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EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE
FIELD GUIDE

Egypt

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the decisive cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 introduces "Culture General," the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

NOTE: While regionally, Egypt is assigned to USCENTCOM, geographically and culturally, it belongs to North Africa.

Part 2 presents "Culture Specific" Egypt, focusing on unique cultural features of Egyptian society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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ECFG Egypt

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local

nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated

market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.

As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

12 Domains of Culture

Family and Kinship
Aesthetics and Recreation
Religion and Spirituality
Learning and Knowledge
Sex and Gender
Sustenance and Health
Political and Social Relations
Language and Communication
Economics and Resources
Technology and Material
Time and Space
History and Myth

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This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of

their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the
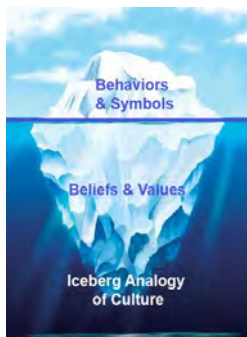
submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth
History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and ethnic

boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles.

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The "golden age" of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the ǃKung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai, along with some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.

Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective "national" identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as "tribalism."

This "class versus descent" scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote "greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples" by building partnerships in all segments of "civil society."

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the

African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed their worldview through their indigenous religions.

Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity.

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions. The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through

sickness, death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

4. Family and Kinship
The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families.

Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.

First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered

over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.

These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced. Females shared in farming while

continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of singles parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

6. Language and Communication
Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is


defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to

adopt multilingual practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional "indigenous" languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups
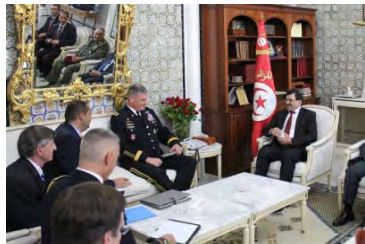
continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their "release" from colonial rule and to preserve a sense of indigenous identity.

While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also

hamper progress. According to 2023 statistics, about 100 million African children and youth were out of school, of which 35 million were of primary school age.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and

style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa, recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.

Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly "white" game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture "Invictus," exemplifying

how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.

Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world's dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World

Championships, and there is also a growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 18% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 68% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 95% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.

These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 65% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to safe drinking water, water-born bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.

Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of fastest growing regions in the world.

Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.

International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Egyptian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Egypt's long and complex history includes periods of both independent regional prominence and foreign domination. The birthplace of an ancient culture famous for its large-scale monuments and fine art, Egypt was subsequently invaded and conquered by Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Ottoman Turks, and Europeans. After a 1952 revolution toppled a British-created monarchy, a series of authoritarian leaders supported by the military maintained tight control for decades. After a brief democratic interlude sparked by the 2011 "Arab Spring," a military coup in 2013 returned the country to authoritarianism.

Early History

Archaeological finds indicate that early humans inhabited the region of present-day Egypt some 250,000 years ago. Around 8000 BC, inhabitants formed semi-permanent settlements, farming a few crops and making pottery. The region comprised lush landscapes until desertification changed the terrain around 6,000 years ago. Residents then began to congregate along the banks of the Nile River, where annual flooding provided fertile soil. Over time, settlements concentrated in two regions: Upper Egypt (in the South) and Lower Egypt (comprising the Nile Delta to the north). Sometime after 4000 BC, a form of early hieroglyphics (a system of writing) emerged, signaling the beginning of ancient Egyptian culture.

Ancient Egypt

According to legend, King Menes united the communities of Upper and Lower Egypt around 3000 BC. While the details of his

reign are disputed, scholars view King Menes as the first in a royal line that lasted for 31 dynasties and some 3,000 years. Ancient Egyptian history divides into three "kingdoms" or eras separated by periods of internal strife or foreign invasion.

Old Kingdom: The earliest Kings established their capital in Lower Egypt at the city of Memphis. Here, rulers managed their domains, levied taxes, constructed increasingly complex tombs to hold the mummified remains of the elite, and erected temples to an array of deities (see *Religion and Spirituality*). As the link between the human world and the realm of the gods, the Kings (later known as Pharaohs) strove to preserve the divine order (***maat***) (see *Religion and Spirituality*). This early period was characterized by the construction of monumental structures that exist today, notably the pyramids of Giza (tombs for fourth dynasty kings) and the Great Sphinx. Internal rivalries caused the Old Kingdom to end around 2100 BC.

Middle Kingdom: The Middle Kingdom began around 2050 BC, when King Mentuhotep II defeated several local chiefs, reunified Upper and Lower Egypt, and established his own dynasty. Subsequent Kings expanded their control southwards into Nubia (in present-day Sudan) and the Levant (comprising the modern-day territories of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria). Besides constructing elaborate temples and memorials, Kings built irrigation systems that significantly increased agricultural output. Culturally, the Middle Kingdom was a golden age of ancient Egyptian art, architecture, and literature. This period ended around 1650 BC, when foreigners from the Levant known as the Hyksos took control. Their presence in Egypt, through either a military invasion or as the result of generations of immigration, brought new technology and forced native rulers to retreat to the city of Thebes (present-day Luxor) in Upper Egypt.

New Kingdom: The New Kingdom began around 1550 BC, when King Ahmose expelled the Hyksos. From Thebes, King

Ahmose consolidated his rule by modernizing the Army and asserting control over local rivals. Over subsequent centuries, Egypt retook control of Nubia and territories in the Levant, achieving significant regional influence and becoming a rival to other prominent ancient kingdoms, notably Assyria and Babylon. Many well-known Kings and Pharaohs trace to the New

Kingdom, notably Hatshepsut (a woman who ruled for 20 years as King), Akhenaten (who unsuccessfully attempted religious reform), Tutankhamun (who achieved worldwide fame after the discovery of his tomb in 1922), and Ramses II (a prolific builder who might be the Pharaoh mentioned in the Bible's Old Testament story of Exodus).

Weakened by military defeats and famines, the New Kingdom collapsed around 1170 BC. For the next 700 years, various Libyan, Nubian, and Persian dynasties divided and ruled Egypt. While most of these foreign rulers adopted the title "Pharaoh" and some aspects of Egyptian culture, they lacked the resources to pursue the grand construction projects of their predecessors. Aside from a brief period between 400-343 BC, Egypt would not be ruled by an ethnic Arab Egyptian until 1952.

Greek Ptolemaic Period
In 332 BC, Alexander the Great of Macedonia defeated the Persians and was named Pharaoh. Following Alexander's 323 BC death, the territories he had conquered were split among three of his generals, with Egypt going to his childhood friend Ptolemy. The rulers of the subsequent 300 year-long Ptolemaic period maintained many traditions of the already ancient Egyptian Pharaohs. Yet, the infusion of Greek culture, philosophy, language, medicine, and art resulted in a cultural blossoming. The new capital of Alexandria on the shores of the Mediterranean in Lower Egypt became a cosmopolitan city that attracted numerous Greek immigrants. A new class of Greco-Egyptian elites established the famed Library of Alexandria and

implemented a centralized bureaucracy that controlled almost every aspect of the economy. Improvements in agriculture and taxation reforms funded art, architecture, and military projects, giving Egypt prominence in the Mediterranean world.

Roman Invasion

Meanwhile, the Romans had begun to build their empire in present-day central Italy. By about 270 BC, Rome was expanding beyond the Italian peninsula and through the Mediterranean. While Rome and Egypt initially had friendly relations, Rome's growth soon caused tensions. Sensing an opportunity to gain an advantage when Rome fell into civil war, Egypt's Queen Cleopatra intervened, lending her support to one faction.

