

Book review: *Egyptian Students and Politics beyond Protest* by Farah Ramzy

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Egyptian Students and Politics Beyond Protest

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In the book *Egyptian Students and Politics beyond Protest*, Farah Ramzy argues that the study of student politics should go beyond the study of protest and traditional activism. Instead, the author sheds light on the broader transformation of higher education under neoliberalism's shifting political landscape in post-2011 Egypt. In doing so, the author introduces a dynamic framework composed of three interrelated dimensions: first, a subjective dimension (focusing on how students individually and collectively frame what they see in their daily lives as political or apolitical); second, collective interactions (exploring how students debate, negotiate, and redefine what counts as political engagement); and third, objective structures (how broader institutional and social structures shape and constrain political possibilities). Through this framework, the author challenges the dichotomy between endogenous mobilization, where students address issues related to their own conditions, and exogenous mobilization, which concerns broader political issues. The author dismisses this distinction as oversimplification, arguing that what counts as political depends on how groups frame their demands.

The author identifies three forms of student organization: student activities (SAs), focused on social, cultural and professional development; student movements, explicitly political groups varying in scope and ideological affiliation; and student unions (SUs), state recognized bodies functioning as official representatives of students within universities. The author utilizes this distinction in organizing the book discussion.

Chapter 1 traces the historical evolution of student politics, showing shifts from leaders of social and political change to periods of repression and resurgence, placing it in the historical

context of nation state construction. Chapter 2 shows how the rise of SAs mirrored the neoliberal shift through the 1990s, and although not openly political, SAs helped students build networks and skills that supported informal politicization and prepared them for participation in the 2011 revolution. Chapter 3 examines post-2011 mobilizations and how the different student movements at the time navigated shifting political constraints. Chapter 4 examines the evolving role of the SUs as spaces of political competition, emphasizing the blurry boundaries between SUs and partisan student movements. Chapter 5 shifts the attention to students' individual trajectories, highlighting the differences between pre- and post-revolution students. Chapter 6 highlights how the post-2013 regime combined hard and soft repression to neutralize political opposition among students and how its youth policies aimed to create obedient, depoliticized, and neoliberal-minded students.

The author's methodology relied on deep access to student networks and events, leading to snowball sampling that brought together diverse groups of students across Cairo and beyond, combining that with close observations of activism as it unfolded. The book's main strength lies in the author's decision to expand beyond protests and conventional activism; while these forms of engagement receive considerable attention and analysis, they are situated within a broader context of a neoliberal shift and its effect on student lives and the structure of higher education. Building on this, the author's categorization of the student organization allowed her to examine the process of politicization and depoliticization across different arenas of students' lives while still showing how these arenas interact and influence each other. Furthermore, the book is an important documentation of various student actors, their experiences and political imagination—a group that is usually understudied. Moreover, the book goes beyond student politics and captures the broader social and political dynamics of the 2011 revolution. Overall, the work contributes significantly to the study of student politics and youth engagement in post-2011 Egypt.