally peaked in 2015, with 66 percent (29 protests) of the socioeconomic protests demanding improved working conditions. Second, and most importantly, protesters demanded improved living standards, with numbers varying from 4 protests in 2012 to 33 in 2013. This category includes various demands such as for better quality of education as well as for the construction of social housing and a decrease in food prices.

Unlike in Tunisia, demands for economic reform and fundamental change did not play a decisive role in post-revolutionary Egypt. Only, in 2012, did demands for economic reforms and fundamental change temporarily become

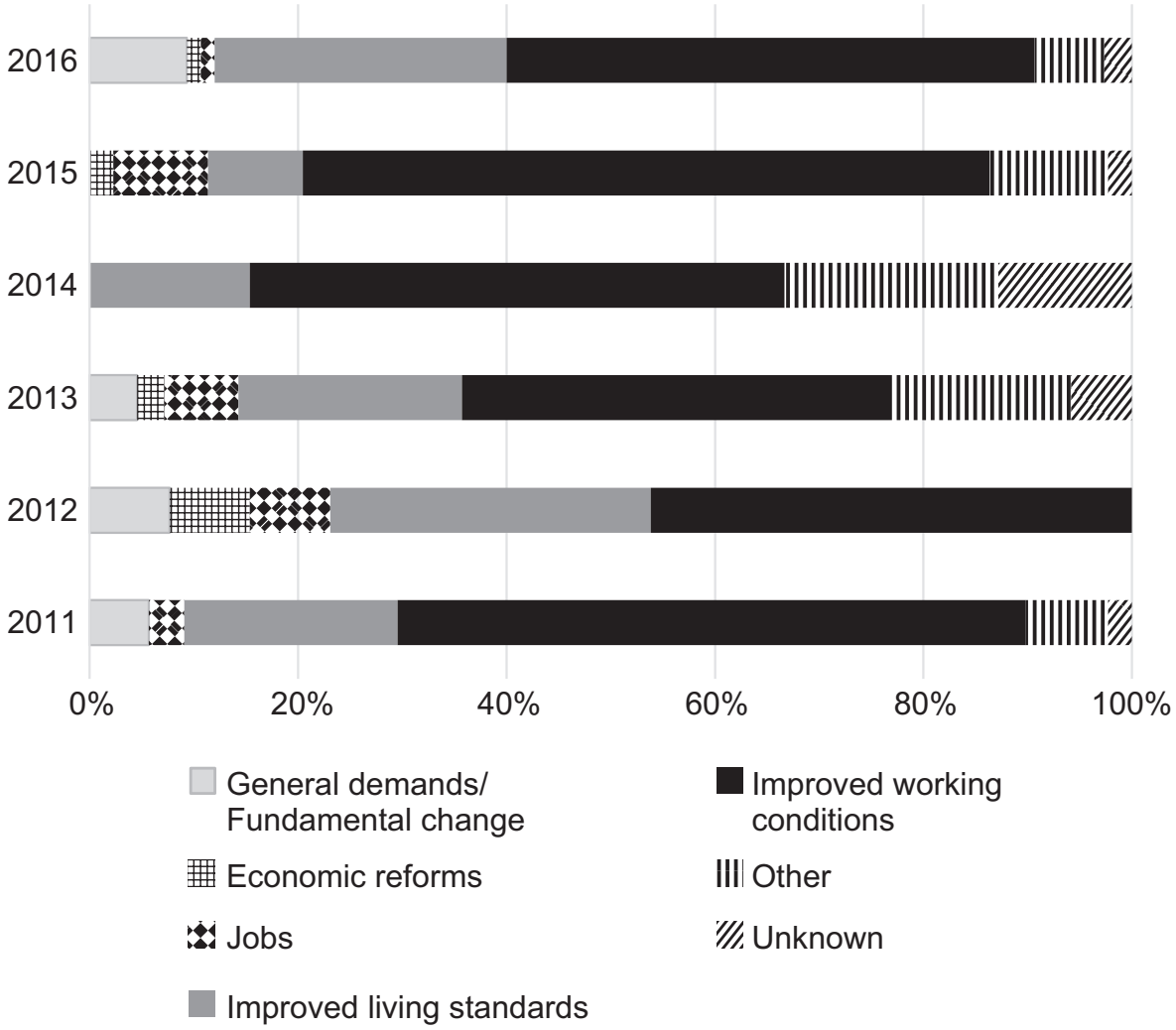


**Fig. 3.7** Protesters' demands in Egypt. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

prominent in the protests: In 16 percent (8 percent each) of the protests, demands were made for economic reform and fundamental change. In 2014, however, these demands were not mentioned at all. Demands for fundamental change only came back on the scene in 2016, when 9 