



Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria (Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and I)

Laurie Brand

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Until the recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, the resilience of authoritarian regimes seemed a fundamental feature of regional politics. While economic, political, and internal security policies are most often considered in discussions of regime maintenance, Laurie Brand introduces a new factor, that of national narratives. Portrayals of a country's founding, identity, and bases of unity can be a powerful strategy in sustaining a ruling elite. Brand argues that such official stories, which are used to reinforce the right to rule, justify policies, or combat opponents, deserve careful exploration if we are to understand the full range of tools available to respond to crises that threaten a leadership's hold on power.

Brand examines more than six decades of political, economic, and military challenges in two of North Africa's largest countries: Egypt and Algeria. Through a careful analysis of various texts—history and religion textbooks, constitutions, national charters, and presidential speeches—*Official Stories* demonstrates how leaderships have attempted to reconfigure narratives to confront challenges to their power. Brand's account also demonstrates how leaderships may miscalculate, thereby setting in motion opposition forces beyond their control.

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