

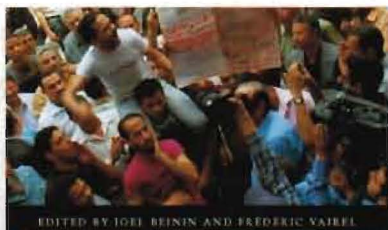
## BOOK REVIEW

# Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa

edited by Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, US, 2011; 308 pp; pb \$24.95)

When massive social uprisings shook Tunisia and Egypt in late 2010 and early 2011, and then quickly toppled those countries' entrenched autocracies, much of the world looked on in surprise and wonder. Even many people in North Africa and the Middle East — long accustomed to seeing the slightest sign of defiance snuffed out by severe repression — did not expect that those protests would blossom into popular revolutions. But for close observers, including the contributors to *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, it was becoming increasingly evident in recent years that something was brewing in the region, and that despite the enormous obstacles to public expression, aggrieved sectors of the population were finding ways to organize, make connections and begin pressing for change. The bulk of the research and writing for this volume was completed before the upheavals of the "Arab Spring," and the editors modestly admit that nothing in the book "predicts the insurrectionary movements that erupted in Tunisia and Egypt." But since the book was not yet at press, they were able to add an afterword on the Tunisian and Egyptian events.

Though most of them were writing before the recent dramatic events, the book's contributors nevertheless revealed a rich array of mobilizations that challenged the old simplistic images of a region that was either politically static or



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prone to irrational bouts of anti-Western terrorism. The case studies of Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Turkey show that workers, unemployed professionals, rural poor, women, relatives of political victims and others were actively exploring very inventive ways of making their voices heard. The studies explicitly address some of the main academic theories of social movements — which generally have been developed in and applied to more industrialized societies in the North — and suggest how those theories work or fall short. A few, especially Beinin's own analysis of Egyptian labour unrest, reinforce an old adage: while revolutions may rarely be predictable, they usually are preceded by foreshocks, even if those precursors may be fully appreciated only in hindsight. 🌍

— Ernest Harsch