percent (7 protests) of the socioeconomic protests raised such demands. In addition, in 2015 and 2016, in only two protests did demonstrators demand economic reform. Unlike Tunisia, demands for jobs—including demands for individual employment as well as the claim of a right to employment—never reached high relevance after the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Only in 2012 were they raised in 8 percent of all socioeconomic protests. Thereafter, they disappeared almost entirely from the protest scene, with only four protests demanding employment in 2015 and one protest in 2016.

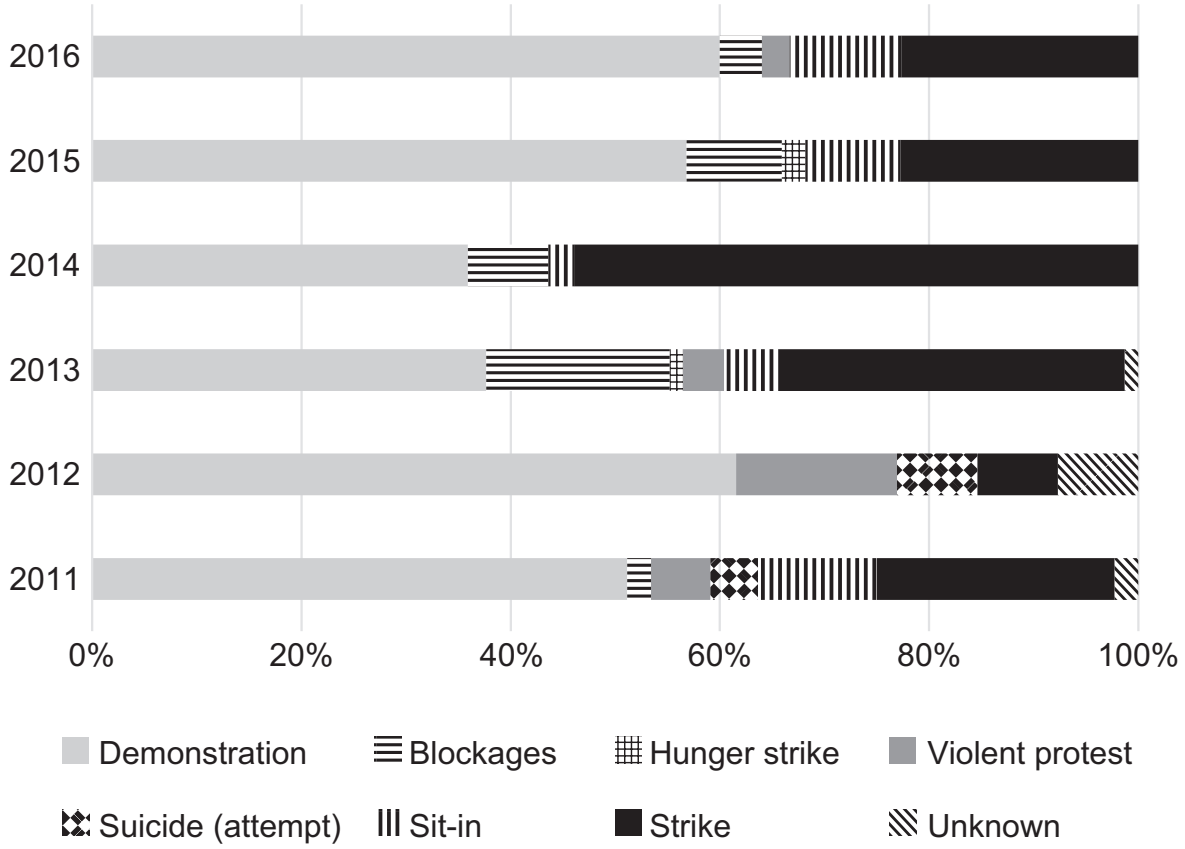


**Fig. 3.8** Types of protests in Egypt. Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set

To put it briefly, demands for better working conditions were most frequently raised in post-2011 Egypt. Furthermore, protesters also demanded improved living standards. By contrast, more general demands for development and economic reform have not played a decisive role in socioeconomic protests since 2011.

