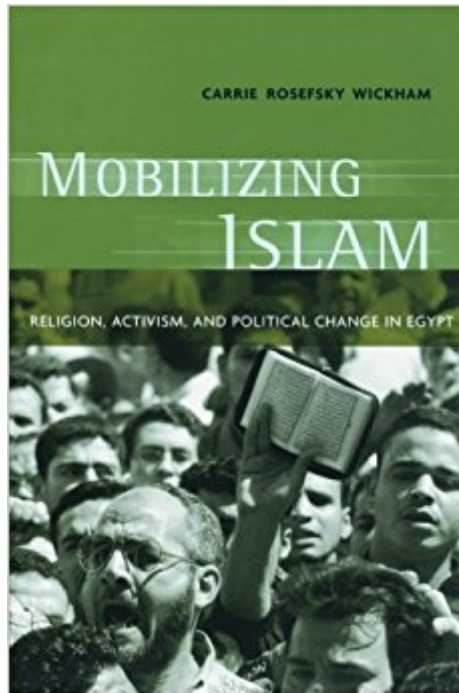




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Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism And Political Change In Egypt



Synopsis

Mobilizing Islam explores how and why Islamic groups succeeded in galvanizing educated youth into politics under the shadow of Egypt's authoritarian state, offering important and surprising answers to a series of pressing questions. Under what conditions does mobilization by opposition groups become possible in authoritarian settings? Why did Islamist groups have more success attracting recruits and overcoming governmental restraints than their secular rivals? And finally, how can Islamist mobilization contribute to broader and more enduring forms of political change throughout the Muslim world? Moving beyond the simplistic accounts of "Islamic fundamentalism" offered by much of the Western media, Mobilizing Islam offers a balanced and persuasive explanation of the Islamic movement's dramatic growth in the world's largest Arab state.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Intellectually ambitious. (Middle East Journal) Mobilizing Islam is easily one of the best books on Islamic activism. Wickham's use of social movement theory and remarkable fieldwork produced a book that speaks to area specialists and students of contentious politics alike. Amidst the onslaught of ill-informed books on Islam in the post-September 11 period, Wickham provides a refreshing reminder that there is rigorous scholarship on Islamic activism. (Quintan Wiktorowicz Perspectives on Politics) The book is one of the best texts available for studying a major Islamic political movement in its proper context. (Kristin Tassin Arab Studies Journal) This book has at least four great strengths... clarity... revives interest... effectively focused... content has enormous appeal. (Mohamed El Sayed Said Journal of Islamic Studies)

The book explains how Islamist groups captured the hearts and minds of educated youth in Egypt. It focuses on the first twelve years of Hosni Mubarak's presidency, from 1981 to 1993, the period when participation in the movement reached its peak and before a wave of repression brought it to an abrupt end.

This book is an excellent account of the rise of the most important opposition movement in Egypt since the 1952 revolution. While its discussion of the last 8 years is unfortunately a bit truncated, this is probably one of the best texts out there to study a major Islamic political movement in its proper context. What the author successfully does is not only take the study of social movements outside of its standard Western milieu, but also look at the critical role ideology plays in mobilizing particular segments of the population to support and join a (r)evolutionary movement. While political economy explanations can show the context that leads to the creation of a potential audience for a message of social justice and transformation of society from below, it doesn't explain why people would do so when the costs of such action in an authoritarian country are so high. Usually survival is the paramount concern of most in society outside the coopted elite, unless an opportunity for change occurs. But such was not the case in Egypt in the 1970s and 80s, not one sufficiently great in and of itself anyway, to mobilize the disaffected semi elite who did join and became the backbone of the Brotherhood. What was needed also was a message of hope, social justice, and fairness, and that message was supplied by moderate political Islam. The opportunity of course was facilitated by the traditional failure not only of the state's own neopopulist economic, social, and educational policies, but also of the main other opposition socialist movements. Moderate political Islam provided the answer for many. It should be noted that this book, unlike many other studies of Egyptian political Islam by authors like Barry Rubin and Mary Anne Weaver, does not focus on the more violent offshoots of the Brotherhood, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and Al Qaeda. Ergo this is not a book about terrorism. But that's kind of the point, this shows the fact the even now (at least before 9/11) mainstream political Islam in most Moslem nations in the Middle East and beyond are quite moderate and while wanting to create a Moslem state in the long run (i.e. over decades) are willing to do so from below. Wickham quotes a female activist in the book who says precisely that, i.e. that by teaching children about the religion, its values, and goals, as well as their mothers and fathers, that over time this will help build support for the movement until it grows to a large enough popular majority to overtake the state peacefully. This could be called revolutionary in the sense that the long term goal is change of the state and society, but it is neither a top down, nor militant movement,

but rather one that seeks to achieve its goals at the ballot box, in the mosques, schools, health care centers, sports clubs, newstands, in professional associations, and such rather than with weapons. It therefore very much is a study of a movement in a major Moslem nation that joins a growing list of outstanding works in English on the subject from other countries such as Jenny White's "Islamist Mobilization in Turkey" about Turkey's AK party, which recently came to power and Robert W. Hefner's "Civil Islam" about Indonesia's Nhladatul Ulama of former President Abdurahman Wahid. If you want to understand what mainstream political islam stands for and is seeking to achieve, in the most important Arab nation at that, this is probably the most important book you could read.

Too often Islam as a comprehensive system of life is overshadowed by the comparatively few but dangerous terrorist individuals and organizations. Though I am not a Muslim, I do think that the Western perceptions toward Islam and Islamism is excessively biased and near-sighted. And more often than not, people are hung up on analyzing the radical extremist aspects of Islamism, or the politics of the movement. This excellent book by Rosefsky Wickham does not provide answers to the whole notion of Islam being 'opposed' to the West, or the debate about whether Islamic countries can become democratized 'like us'. It is more focused on the deeper, underlying social movements that propel Islamism in Egypt, the people/organization/methods through which the religious movement has gained ground. She also examines how this change takes place, via what she calls "transvaluation". It's a nice departure made from the conventional obsession with the violence and the need to 'save' the Muslims under Islamic autocrats. The narrative she provides does not use the normal political science jargon and is an enjoyable academic read. I found it quite refreshing.

I am an avid reader of books about religion and political science, and am most concerned with the impact of religion on a nation's policies and politics. Dr. Wickham's book is the most interesting and profound book on modern Islam I have read. She has the ability to allow the reader to understand Islam from the inside out and therefore to make sense of what we Westerners often feel is not logical. The author held my attention from beginning to end with a style that was both interesting and informative. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in learning more about Islam and its impact on the United States and the world today.

Good historical perspective of the time.

I concur with the other reviewers - a thorough and interesting book.

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