



Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World: The Dynamics of Activism (Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics)

Francesco Cavatorta, Vincent Durac

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The transition paradigm has traditionally viewed civil society activism as an essential condition for the establishment of democracy. The democracy promotion strategies of Western policy-makers have, therefore, been based on strengthening civil society in authoritarian settings in order to support the development of social capital -to challenge undemocratic regimes.

This book questions the validity of the link between an active associational life and democratization. It examines civil society in the Arab world in order to illustrate how authoritarian constraints structure civil society dynamics in the region in ways that hinder transition to democracy. Building on innovative theoretical work and drawing on empirical data from extensive fieldwork in the region, this study demonstrates how the activism of civil society in five different Arab countries strengthens rather than weakens authoritarian practices and rule. Through an analysis of the specific legal and political constraints on associational life, and the impact of these on relations between different civic groups, and between associations and state authorities, the book demonstrates that the claim that civil society plays a positive role in processes of democratic transformation is highly questionable.

Offering a broad and alternative vision of the state of civil society in the region, this book will be an important contribution to studies on Middle Eastern politics, democratization and civil society activism.

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