Whereas in Tunisia we have observed increasing numbers of disruptive protests since 2011, Egypt, again, faced no major changes when it comes to the types of protests (see Fig. 3.8). Over the past six years, the forms of protest have remained almost unchanged in Egypt: Demonstrations have been the most common form of protest, followed by strikes. Only, in 2014, did the number of strikes (21) exceed the number of demonstrations (14). Disruptive forms of protest such as sit-ins, blockades, violent protest, suicides, and hunger strikes never made up more than 30 percent (between 3 and 41 protests per year) of the socioeconomic protests between 2011 and 2016. Thus, more organized forms of protest such as demonstrations (including protest marches) exceed unconventional and disruptive forms of protest.

In Egypt, regional disparities go along with the division into Upper (southern) and Lower (northern) Egypt and a strong urban/rural divide (EHDR 2010, p. 22). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 923 of the 1000 poorest villages are all located in governorates in Upper Egypt (EHDR 2010, p. 22). By contrast, the five highest ranked governorates are located in Lower Egypt.[10] In addition, the UNDP Report on Poverty in Egypt (2011) shows that all governorates in Lower Egypt show remarkably lower levels of poverty than their counterparts in Upper Egypt, except for Luxor (El Laithy 2011, p. 7).[11]

In the marginalized regions where some 33 million people lived between 2011 and 2016, only 90 socioeconomic protests were counted (see Table 3.3). By contrast, in the non-marginalized regions (without Cairo), where more than 42 million people live, 143 socioeconomically motivated

**Table 3.3** Socioeconomic protests by region in Egypt

| | *Protests in marginalized regions*[a] | *Protests Per million inhabitants* | *Protests in wealthier regions (w/o Cairo)*[b] | *Protests Per million inhabitants* | *Protests in Cairo* | *Protests Per million inhabitants* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2011 | 22 | 0.71 | 23 | 0.57 | 43 | 4.97 |
| 2012 | 1 | 0.03 | 1 | 0.02 | 11 | 1.25 |
| 2013 | 44 | 1.34 | 49 | 1.16 | 61 | 6.78 |
| 2014 | 6 | 0.18 | 20 | 0.46 | 13 | 1.42 |
| 2015 | 0 | 0.00 | 23 | 0.52 | 21 | 2.25 |
| 2016 | 17 | 0.48 | 27 | 0.60 | 31 | 3.28 |
| **Total** | **90** | – | **143** | – | **180** | – |

Source: Authors' data collection based on the ACLED data set. Numbers of inhabitants are taken from CAPMAS (2016).

Notes: [a]The category "marginalized regions" covers marginalized Upper Egypt governorates (including Luxor). [b]The category "wealthier regions" covers wealthier Lower Egypt (excluding Cairo)

[10] The highest ranked governorates are Port Said, Suez, Cairo, Alexandria, and Damietta. Only in 2010 was Cairo replaced by Ismailia in the group of the top five ranks for the first time since 1995. This is partly explained by Ismailia's remarkable increase in the education index as a sub-index of the Human Development Index (EHDR 2010, p. 21).

[11] Among the 13 best-performing governorates, only Luxor, which is a very small governorate located in Upper Egypt, is listed at rank number 12. It performs slightly better than the Lower Egypt governorate Beheira (rank number 13) in the UNDP Report on Poverty in Egypt. However, this does not crucially influence our findings on the gap between Lower and Upper Egypt. Consequently, Luxor has been placed in the category of the lower performing Upper Egypt regions in following discussions.

protests took place plus another 180 protests in the government of Cairo, where another 9 million people live. Thus, a considerably higher number of protests was counted in the governorates of the non-marginalized Lower Egypt—even when Cairo is omitted. This is also mirrored in the protest actors themselves, who have most prominently been employees from the different economic sectors, who most frequently live in the urban centers of Lower Egypt. By contrast, Egyptians who live in the most impoverished areas of Upper Egypt suffer from lack of job opportunities due to a poor industrial infrastructure. According to our findings, they have not constituted relevant groups of protest actors since 2011.

