

Book Review

Private Voluntary Organizations in Egypt: Islamic Development, Private Initiative, and State Control

Denis J. Sullivan. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1994.

Over the past five years or so, the considerable western interest in the role played by nongovernmental voluntary associations in Egypt has been reflected in a growing English-language literature on the subject. Researchers tackle the question from a range of perspectives.

One approach, relatively state-centered and legalistic, focuses on how Cairo manages to control, co-opt, or "corporatize" autonomous organizations including labor and professional syndicates, agricultural and other cooperatives, and private not-for-profit groups. The principle tool for reining in private voluntary and community associations is the notorious Law 32 of 1964. Under Law 32, the Ministry of Social Affairs can interfere directly in all aspect of associational life—articulation of goals, election of officers, pursuit of projects, allocation of funds, and so on. Among the well-known secular nonprofit groups with international linkages that have been denied licenses from the Ministry are the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights and the Arab Women's Solidarity Association. In this legal and policy milieu, many scholars and human rights activists argue that no registered association in Egypt can properly be deemed "nongovernmental." Other analysts, however, accept Cairo's position that the threat of radical Islam justifies authoritarian restrictions on independent organizations.

The second group of studies is inspired partly by these concerns over the radicalization of Islamist associations. Scholars familiar with social, economic, and political circumstances in the Nile Valley usually try to counteract hysterical mass media portraits of "Muslim terrorists" with inquiries into the structure, function, membership, activities, and ideologies of a range of Islamist institutions including welfare and charitable associations. The particular strength of politicized Islam in the 1990s, this research suggests, rests on the capacity of Islamist charities to provide a crucial layer of social services to a burgeoning, underemployed, increasingly impoverished population. Opinion is divided, however, on the question of whether this circumstance favors containment and stability or frustration and insurrection.

A third set of studies, sometimes overlooked by scholars, comes from within the Cairo-based donor community, the "development practitioners"

working with bilateral, multilateral, and nongovernmental assistance agencies. Advisors and financiers of development projects produce policy-oriented studies explicitly directed to the stated overall goals of privatization, sociopolitical stability, and meeting basic human needs. Such concerns have inspired voluminous studies of what development practitioners call PVOs and NGOs (private voluntary or nongovernmental organizations), seen as autonomous grassroots self-help institutions whose projects agree with the largest donors' concerns for rapid economic adjustment coupled with gradual political reform. According to the many surveys commissioned by prospective donors, Egypt's 14,000 legally registered NGOs and PVOs—Muslim and Coptic, local and national, specialized and communitywide—may help decentralize, privatize, and rationalize welfare activities.

Drawing on his extensive interviews, reports to international development agencies, and a range of published materials to construct dozens of minicase studies of Egyptian PVOs and NGOs, Sullivan addresses all three perspectives and contributes something to each. Law 32 is shown to stifle local initiative, centralize authority, and inhibit self-reliance in ways that are contrary to the regime's own interest and stated policies. Organizations whose names have an Islamist ring differ from Coptic associations mainly in that the latter have been well-funded by western churches and governments throughout this century. Religious and secular associations often offer parallel services. In response to broader debates about the relationship of the Egyptian state to Islamist organizations, Sullivan argues for reform of Law 32 in ways that allow various organizations greater autonomy.

The book's principal audience, however, is the donor community whose language, propensity for acronym, and frame of reference Sullivan embraces. The ultimate objective of self-reliance, always articulated (unironically) by donors, is a given. "Small is beautiful," also a popular notion in the donor community, is offered as a hypothesis. The well-documented narrative case studies of PVOs and NGOs—among them, Community Development Associations (CDAs), the Young Entrepreneurs Society (YES), the Young Men's Muslims Association (YMMA), the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), and the Mustafa Mahmud Association—include a policymaker's appraisal of the development potential of each. Despite a legal environment that imposes certain shapes and activities, the associations profiled show wide variation and considerable ingenuity. In providing essential services that the government can no longer afford to provide, they help cushion the most vulnerable groups in society from the deleterious effects of structural adjustment and thus help ward off social upheaval. The explicit argument offered in the conclusion is a plea for international funding for small-scale, community-oriented groups regardless of their religiosity or secularism. Criticisms of profiteering from NGOs or foreign aid or of the trendiness of PVOs, and NGOs among donors are mentioned as factors policymakers may want to keep in mind.

Sullivan's book is thus "must" reading for development practitioners. Those in the Cairo donor community, especially, will find it accessible,

impeccably researched, thorough, hard-hitting, and full of clear and direct policy recommendations. It will, moreover, serve as a reference for anyone studying the role of nongovernmental organizations or indeed of foreign donors and international NGOs in Egypt.

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Book Review

The Challenges of Islam in the Islamic Republic

James Brune, *Islam and the Islamic Republic: The
 Islamic Republic*

James Brune's book is a critical study of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is a well-written, well-researched, and well-organized work that provides a comprehensive overview of the Islamic Republic's political, social, and economic development. The book is divided into three main parts: the first part discusses the Islamic Republic's political system, the second part discusses its social and economic development, and the third part discusses its foreign policy. The book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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