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## Will the Current Uprisings in North Africa Lead to Democracy or Theocracy?

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### Fokus

With the departure of Ben Ali – Tunis president – on 14 January 2011 and subsequent resignation of Mubarak – Egyptian president – on 11 February 2011, the debate at the moment rotates around whether these changes will produce democracy, transparency, and equitable prosperity or whether they will only reproduce the same systems in different forms. In spite of the availability of genuine reasons not to entirely dismiss a relapse into different kinds of dictatorships, the odds favoring the optimistic projections seem to outweigh the pessimistic camp.

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To begin from the last, many experts on the region argue that the 1979 Iranian revolution was tactically, ideologically, and strategically different from the current uprisings in the Northern Africa. In Iran, although the youths and other leftist secular democratic forces played an overwhelming role in ousting the Shah regime, from the outset, the architects behind the anti-Shah movement were religious figures driven by religious zeal that was noticeable from the banners, communiqués and slogans of their revolution. In stark contrast, the current popular uprisings in the Northern African states are led by ordinary youths through digital technology and up till now, the slogans and banners on the streets, and the Facebook messages and tweets online, hint neither religious orientation nor anti-western sentiments. On the contrary, what we have been witnessing on the streets and online are voices friendly and consistent with liberal democratic values. For those who invoke a scenario in which the well-established radical religious groups – Muslim Brotherhood, for instance – hijack these upheavals to their own ends and turn these countries into theocratic states, even though such groups are most likely to play a significant role in any post-revolutions democratic dispensations, it is most unlikely that they will be the dominant ones. Moreover, given the role of the youths in these uprisings, it will be unaffordable for any dominant political party to alienate the very youths that have stirred and inspired the revolutions. In fact, experts on such radical groups have hailed the current uprisings as a counter-discourse to change-through-violence discourse that the radical groups have been preaching. So, instead of single thesis – the radicals taking over the revolutions, the antithesis – the revolutions converting the radicals – could also be true. In a nutshell, the outcome of the current popular uprisings in the Northern African States will largely depend on the kind of engagement the concerned actors will chose to pursue and the interplay between multiple variables. However, whatever direction the events take, one fundamental democratic foundation appears to be predictable – that is, it is most unlikely that any single ruler will reign over these countries again for decades.

### Verantwortung

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