However, that side was defeated, and as punishment, Rome invaded Egypt in 30 BC, quickly conquering and adding the region to its growing empire. The Romans controlled Egypt for the next 300 years. The existing Greco-Egyptian culture largely continued, with the Romans focused on exploiting Egypt's resources. By the rule of Emperor Tiberius in 14 AD, Egypt provided the Roman Empire with a third of its food supply, alongside the stone for Roman monuments and government buildings. During this period, Christianity began to spread through Egypt, and the Egyptian Christian Church (known as the Coptic Church) was established by St. Mark the Evangelist around 57 AD (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

In 285, the Roman Emperor reorganized his holdings into western and eastern divisions, and in 395, the split between the western Roman and Eastern (Byzantine) Empires became permanent, with the Byzantines ruling Egypt from their capital at Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). During this period, the Coptic Church clashed with its Byzantine counterpart over theology. Subsequently, increasingly strict church Patriarchs (heads of the Coptic Church) encouraged the destruction of

ancient temples that they deemed heretical, effectively erasing over 3,000 years of ancient Egyptian religion and culture.

Arab Invasions

By the mid-6th century, Byzantine control of Egypt had weakened due to internal conflict. At the same time, a new religion, Islam, was gaining converts in the Arabian Peninsula (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Soon, Muslim Arab warriors sought expansion into the eastern Mediterranean, defeating the Byzantines in a series of key battles in the Levant before entering Egypt in 641. In subsequent centuries, rival Islamic dynasties competed for control of the **ummah** (community of Muslim believers) (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Ruling from Damascus (present-day capital of Syria), the Sunni Umayyad dynasty took control in 661, but internal conflict and economic decline soon weakened them. While the Umayyads did not seek to convert the local population or impose Arab culture, Egypt's eventual shift to an Arabic-speaking and Muslim-majority population began during this period. In 750, the Sunni Abbasid dynasty, who ruled from Baghdad (present-day capital of Iraq), overthrew the Umayyads. The Abbasid dynasty was also plagued by internal divisions and soon began to lose their hold on Egypt.

In 969, the Abbasids were defeated by the Shi'a Fatimid dynasty, a collection of Libyan **Amazighen** (formerly known as Berber) tribes (see *Political and Social Relations*). Moving into Egypt, the Fatimids established the city of al-Quahira (Cairo) and grew Mediterranean trade by expanding into the Levant. In 1095, the Pope, leader of the Roman Catholic Church, declared a series of religious crusades to capture territories in the Levant. These attacks weakened Fatimid control of the region and provided an opening for a new power, the Sunni Seljuk Turks, who ousted the Fatimids from Egypt in 1171.

The Seljuk Turks returned Egypt to Sunni Islam, and with the founding of their Ayyubid dynasty, increased Cairo's

prominence. Nevertheless, Ayyubid rule proved short-lived, as the Seljuk Turks' reliance on *Mamluks* (enslaved warriors) to rule their territories led to factionalism and instability. When Mongol invaders from central Asia threatened the Levant, the Ayyubids dispatched the Mamluks to halt the Mongol expansion and expel the remaining European crusaders. Their success in both missions granted the Mamluks credibility as defenders of Islam. Upon returning to Egypt, the Mamluks revolted against their Ayyubid rulers and established their own dynasty in 1250.

Mamluk Control

The Mamluks would rule Egypt and parts of the Levant for some 250 years. However, their dependence on the continued influx of enslaved soldiers led to infighting, and well-defined dynasties were never established. Nevertheless, a boom in trade with Europe brought great wealth for the Mamluks and initiated a golden period for Islamic art in the region. However, during the latter part of the Mamluk era, significant population reduction resulted due to successive epidemics of the bubonic plague. First arriving in Egypt in 1347, the disease brought widespread devastation and remained a threat until the 19th century.

Ottoman Rule

Meanwhile, to the north, the Byzantine Empire had been steadily weakening and losing territory. By the mid-14th century, the Ottoman Turks were the region's rising power, and in 1453, they besieged and captured the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire. In 1517, the Ottomans defeated the Mamluks, who were weakened from infighting, and incorporated Egypt into their growing empire.

Ruling Egypt as 1 of 32 provinces, the Ottomans imposed harsh taxes, looted Egyptian mosques and palaces, and introduced Turkish as the administrative language. While surviving Mamluk elites lost their status, life remained virtually unchanged for most

Egyptian peasants. As it had for the Romans, Egypt was forced to supply the Ottoman Empire with its resources, particularly its agricultural products. After local ***beys*** (military commanders descended from Mamluk fighters) rebelled in 1631, Ottoman rule in Egypt depended on an uneasy balance of power between local leaders and the Ottoman Sultan's appointed Governor. This system continued largely uninterrupted for the next 167 years.

Brief French Occupation: Seeking to gain territories to challenge the British Empire, Napoleon Bonaparte, the future Emperor of France, invaded in 1798. Initial goodwill between the French and Egyptians quickly declined, and the military occupation provoked a series of violent revolts against the French troops. As a result, Napoleon soon withdrew, and all remaining French forces evacuated by 1801. Despite its brevity, the French occupation, particularly Napoleon's policy of encouraging European scholars to study Egypt, spurred outside interest in the region. One notable outcome of this period was a French scholar's deciphering of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics in 1822.

Muhammed Ali and Modernization: To reassert their control of Egypt, the Ottomans dispatched an armed contingent led by Albanian-born Muhammed Ali. Ali successfully formed local alliances and soon assumed the position of Ottoman Governor of Egypt. To further ensure his authority, Ali massacred certain Mamluk descendants in 1811, thereby eliminating the possibility of rebellion among Egypt's former ruling class. Ali also modernized Egypt, establishing a state-of-the-art Army and Navy, increasing trade with Europe, and constructing munitions and textile factories. These efforts strengthened Ali's regional influence, allowing him to extend his authority into the Arabian Peninsula and Sudan.

Ali's expansionist efforts eventually reached the Ottomans' doorstep in present-day Turkey. In 1831, when Ali was poised to

take Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), the Ottomans conceded, granting Ali hereditary rule of Egypt and Sudan in exchange for the withdrawal of Ali's forces. This concession gave Ali an unprecedented level of autonomy within the Ottoman Empire.

Debt and Foreign Influence: In subsequent decades, several of Muhammed Ali's descendants continued his modernization efforts. Ali's grandson, Ismail Pasha, borrowed large sums to fund largescale public works programs. The most ambitious of these projects was the Suez Canal, constructed to connect the Red and Mediterranean seas and completed in 1869. However, when Ismail Pasha was unable to pay his debts, the British and French intervened to manage the Egyptian economy in 1876. The Europeans' economic policies caused hardships among the lower classes and provoked a series of riots. Shortly after Ismail Pasha's son, Tawfiq Pasha, implemented nationalist reforms to calm the situation, the British invaded in 1882.

British Control: For the next 4 decades, the British largely controlled Egypt as an unofficial colony. While they modernized Egypt's bureaucracy and agricultural sectors, they did little to support industrialization or educate its populace, reserving most administrative positions for Europeans.

In 1914, World War I broke out between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allies (the US, Britain, France, and Russia, among others), placing the Ottomans and Britain on opposing sides. As a result, the British formally severed all ties between Egypt and the Ottomans and declared Egypt a British protectorate. Unsatisfied with this arrangement, Egyptians gathered in mass protests to demand independence, prompting the British to dissolve the protectorate in 1919.