However, when we relate the numbers of socioeconomic protests per governorate to regional population numbers, we see a different picture: A maximum of 1.34 protests annually per million inhabitants was counted in the marginalized governorates, but only up to 1.16 in the non-marginalized governorates, and only if Cairo is left out. Yet, the most protests per inhabitant were measured in Cairo as one of the urban and well-developed centers of the country (see Table 3.3).[12] If we compare the numbers of protests per year since 2011, we find that until 2014, protest numbers were on a similar level in the marginalized and wealthier regions (such as Cairo). Since 2014, protest numbers (absolute and relative to the number of inhabitants) in Lower Egypt have remained at a significantly higher level than in marginalized Upper Egypt, even though they have decreased compared to 2013.

## 3.6 Conclusion

Even though socioeconomic problems are still striking in both post-revolutionary contexts, we find that socioeconomic protest activities—in terms of actors, demands, tactics, and regional distribution—took different paths in Egypt and Tunisia. Generally speaking, socioeconomic protests have been much more relevant in Tunisia than in Egypt. First, Tunisia has faced significantly higher numbers of socioeconomic protests relative to its population. Second, socioeconomic protests in Tunisia have been shown to be more relevant when compared to the overall number of protests. In particular, since 2014, the number of socioeconomically motivated protests has steadily increased and finally even outnumbered those of "other" protests in 2016. In Egypt, in contrast, there have consistently

[12] Official population numbers are taken from the Statistical Yearbook (2016) of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) in Egypt. For further information, see CAPMAS (2016).

been much more non-socioeconomic protests than socioeconomic protests. After overall protests had peaked in 2013, the number of socioeconomic protests in Egypt has decreased even more since 2014. This decline arguably reflects the changing political environment after the military coup in 2013 and the rise in violent repression by the al-Sisi government.

However, it is important to note that even in Egypt socioeconomic protests *did occur* during the years after the 2011 uprisings, even if they did not reach a high level of political and societal relevance compared to non-socioeconomic contention. Whereas non-socioeconomic protests such as the anti-regime protests in summer 2013 led to the overthrow of the Morsi regime by military forces (Brown 2016, p. 25), socioeconomic protests did not result in observable changes in social and economic policies. Neither, as further outlined in the chapter by Nadine Abdalla (see Chap. 6, in this volume), were the independent trade unions able to reach political influence and organize systematic labor protests.

Since the differences in the role of socioeconomic protests in Egypt and Tunisia are puzzling—especially against the background of continuing economic stagnation, rising food prices, and persisting unemployment in both North African countries—this chapter looked in greater detail at the socioeconomic protests that have been organized since 2011.

Regarding the actors and their demands, we find that socioeconomic contention in Egypt was mainly driven by sector-specific labor protests asking for improvement of their working conditions. An exemption from this can be seen in the protests around the 2011 revolution, in which workers took to the streets as politicized individuals and not as part of an organized entity (see Beinin 2011, p. 194; Bishara 2014, p. 3). In Tunisia, the picture is different. Until 2014, most socioeconomic protests were staged by unspecified societal actors demanding fundamental changes and reforms to end the marginalization of certain regions. These protests mostly had the form of mass protests. Yet, since 2014, protest actors in Tunisia have become more diverse, and protests were increasingly composed of groups of employees from different economic sectors making sector-specific claims such as raising salaries or improving working conditions.

It is only in Tunisia that we find a shift toward combative tactics. Since 2014, when protest actors in Tunisia started to differentiate, disruptive forms of protest have become more frequent. At the same time, more conventional forms of protest such as (mass) demonstrations decreased. In Egypt, in contrast, demonstrations remained the most common type of action. This finding might be surprising in view of the changing political environment in Egypt: Increasing repression by the al-Sisi government since 2013 led to neither

more violent forms of protest nor to the contrary response among socioeconomic protesters. At the same time, it is remarkable that demonstrations were still held despite a higher degree of repression—particularly after a new anti-protest law had been issued in November 2013.

