

## **Understanding Islamism and Authoritarianism through the Footsteps of Women's Islamic Mobilizations in Egypt (2000-2014)**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the women's Islamic mobilizations' (WIM's) experiences of Islamism, feminism and authoritarianism during the last decade in Egypt. Egypt has undergone disrupted waves of liberalization, revolution, and Islamization during the last decade that effected women's mobilizations directly. In contrast to the mainstream literature on WIM's which focuses on religious women's agency or Islam's liberating potential for women, I argue that *social movement approach* provides a fruitful framework to understand the WIM's discursive and organizational positions and how they operate in different contexts. I argue that three main contextual factors are defining how WIM's get mobilized; define priority issues and what kind of discourses they use: (1) source and content of legislation, particularly the family law (secular vs. Islamic); (2) level of acceptance of religious expression in public, (3) level of openness of the democratic space. The paper comparatively analyzes the perspectives and activities of three main types of independent WIM's, namely Islamic feminists, Islamist women and secular women who use religious discourse. Secondly, it presents a detailed case study on the arguments and efforts to reform the Personal Status Law of the WIM's in Egypt.

I found out that the source of legislation and the openness of the democratic space are the most relevant factors that impact WIM's in Egypt. I confirm that the thesis of Islamization of women's rights discourse in Egypt holds true in the last decade, but only in the field of Personal Status Law and its underlying theory. For other pressing issues like sexual harassment, secular feminist discourses have been dominant. The revolution in 2011 increased both WIM's and feminists' discursive opportunities and mobilization space. While, the military intervention in 2013 limited visibly the mobilization and organization of both WIM's and feminists, the discursive gains seem to stay for both movements. Nevertheless, regardless of the similar contextual factors, we see divisions within WIM's, where Islamic feminists focus on theoretical production of Islamic feminism (and have just initiated public outreach since 2010); Islamist women have involved in both theoretical and community activism but not with a priority of women's rights; while secular women who use religious discourse have been the most proactive in terms of advocacy and lobbying for women's rights with close contacts to the state and Al-Azhar. The findings are based on field research and personal interviews done in Cairo in 2014.