Independence as a Parliamentary Monarchy

In 1922, the British declared Egypt an independent parliamentary monarchy. The then-Egyptian leader, the ninth ruler in Muhammad Ali's dynasty, became King as Fuad I of Egypt. While Egypt was nominally independent, the British maintained an armed presence in the country, continued to restrict most civil service positions to Europeans, and retained a special judicial system for foreigners. In subsequent years, the King and the British competed for ultimate control.

Amidst this power struggle arose new political movements opposed to both the monarchy and British interference. For example, groups such as the nationalist *Wafd* party and the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood highlighted Egypt's political inequalities and advocated for full sovereignty.

World War II (WWII): The 1939 outbreak of WWII – fought between the Axis powers (Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan) and the Allies (Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union, among others) – increased the foreign presence in Egypt, with the country hosting half a million Allied troops over the course of the conflict. Further, Egypt became the site of notable battles fought to gain control of North Africa and the Suez Canal. The Allies repulsed an invasion attempt from Italian troops via Libya in 1940. Yet, when German troops under Gen Erwin Rommel reached the Egyptian border in 1941, anti-colonial protests broke out in Cairo, with protestors voicing support for the Germans. Gen Rommel's troops advanced within 60 mi of Alexandria but were stopped at El Alamein pass. In late 1942, the British forced the undersupplied German troops to retreat permanently.

WWII caused internal political tensions to increase. The Muslim Brotherhood (see *Political and Social Relations*) targeted Egyptians supportive of the victorious Allies, assassinating politicians deemed sympathetic to the British. In 1945, Egypt became a founding member of the both the United Nations (UN)

and the Arab League, a regional organization formed to foster collaboration and security among member states.

Post-War Regional Upheaval: The post-war period brought regional upheaval. In 1947, the UN voted to partition the British mandate of Palestine (bordering Egypt to the northeast) into separate Jewish and Arab states. Clashes between Jews and Arabs in Palestine erupted immediately, and when the Jewish state of Israel declared independence in mid-1948, war broke out. As an Arab League member, Egypt joined Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq in declaring war on Israel. With its better-trained Army, Israel quickly won. This unexpected defeat led to massive public unrest in Egypt, with protests against governmental corruption and the continuing presence of the British devolving into riots.

The 1952 Coup: The First Revolution
On July 23, 1952, the Army under Gen Muhammed Naguib seized control of key infrastructure. Days later, troops forced King Farouq (King Fuad I's son, who had assumed the throne upon his father's 1936 death) to abdicate. Quickly consolidating control, a group called the Free Officers established a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) to govern Egypt. Among other actions, the RCC confiscated large estates and held special "corruption trials," which stripped many former elite of their privileges. While groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the *Wafd* tried to influence the RCC, it rejected attempts to dilute its control, abolishing the monarchy and declaring the country the Arab Republic of Egypt in 1953.

Soon, Gen Naguib's deputy, Gen Gamal Abdel Nasser, emerged as the RCC's dominant figure. Increasingly popular among the general population, Nasser outmaneuvered Naguib with his charisma and political skill, stripping Naguib of his leadership in 1954 and implementing a new Constitution in 1956.

Confirmed as President that year with 99.9% of the vote, Nasser would hold the office until his death in 1970.

The Early Nasser Era

Nasser negotiated a gradual British withdrawal in 1954 and recognized Sudan's independence from Egypt in 1956. Intent on ensuring Egypt's autonomy, Nasser became a member of the "non-aligned movement," which rejected overt cooperation with either the US or the Soviet Union (USSR). As a leader of the pan-Arab nationalist movement, Nasser also sought to incite anti-imperialist sentiment across the region.

Nasser aimed to modernize Egypt and increase its global standing. To increase agricultural and electricity production, he sought to construct a new Nile dam at the southern city of Aswan. Nevertheless, negotiations with lenders, notably the US and World Bank, eventually declined due to Nasser's friendly relations with the USSR.

Suez Canal Crisis: Seeing canal tolls an alternative source for the dam's funding, Gen Nasser ordered the nationalization of the

Suez Canal, which the British and French still controlled, in 1956. While the move was popular among Egyptians, the British, French, and Israelis considered it a threat, so they devised a plan to retake the canal and topple Nasser. According to the plan, Israel would invade Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and shortly thereafter, France and Britain would intervene on the pretext of halting the conflict and take control of the canal.

Nevertheless, the operation did not proceed as planned, and the US, USSR, and UN condemned the incursion and forced the invading forces to withdraw. This episode gave Egypt control of one of the world's most significant waterways and served to increase Nasser's popularity across the Arab world. The Aswan High Dam was eventually built across the Nile River with USSR assistance and opened in 1970, requiring the resettlement of

more than 100,000 Nubian Egyptians and Sudanese (see *Political and Social Relations*), as well as the dismantling and removal of some 22 archaeological monuments.

The Late Nasser Era

As a step toward Nasser's goal of creating a pan-Arab state, Egypt merged with Syria in 1958 to form the United Arab Republic (UAR). Nevertheless, the UAR proved short-lived, as Syrians balked at Nasser's authoritarianism and resented his treatment of Syria as a less significant province. In 1961, Syrian Army officers staged a coup and withdrew Syria from the UAR. Egypt retained the UAR as its official name until 1971, when it reverted to its previous name, the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The collapse of the union with Syria coincided with a decline in

Nasser's popularity. The Egyptian economy was in disarray and depended heavily on aid from the US and USSR. Political tensions grew, despite Nasser's overwhelming victory in the 1964 election. After the Muslim Brotherhood's alleged plot to depose Nasser was discovered in 1965, Nasser acted quickly to suppress his political rivals. Thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were detained, and a prominent leader was executed. Many supporters of Islamism across the Arab world were resentful of the crackdown, contributing further to a decline in Nasser's regional standing.

The Six-Day War: In mid-1967, the Six-Day War (also known as the Third Arab-Israeli War) broke out between Israel and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Israel again emerged victorious, almost destroying Egypt's Air Force, inflicting heavy casualties, and occupying Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The war's negative effect on the economy increased Egypt's dependence on foreign aid. Amid compounding political and economic pressures, Nasser suffered a heart attack and died in 1970.

The Sadat Years

Nasser's Vice President, Anwar Sadat, assumed the Presidency upon Nasser's death, and his hold on the office was reaffirmed

in referendums in 1970 and 1976. Sadat was an original member of the RCC but was intent on reversing the missteps of the late Nasser era. To retake the Sinai Peninsula, Sadat launched another war with Israel in 1973, but the conflict devolved into a stalemate. The Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries then instituted an oil embargo on countries supporting Israel, compelling the belligerents to end their hostilities. In the aftermath, Israel withdrew from the immediate proximity of the Suez Canal but retained most of the Sinai Peninsula.

To reverse Nasser's economic failures, Sadat initiated his *infitah* (open door) policy to attract foreign investment and institute market liberalization (see *Economics and Resources*). However, progress was slow, as foreign countries were wary of investing in Egypt while there was still a risk of war with Israel. With US support, Sadat pursued peace with Israel, signing a treaty in 1979 in which Israel agreed to completely withdraw from the Sinai, which it did by 1982.