Significant differences also concern the geographical patterns of socioeconomic protest. In Tunisia, the marginalized south and interior regions have proven to be the most prominent protest scene since 2011. Thus, also in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, when protests first occurred in Sidi Bouzid in the Tunisian hinterland, socioeconomic protests primarily involved the marginalized governorates of the country. In Egypt, by contrast, socioeconomic protests were mostly organized in the comparatively "wealthier" governorates of "Lower Egypt." In both countries, however, a large number of protests were organized in the capital cities Tunis and Cairo.

This regional pattern matches our findings on protest actors and claims in the two countries: In Tunisia, where in 2011 groups of "unspecified societal actors" and "unions, political parties and protest alliances" in the marginalized regions made demands for fundamental change and economic reform, post-revolutionary protests were primarily staged in these marginalized regions of interior and southern Tunisia. Interestingly, the difference in protest numbers in the marginalized versus those in the wealthier regions became even more pronounced in the following years, when protesters started to cluster along group-specific issues. In this context, unemployed people became key protagonists driving protest waves in May 2015 and in January 2016 (see Chap. 8, in this volume).

In Egypt, where protest actors were already more heterogeneous in 2011, most socioeconomic protests—in absolute numbers as well as relative to the number of inhabitants—took part in Cairo and the governorates of Lower Egypt. Until 2014, protest numbers in the wealthier regions (without Cairo) were similar to those in the marginalized regions. Since 2014, protest numbers in the wealthier regions have outnumbered those in marginalized Upper Egypt. This does not seem much of a surprise, given our findings on protest actors and their claims. As shown, socioeconomic protests in Egypt were mostly staged by groups of employees from different economic sectors claiming higher wages and better working conditions.

In a study on the participants in the Arab uprisings, Beissinger et al. (2012) show that the revolution in Egypt has not been driven by a "cross-class coalition," as in the case of Tunisia, but mainly by people from the urban middle class. As our analysis demonstrates, these differences in the composition of protest groups have continued to shape socioeconomic protests in the years

that followed the revolutions. This continuity becomes even more evident against the background of protest events prior to the Arab uprisings:

As, for example, Amin Allal (2013), Laryssa Chomiak (2014), and Eric Gobe (2010) have shown, Tunisia had already experienced waves of protests during the last years of the Ben Ali regime. Most prominent examples are protests by the unemployed in front of the Gafsa mining basin in January 2008 (Allal 2013; Gobe 2010) and the Ras Jdir border protests in August 2010 (Allal 2013). In both protest episodes, young and unemployed Tunisians of the impoverished regions as well as workers who felt deprived were the primary actors (Allal 2013, pp. 187, 189). As is further analyzed by Samiha Hamdi and Irene Weipert-Fenner (see Chap. 8, in this volume), such protests by unemployed people in the Tunisian hinterland have continued to play a crucial role in Tunisia since the 2011 uprisings.

By contrast, Egypt was hit by a massive wave of workers' protests in the years before the 2011 uprisings (see Beinin 2009, 2011; Beinin and Duboc 2013), in which the unemployed did not play an active role. In December 2006, the biggest workers' strike was held in the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra, which is located in the Nile delta in Lower Egypt (Beinin and Duboc 2013, p. 218). In 2007 and 2008, the number of labor protests reached a peak of 614 and 609, respectively, actions per year (Beinin 2009, p. 450). These protests were initially limited to the textile industry but soon after also embraced every industrial sector as well as public service workers and professionals (Beinin 2009, p. 450). The protests primarily arose in the regions of Lower Egypt where people demanded their rights as employees.

In both countries, thus, the protesters and claims that had dominated socioeconomic protests prior to the Arab uprisings continued to shape protest dynamics in the years that followed the revolutions (2011–2016). Thus, our analysis shows a high degree of continuity in both cases.

Finally, there are also remarkable similarities between Egypt and Tunisia. In the two countries, the years between 2011 and 2016 have been characterized not by more or less continuous socioeconomic protests but rather by passing outbursts of socioeconomic discontent, most notably in Egypt in 2013 and in Tunisia in 2016. Also, there seems to be a certain convergence when it comes to actors and claims. Whereas in Tunisia broader protest alliances that dominated the years 2011 and 2012 were later replaced by individual protest groups representing specific economic sectors who were demonstrating in their own right, Egypt throughout the years was characterized by a rather fragmented landscape of issue- and sector-specific socioeconomic protests.

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