While the treaty was celebrated by the international community (Sadat shared the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin), some in the Arab world viewed it as a betrayal because it did not address the question of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories nor their statehood. The Arab League expelled Egypt for 10 years, and several Middle Eastern countries severed their trade relationships with Egypt. Many Egyptians viewed peace with Israel skeptically, especially members of militant Islamist groups that opposed Israel's right to exist. As public unrest grew, the government quelled protests and arrested over 1,500 activists. In late 1981, members of one such Islamist organization disguised themselves as soldiers to infiltrate a military parade and assassinated Sadat.

The Mubarak Regime
After Sadat's death, his Vice President, Hosni Mubarak, assumed the Presidency and was reelected without opposition every 6 years for the next 25 years. Mubarak restored relations

with other Arab countries, while maintaining peace with Israel and close ties with the US. He also continued Sadat's *infitah* policies, while adding some antipoverty programs. However, Egypt's inability to repay foreign loans caused an economic crisis. Meanwhile, opposition to Egypt's lack of political freedoms grew, with some activists seeking peaceful democratic electoral reforms. Terrorist activity also increased, with a 1997 attack in Luxor by Islamist fundamentalists leaving some 60 foreign tourists dead. To project openness to reform, while maintaining his position of power, Mubarak allowed other candidates to run in the 2005 presidential election. Nevertheless, he won with almost 89% of the vote, provoking accusations of fraud.

The January 25 Revolution: The public's frustrations intensified in January 2011. Inspired by unrest in neighboring Tunisia, Egyptians gathered to demand greater social, political,

and economic freedoms and an end to government repression. These events triggered similar protests that swept the Arab world and came to be known in the West as the "Arab Spring." Over several days, Mubarak attempted to remain in office by announcing certain concessions. Nevertheless, protests continued, and in February, Mubarak resigned, relinquishing power to a group of senior military officers. Later, Mubarak was tried but ultimately acquitted on charges of corruption, embezzling public funds, and complicity in the deaths of protestors. He died in early 2020 and received a military funeral.

An Elected Government
Amid continued unrest, voters approved constitutional changes setting presidential term limits, among other reforms. In the parliamentary and early presidential rounds of Egypt's first free elections in 2011-12, numerous candidates from Islamist parties won. The landslide result prompted the traditional powerholder, the military, to limit the President's powers and restrict his ability to declare war. Even so, the Islamists prevailed, and Muhammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood became President.

Conflict among Islamists and their opposition, a loose coalition of liberal, secular, and Christian faction, focused on the drafting of a new Constitution. After Morsi issued decrees exempting his actions from judicial oversight, the opposition factions and some Islamists boycotted the constitutional committee. Nevertheless, Morsi scheduled a public referendum on his Islamist Constitution, prompting widespread protests. In response, Morsi declared martial law and authorized the military to arrest protestors. Voters approved the Constitution in late 2012.

2013 Protests and Coup: Deteriorating economic conditions contributed to further political polarization in 2013. Clashes between Morsi supporters and opponents culminated in

countrywide protests, termed a revolution by the current government, on June 30. On July 1, the head of the armed forces, Army Gen Abdel Fattah al Sisi, threatened military intervention and did so 2 days later, suspending the Constitution and removing Morsi from power. An interim government assumed power, though the military retained significant influence. Declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, the military under Gen Sisi responded violently to protests, killing scores, while arresting many others, notably Morsi, who died in custody in 2019.

The interim government drafted a new Constitution without the Islamist-favored content of the 2012 version. Further, the new document recognized the military and police as autonomous institutions requiring no civilian oversight. Voters approved the new Constitution in early 2014. In the spring, Gen Sisi resigned from the military to stand in the presidential election, campaigning on a platform to reduce poverty and bolster national security. Sisi won the election in mid-2014 with more than 96% of the vote.

Return to Authoritarianism under President Sisi
Sisi's election marked a return to authoritarian rule. He reinstated many of Mubarak's policies, restricting political

activities (notably banning the Muslim Brotherhood) and detaining, jailing, and sometimes condemning political opponents to death, while outlawing any form of dissent. He also

spearheaded several initiatives to bolster the economy, notably the expansion of the Suez Canal and the construction of a new capital (see *Economics and Resources).* These measures have done little to reduce poverty. Sisi won the 2018 presidential election with more than 97% of the vote.

Myth Overview
In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

The Flooding of the Nile: For millennia, Egyptian farmers depended on the Nile River's annual flood to deposit fertile soil along its banks. Among ancient Egyptians, the god *Hapi* was associated with this annual event. Unlike most other Egyptian deities, *Hapi* was depicted as overweight, symbolizing plenty, and although a man, he had large, female breasts, indicating the fertility brought by his floods. Across Upper Egypt, priests erected shrines to *Hapi* and performed certain rituals to ensure the annual flooding.

Although Judaism, Christianity, and Islam eventually replaced ancient Egyptian beliefs (see *Religion and Spirituality*), Egyptians continued to celebrate the Nile's annual flooding. During the Ottoman era, Egyptians marked the onset of the flood on **Laylat al-Nuqta** ("the night of the drop"). At that time, according to folklore, a magical drop of water caused the Nile to overflow its banks. When the River reached its peak some weeks later, Egyptians celebrated the lush farmland brought by the flooding with **Wafa' al-Nil**, a week-long festival of feasting, fireworks, and music.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
The Arab Republic of Egypt
Jumhūrīyat Miṣr al-ʾArabīyah
جمهورية مصر العربية
(Arabic)

Political Borders
Mediterranean: 620 mi
Gaza Strip: 8 mi
Israel: 129 mi
Red Sea: 1,200 mi
Sudan: 793 mi
Libya: 693 mi

Capital
Cairo

Demographics
Egypt's population of about 111.2 million is growing at an annual rate of 1.49%. Around 43% of the population lives in urban areas, with 95% residing within 12 mi of the Nile River. Population density is highest in the Northeast, where the Nile forks and forms the Nile Delta.

Flag
Adopted in 1984, Egypt's flag features three equal red, white, and black bands. These colors are associated with Arab nationalism and represent oppression (black), which is overcome by bloody struggle (red) and leads to a bright future (white). The middle of the flag features Egypt's national emblem, a golden eagle with a shield on its chest showing a scroll with the country's name in Arabic.

Geography

Situated in Africa's northeast corner, Egypt forms a bridge between the Middle East and North Africa. The Mediterranean Sea lies to the north and the Red Sea to the east. Bordering Israel and the Gaza Strip, the triangular Sinai Peninsula is notably home to the Suez Canal, a vital shipping route between the Mediterranean and Red seas. Egypt also borders Sudan to the south and Libya to the west. Its total land area is 384,345 sq mi, making it about three times the size of New Mexico.

Over 90% of the country falls within the Sahara Desert. Egypt's most prominent geographic feature is the Nile River, which flows

northward through the country and serves as its main water source. In the North, the Nile splits before reaching the Mediterranean Sea, forming a fan-shaped swath of some 9,650 sq mi known as the Delta (or "Lower Egypt" for its low elevation). With its fertile soil, the Delta is Egypt's largest agricultural region and home to most of Egypt's population.

The area extending south from Cairo to the border with Sudan (known as Upper Egypt) is primarily desert, with a few farming villages dotted along the Nile's banks. The Nile divides Upper Egypt into the Eastern and Western deserts. The Eastern is largely barren, save a few cliffs and mountains near the Red Sea coast. An important source of minerals, coal, and oil (see *Economics and Resources*), the Western Desert comprises the country's largest region, some 259,000 sq mi. Egypt's tallest point, the 8,667-ft Mount Catherine (***Gabal Cantreen***), is located in the mountainous southern Sinai Peninsula.

Climate

Egypt has a two-season climate featuring hot, dry summers (April-October) and mild, rainy winters (November-March). While the coasts are typically milder, summer temperatures range from 86°-109°F, with the winter averaging 44°-57°F.

Annual winter rainfall varies significantly. While areas on the Mediterranean coast and the Sinai Peninsula experience 5-7 inches of rain, inland areas such as Cairo get 1 inch or less. Large dust storms (***khamsin***) occur from March-June.

Natural Hazards
Egypt is vulnerable to earthquakes, intense dust storms, and flooding. While most earthquakes are small, destructive events occasionally occur, such as a 1992 magnitude 5.9 event in Cairo that killed over 300 people. Today, earthquakes of this magnitude occasionally occur but rarely cause significant damage due to advance preparedness. Meanwhile, severe dust and sandstorms (*khamsin*) are common in the beginning of summer, causing temperatures to rise as much as 20° F and winds to reach up to gale force. Lasting anywhere from a few hours to several days, *khamsin* events reduce visibility and present a significant danger to residents with respiratory problems. In the winter months, flooding from the Nile tends to occur after heavy rains, sometimes causing significant damage to urban areas having poor infrastructure.


Environmental Issues
Climate change, rapid urbanization, and a growing population significantly strain Egypt's natural environment, with Cairo ranked as one of the world's most polluted cities. Experts estimate up to 20,000 residents of Cairo die of pollution-related health problems each year. Rising sea levels from global warming occasionally cause flooding in coastal cities. Further, Mediterranean waters have trickled into the Nile, polluting the country's water supply with salt and destroying croplands along the Nile's banks.

Government
Egypt is a semi-presidential republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 27 governorates, each led by a presidential-appointed governor and divided into towns or
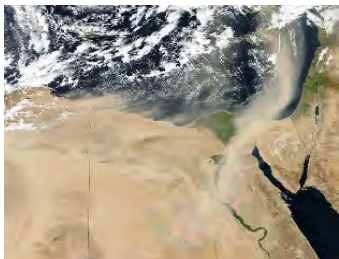
villages led by local councils. However, in 2011, the local councils were dissolved and reelections postponed indefinitely, allowing the President and governors to directly govern all municipalities. Adopted in 2014 and amended in 2019, Egypt's Constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, while outlining the basic rights and freedoms of the Egyptian people.

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the President, who is chief-of-state.

A council of 32 ministers and a Prime Minister, who serves as head-of-government, support the President. The President is elected by popular vote to serve up to two consecutive 6-year terms. Current President Abdel Fattah al Sisi took office in 2014 and was reelected in 2018. Constitutional amendments in 2019 extended the Presidential term to 6 years and confirmed a limit of two consecutive terms, though a special provision allowed Sisi to run for a third term in 2023 and he was re-elected. The next election will be in 2029.

Legislative Branch

Egypt's legislature is a two-chamber Parliament composed of a 300-seat Senate and a 596-seat House of Representatives. Some 100 Senators are elected from a closed list, 100 by popular vote, and another 100 appointed by the President. Some 448 Representatives are directly elected, 120 by proportional representation from 4 national districts, and up to 28 are appointed by the President. All members of Parliament serve 5-year terms. The Parliament controls most legislative powers, notably approving and implementing executive policy and amending the Constitution. The Parliament also holds the power of presidential impeachment and can hold a vote of no confidence against the President.

Judicial Branch

Egypt's judicial system is based on French civil code and *sharia* (Islamic law) derived from Sunni principles, with four entities authorized to issue *fatwas* (religious rulings binding on Muslims). While Christians and Jews have the constitutional right to judgement under Christian and Jewish personal status laws, this right is frequently ignored (see *Family and Kinship*).

The judiciary includes a Court of Cassation, a Supreme Administrative Court, a Supreme Constitutional Court, Courts of Appeal, Courts of First Instance, family courts, and a system of military courts. The Court of Cassation is the final court of appeal for civil and criminal cases. Its 550 judges are appointed by the Supreme Judiciary Council (comprising six court Presidents and the Prosecutor General) and organized into circuits that hear cases in panels of five or more.

The Supreme Administrative and Supreme Constitutional courts serve as the highest courts for administrative and constitutional disputes, with judges serving lifetime appointments. While the Constitution guarantees an independent judiciary and Egypt's judges maintain objectivity in ruling, Sisi's government exerts control over the judiciary through executive control and manipulation by the military and intelligence services.

Political Climate

While the 2011 Arab Spring provided a brief democratic opening (see *History and Myth*), Egypt has returned to authoritarianism

under President Sisi. Although Egypt has over 100 registered political parties, President Sisi and other officials remain unaffiliated with any party. For example, of the 596 members of the House of Representatives, 124 are independents as of early 2023. Nevertheless, notable political parties include the liberal Free Egyptians Party, the

populist Nation's Future Party, the liberal-nationalist New Wafd Party, and the populist Homeland Defenders Party.

Since assuming office, Sisi has renewed efforts to suppress political Islam, a movement that views Islam as a source of political identity and aims to integrate Islamist ideology into government institutions. Former President Morsi, who President Sisi removed from office in 2013 when serving as Army General, was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood (see *History and Myth*), one such organization.

Egypt's 2014 Constitution forbids political parties based on religion, and Sisi has designated the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, jailing many members, including former President Morsi, who died in custody in 2019. That year, Sisi stated his opinion that the Middle East's instability would continue as long as the movement exists.

Egyptians are restricted with regards to their freedoms of assembly, association, speech, and press (see *Technology and Material)*. The Constitution imposes limits on the freedom of expression if speech incites violence or "dishonors individuals," giving the government broad leeway to punish dissenters.

While demonstrations have become infrequent since Sisi took power (largely due to the fear of authorities imposing violent reprisals), Egyptians gathered in the streets throughout fall 2020 to call for Sisi's resignation. Some protestors condemned the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (see *Economics and Resources* and *Sustenance and Health*), while others demanded greater political freedom. The authorities responded violently to these protests, prompting international observers to accuse them of police brutality and human rights abuses. As of late 2022, experts estimate that the military holds some 60,000 Egyptians as political prisoners. Further, the

government has arrested some human rights activists on terrorism charges.

Defense

The Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches with a joint strength of 438,500 active-duty troops, including 290,000 conscripts, and 479,000 reserve personnel. Egyptian men are required to serve 1-3 years. With the region's largest force, Egypt has begun to modernize its arsenal, replacing its Soviet-era weapons systems with US, European, Russian, and Chinese models. The EAF are charged with maintaining territorial integrity, combatting regional terrorism and supporting President Sisi by quashing protests and dissent.

Army: Consists of 310,000 active-duty troops organized into 2 headquarters and 5 military districts containing 4 armored divisions and 8 mechanized 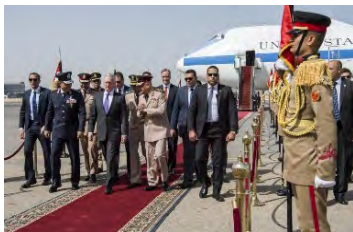infantry divisions, a Republican Guard armored brigade, 10 independent brigades (including armored, mechanized, and infantry), 3 infantry brigades (including light and airmobile), an airborne brigade, 5 commando groups, a counterterrorist unit, 14 independent artillery brigades, 2 surface-to-surface missile brigades, 6 engineer brigades, 2 special operations engineer battalions, 6 salvage engineer battalions, 24 military police battalions, 18 signals battalions, 36 logistics battalions, and 27 medical battalions.

Navy: Comprises 18,500 active-duty troops, with 2,000 serving in the Coast Guard. The Navy divides into the Mediterranean Sea Fleet and the Red Sea

Fleet, with each divided into submarine, destroyer, patrol, fast attack craft, and special operations brigades.

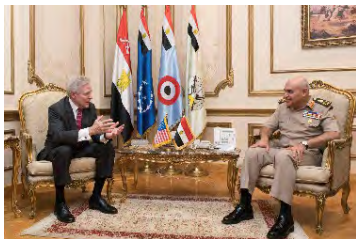**Air Force:** Consists of 30,000 active-duty troops organized into 16 fighter squadrons (including 6 ground attack), 8 transport squadrons (fixed-wing and helicopter), 7 attack helicopter squadrons, an anti-submarine helicopter squadron, a maritime patrol squadron, an EW squadron, an airborne early warning squadron, a UAV squadron, a search-and-rescue helicopter squadron, and 13 basic training squadrons.

Air Defense Command (ADC): Comprises 80,000 active-duty conscripts and operates surface-to-air missiles (SAM) and anti-aircraft machinery in support of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The ADC consists of 110 SAM SA-2/SA-3/SA-6 battalions, 12 SAM I-Hawk batteries, 12 SAM Chaparral batteries, 14 SAM Crotale batteries, 18 SAM Skyguard/Amoun battalions, 12 anti-aircraft brigades, and 12 radar battalions.

Paramilitary: Comprises the Central Security Force (CSF) (325,000), National Guard (60,000), and Border Guard Force (12,000). The CSF serves as Egypt's domestic militarized police, protecting public figures and monitoring perceived domestic threats from protestors or activists. The National Guard's eight brigades are stationed along the Egypt-Libya border and serve as reinforcements for the Army in wartime. The Border Guard Force's 18 infantry regiments monitor border checkpoints and serve as a general military backup in wartime.

Egyptian Air Force
Rank Insignia

Air Chief Marshal	Air Marshal	Air Vice Marshal	Air Commodore
Group Captain	Wing Commander	Squadron Leader	Flying Lieutenant
Flying Officer	Pilot Officer	Warrant Officer	
Master Sergeant	Sergeant	Corporal	Private

Security Issues

Regional Terrorism: Largely concentrated in the Sinai Peninsula, terrorist activity usually attributed to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as ISIL, IS, or Daesh) is Egypt's largest security threat. ISIS, a notoriously brutal militant Islamist group, began an assault on the Sinai in 2011. In 2014, terrorist activity spiked after President Sisi took office in response to his stance against political Islam. Since then, the area has become an active conflict zone requiring the presence of Egyptian Soldiers and international peacekeepers. Besides military targets, ISIS attacks target tourists and certain religious minorities (see *Religion and Spirituality*). The Egyptian military and its foreign allies have conducted several large-scale operations in an effort to dislodge terrorists in North Sinai but have been mostly unsuccessful.

Terrorist incidents attributed to ISIS occasionally occur outside the Sinai and often target Coptic Christians (see *Religion and Spirituality*). For example, between 2016-20, ISIS claimed responsibility for four church bombings in Cairo, Tanta, and Alexandria.

Human Trafficking: Egypt is a hub for trafficked people, typically from Asia and East Africa. Both men and women are vulnerable to trafficking, often forced into sex slavery or domestic service. Some employers confiscate victims' passports, inflict physical and mental abuse, and underpay or withhold wages. Traffickers occasionally use Egypt's Mediterranean ports to transport African refugees to Europe.

Foreign Relations

Situated between the Middle East and Africa, Egypt plays a crucial role in maintaining regional stability. It strives to cultivate good relationships with regional states, notably the United Arab

Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Israel, and Palestine. While Egypt has historically taken an active role in brokering peace in the Middle East (see *History and Myth*), the Egyptian military is challenged by simultaneous efforts to maintain stability along its borders.

Connecting the Mediterranean and Red seas, Egypt's Suez Canal is a crucial waterway in international trade (see *Economics and Resources*) and establishes Egypt as a major economic hub. Recently, the Suez Canal has been key to the cultivation of Sino-Egyptian relations, with China seeking to include the canal in its plan for a Maritime Silk Road. Egypt also maintains strong trade relationships with several European Union states (most notably France), though relations between Egypt and Italy waned after the 2016 murder of an Italian exchange student in Cairo. Egypt is a member of international peace and economic organizations such as the United Nations (UN), Interpol, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

Regional Tensions: Playing a prominent role in Middle Eastern politics, Egypt aims to promote military and economic cooperation in the region. However, President Sisi's stance against political Islam has prompted some regional conflict. In 2017, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain severed trade and diplomatic ties and imposed a blockade on Qatar, accusing it of funding Islamic terrorists. The conflict stemmed from Egypt's and Saudi Arabia's distrust of Qatar's friendly relationship with Iran and support of the Muslim Brotherhood. In early 2021, the countries ended the blockade, though some tensions persist.

Relations with Israel and Palestine: One of the first Arab countries to recognize Israel's sovereignty, Egypt and Israel have shared close ties since their historic bilateral peace treaty in 1979 (see *History and Myth*). President Sisi has prioritized the relationship to effectively combat terrorism in the Sinai

Peninsula. However, due to Israel's adversarial relations with Palestine, Egypt and Israel are unable to cultivate a fully open relationship. The vast majority of Egyptians are supportive of Palestinian causes and critical of Israel. Currently, Egypt is serving as a mediator between Israel and Palestine after brokering an internal Palestinian peace deal in 2014.

Relations with Turkey: Since Egypt has increased efforts to curtail political Islam, relations with Turkey have deteriorated. In 2013, both countries expelled each other's ambassadors due to Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood. As of early 2021, relations remain frosty, and President Sisi and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan openly express disdain for one another. Another source of strain is the fact that the Egyptian authorities arrested several Turks for suspected spying or attempted

sabotage between 2017-20. Internationally, Turkey and Egypt support opposing sides in the Libyan civil war, considerably increasing tensions and instilling fears that the conflict will become a proxy war.

Relations with Libya: Due to their shared border, Egypt considers Libya's current civil war a major security threat. Egypt strongly opposes the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) due to the GNA's support of political Islam. Further, the GNA is backed by Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood, stoking fears in Egypt that its opponents could gain a foothold on its borders. In 2020, Egypt began deploying soldiers to Libya in support of the opposition movement, the Libyan National Army.

Relations with Sudan: Egypt considers Sudan vital to its own security due to its proximity. While the countries maintain strong military ties, diplomatic relations are strained due to disagreements on several issues. These include tentative Sudanese support for the Ethiopian Grand Renaissance Dam on

the Nile (a project that could reduce the flow of water to Egypt), and Sudan's willingness to harbor Muslim Brotherhood members fleeing Egypt. The two countries also have a longstanding border dispute over the Hala'ib Triangle, a wedge of land along the Red Sea.

Relations with Russia: After the US temporarily suspended military aid to Egypt in 2013 due to ongoing human rights abuses, Egypt began to rely more heavily on Russian weapons imports. Since then, economic and diplomatic relations between Egypt and Russia have strengthen. Russia supports Egypt in its fight against terrorism in the Sinai and its opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood. Further, Russia and Egypt frequently collaborate on operations in Libya and Syria.

Relations with the US: The US and Egypt first established diplomatic relations in 1922. In recent decades, the US has supported Egypt's economic and military development, sending some $70 billion in military and economic aid between 1980-2020. Today, US-Egypt relations center on military collaboration and a strong trade partnership based on oil and agriculture. The US has provided extensive military funding to Egypt's ongoing fight against regional terrorism. In 2020, Egypt was the second-

largest recipient of US security aid.

Since 1981, US peacekeepers have been stationed in the Sinai Peninsula as a part of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), an international group seeking to stabilize the region. However, rising extremism has occasionally prompted some US officials to consider withdrawing those peacekeepers.

Despite its strong military and economic ties with Egypt, the US looks unfavorably on the ongoing human rights abuses and lack of basic freedoms under Sisi's rule. Further, as of early 2023, Egypt holds several US citizens as political prisoners, prompting

some US officials to advocate sanctions or the withdrawal of military funding. Nevertheless, the US has prioritized supporting Egypt in its fight against terrorism despite Sisi's poor human rights record.

Ethnic Groups

Some 99% of residents consider themselves "Egyptian," and while many Egyptians also claim an Arab identity, the label "Egyptian" may include other identities. The largest such grouping includes Copts, an ethno-religious group associated with Coptic Christianity (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Comprising around 10% of the population, Copts consider themselves the last direct descendants of the ancient Egyptian Pharaohs (see *History and Myth*). While some Copts identify as Arab, most simply identify as Egyptian.

Egypt is also home to the Beja, Bedouin, and *Amazighen* (or Berbers), which are small nomadic groups that traditionally inhabit Upper Egypt's deserts. The Beja traditionally reside in the Eastern Desert and divide into two subgroups: the *Abābdah*, who congregate in the South near the Sudanese border, and the *Bishārīn* in the North. The *Amazighen* and Bedouin are scattered across the Western Desert, with a small population of Bedouin in the Sinai Peninsula. Bedouin tribes traditionally divide into two social classes: the *Saʿādī*, considered the superior class, and the *Mūrābiṭīn*.

Egypt's largest ethnic group is the Nubians, whose historical homeland straddles the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Today, many Nubians have been resettled in Kom Ombo, north of the Aswan High Dam, while others live across the country. Nubians have a rich culture distinct from that of Egyptians and speak several dialects of the Nubian language (see *Language and Communication*). In the 1960s, many Nubians were forced to leave their ancestral homeland near the Sudan border, when the Aswan High Dam flooded their villages (see *History and Myth*). Today, many Nubians still inhabit subsidized resettlement

communities. While Egypt's 2014 Constitution promised to return the Nubians to their homeland by 2024, the government

has made little progress toward this goal.

Egypt's Roma ("Gypsy") population (referred to as *Dom* after their native language *Domari*) concentrates north of Cairo. The *Dom* traditionally maintain a nomadic lifestyle, historically earning their living through trading and traveling entertainment. Some 6,000 Armenian-Egyptians reside in the country, primarily in Cairo and Alexandria. Egypt also hosts some 343,000 refugees from the Horn of Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Yemen, and Syria.

Social Relations

Egyptian society divides along rural-urban, male-female, and rich-poor lines. Generally, urban dwellers, males, and the wealthy have greater access to educational and employment opportunities and hold the most social prestige. Rural Egyptians (sometimes referred to as *fellahin*, meaning agricultural laborer) sometimes face stigma and discrimination when visiting urban areas.

Egypt's vast economic inequalities (see *Economics and Resources*) create deep social cleavages, but social divisions also occur along racial, ethnic, and religious lines. Some Egyptians reject people with darker skin, with Black refugees reporting discrimination and occasionally experiencing violence from Egyptian residents and authorities. In late 2020, international groups condemned both an Egyptian man's murder of a 12-year-old Sudanese refugee and the Egyptian authorities' brutal response towards Sudanese, who gathered to protest the incident. Egypt's Nubian communities are subject to frequent discrimination. Similarly, Egypt's *Dom* communities experience notable prejudice and poverty, and tensions between Egypt's religious groups occasionally erupt into violence (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Further, the government meets any large protest with violence, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Most sources estimate that about 90% of Egyptians are Sunni Muslim, some 1% Shi'a Muslim, and around 10% Christian (though estimates range from 5-15%). Some 90% of Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Other Christian denominations constituting less than 2% of the population include Anglican, Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian Chaldean, Melkite, Maronite, Latin, and Syrian), and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) churches. Smaller numbers of Egyptians are Jehovah's Witnesses, followers of Baha'ism, Dawoodi Bohra Muslims, and Ahmadi Muslims, though some of these groups are banned.

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and the principles of *sharia* or Islamic law as the guiding sources for legislation (see *Political and Social Relations*). The Constitution also guarantees religious freedom and prohibits religious discrimination. However, it limits the freedom to practice religious rituals and right to establish places of worship to followers of the three Abrahamic religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The Constitution also forbids the formation of political parties on the basis of religion (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Islamic, Christian, and Jewish groups must register with the state to gain legal recognition. Besides establishing houses of worship and importing religious literature, the law gives recognized groups the right to define and enforce their own family and personal status laws regulating marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Nevertheless, Egyptian authorities frequently ignore this right (see *Family and Kinship*).

Ancient Egyptian Beliefs

Ancient Egyptians led a rich spiritual life, recognizing numerous gods, goddesses, and other deities, who they believed created and maintained the balance of the universe. To honor the gods, Egyptians constructed temples and designated priests to perform daily rituals at shrines within the temples. During festivals, Egyptians gathered to worship at the shrines and watch mythical reenactments. The most notable deities were *Ra*, the sun god, and *Osiris*, the god of the underworld and judge of the dead.

The Egyptian King (or Pharaoh), was known as the Son of *Ra* and viewed as the connection between the divine and earthly realms. Accordingly, the King was responsible for maintaining *maat* (order) by upholding ethical principles of truth and justice and keeping *isfet* (disorder) at bay. The King was often represented as a *sphinx*, a being with a human head and animal body. Following death, the bodies of Kings and other high officials were mummified in preparation for their journey to the afterlife.

Judaism

Due to its proximity to the Levant (present-day territories of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria), the birthplace of Judaism, Egypt has been home to a Jewish community for over 3,000 years. Scholars believe Israelites moved into Egypt around 1375 BC. During the reign of Ramses II (see *History and Myth*), many were enslaved to labor in the Pharaoh's building projects. Revolting against enslavement and other anti-Jewish policies, the Israelites fled across the Sinai Peninsula around 1220 BC, the biblical Exodus which Jews commemorate during Passover. For the next several centuries, Egypt's Jewish population remained small but gradually grew. By the mid-12th century, Egypt was home to as many as 20,000 Jews, notably the famed scholar Maimonides. There were periods of tolerance interspersed with persecution during subsequent centuries.

In the late 19th-early 20th centuries, the Jewish community grew again, with the arrival of many European Jews, increasing from 25,200-63,500 between 1897-1937. During this period, Jews participated in most aspects of Egyptian society, with Jewish newspapers publishing in several languages. However, before and during World War II (see *History and Myth*), the rise of Jewish and Egyptian nationalism, and the founding of Israel, resulted in increasing anti-Semitism in Egypt. In 1945, anti-Jewish riots left 10 dead and a synagogue destroyed.

The 1948 establishment of Israel and outbreak of war (see *History and Myth*) increased anti-Jewish sentiment. Following months of unrest, bombings, arrests, and the confiscation of Jewish property, many Egyptian Jews began fleeing. During the 1956 Suez Canal crisis (see *History and Myth*), the government declared Jews enemies of the state and expelled some 25,000, while forcing them to "donate" their property to the state. The 1967 Six-Day War (see *History and Myth*) prompted further persecution, reducing the population to 2,500. By the 1970s, almost no Jews remained in Egypt.

Less than 100 Jews live in Egypt today, primarily in Alexandria. While President Sisi has expressed support for the return of a Jewish community and the government has funded the restoration of an Alexandria synagogue, anti-Semitic ideology regularly appears in many arenas, notably the state-owned media.

Christianity

Christianity emerged in the Levant some 2,000 years ago. According to the Bible's New Testament, the Holy Family fled Jerusalem into Egypt, and several Levantine sites today claim to mark the Family's wanderings. Most sources agree that the apostle Mark (St. Mark the Evangelist) brought Christianity to Egypt, founding a church in Alexandria around 57 AD and becoming the congregation's first Patriarch or Pope (leader). In

subsequent decades, the new faith spread rapidly, with Alexandria becoming a leading center of Christian thought by the mid-2nd century.

Like other Christians across the Roman Empire, Egyptian Christians suffered persecution until 313, when Emperor Constantine established freedom of religion. In the late 4th century, Emperor Constantine made Christianity the Empire's official religion. Subsequently, Christianity blossomed in Egypt, with large monastic communities forming. In the 5th century, theological disputes over the nature of Jesus' divinity split the Christian Church into factions. Over subsequent centuries, these and other conflicts resulted in greater estrangement. The result was a permanent division between Oriental Orthodoxy (which

included the Egyptian Church), Eastern Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism.

While the mid-7th century arrival of Muslim Arab invaders initially changed little for Egyptian Christians, many eventually began to convert to Islam and adopt Arabic (see *History and Myth*). During this period, the Egyptian Church became known as the Coptic Church. The word **Copt** derives from the Arabic translation of the Greek word **Aigyptios**, the Egyptians' name for themselves prior to the Arabs' arrival. When Egyptian Muslims ceased identifying themselves by this term, it came to be associated solely with the Christian minority. In the 10th century, the Coptic Church adopted Arabic.

Islam

Origins of Islam
Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing

the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values.

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into two sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."

- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray five times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.

- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.

- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.

- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.
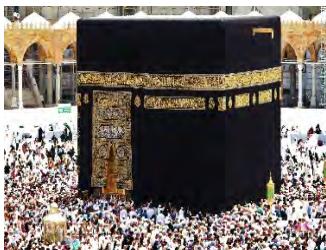
Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the

Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

Abraham: All three faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The three religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Concept of Jihad
The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Observed during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life. Egyptian Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset (signaled by canon fire at Cairo's Citadel of Saladin) with a meal known as *iftar*.

Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This "Night of Power" marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.

- **Eid al-Fitr:** This "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrates Ramadan's end and is a national holiday in Egypt.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This "Festival of Sacrifice" commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is also a national holiday.

Sufi Tradition: Some Egyptians follow the Sufi tradition of Islam, characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer. In the past, *awliyaa*, Islamic teachers believed to hold *baraka*, or special spiritual powers, were venerated as healers and saints.

The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Egypt

Following Muhammad's 632 death, his followers endeavored to spread the teachings of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula. After winning prominent battles in the Levant, Muslim Arab

warriors entered Egypt in 641 (see *History and Myth*). During the subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties (see *History and Myth*), the Muslim population across the region began to divide among Sunni and Shi'a. Within Egypt, many Christians converted to Islam during this period. In 969, the Shi'a Fatimids established Cairo as the capital of their dynasty (see *History and Myth*), then founded Al-Azhar University (see below and *Learning and Knowledge)* as a center of Shi'a Islamic learning.

However, the Fatimids soon weakened, and the Seljuk Turks seized power in Egypt and converted Al-Azhar University to Sunni Islam in 1171 (see *History and Myth*).

Religion Today

Today, the Islamic faith features prominently in Egyptian society and is an important part of many Egyptians' identity. Islamic traditions inform socially acceptable public behavior for Muslims and non- Muslims alike, influence ethics and culture, and frame day-to-day living. For example, Islam's frequent calls to prayer shape the daily rhythm, while the routine use of the phrase *insha'allah* ("if God wills") reveals the popular belief that God directly and ultimately controls all events.

The government actively works to control and regulate Islamic religious discourse through two institutions. First, the Constitution establishes the government-funded Al-Azhar University as the main authority in Islamic theology responsible for spreading Islam, Islamic doctrine, and the Arabic language in Egypt and around the world. The institution also has the authority to censor and confiscate publications dealing with the Qur'an and Islamic ideology that it deems inconsistent with Islamic law.

Second, the Ministry of *Awqaf* (Islamic Endowments) closely monitors religious activities. It oversees the construction of Sunni mosques, issues certificates to Sunni *imams* (worship

leaders) and pays their salaries, and exercises oversight over Friday sermons. The Ministry also disciplines *imams* who ignore suggested guidelines and enforces penalties for preaching or holding religious instruction without the required certificate.

Other laws and customs ensure the predominance of Sunni Islam in society. In matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, judges often apply *sharia*-based laws to non-Muslims (see *Sex and Gender*), though as of early 2021, new personal status laws for non-Muslims were under review. While the law allows citizens to change their religion, the government recognizes only conversion to Islam, not from Islam to any other religion. Further, consistent with *sharia*, laws forbid marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, so a non-Muslim man who wishes to marry a Muslim woman must convert to Islam (see *Family and Kinship*).

Islam
While adherents of all Sunni **madhabs** (schools of thought) are present in Egypt, the Shafi'i, Hanafi, and Maliki are the most common. Although their prevalence tends to vary by geographic location, *madhabs* in Egypt generally adhere to tolerant schools of thought that teach the primacy of the Qur'an over later teachings and stress the importance of community consensus.

Sufis: Followers of Sufism practice their faith by visiting **zaouinas**, tombs of Sufi *awliyaa*, and celebrating the **mulid** (birthday) of saints. Egyptian Sufis are members of some 77 **tariqas** (orders), with the largest having about 2 million followers. Sufis are frequently the target of deadly attacks by extremist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as ISIL, IS, or Daesh) (see *Political and Social Relations*), which view Sufis as heretical.

Shi'a Muslims: Egypt's small Shi'a population lacks religious freedom, is subject to societal discrimination, and is forbidden from constructing places of worship. The authorities sometimes

harass Shi'a, who are regularly denied the right to serve in both the armed forces and security services.

Christianity

Egyptian Christians represent the Arab world's largest Christian community. They live predominately in the Upper Egypt governorates of Asyūṭ, Al-Minyā, and Qinā. Most Christians are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, whose leader, Pope Tawadros II, is considered the latest in an unbroken line of patriarchs dating to St. Mark.

Since 2003, the government has recognized Coptic Christmas as a national holiday (see *Time and Space*), and in 2015, President Sisi became the first Egyptian leader to attend a Coptic Christmas Eve mass. In 2019, two public universities established centers of Coptic studies.

Nevertheless, Christians face restrictions on their religious freedom and societal discrimination. Since 2016, governors

have held the power to authorize church construction and renovation. While some authorities seek to slow projects by imposing stringent registration procedures and building codes, others deny applications altogether. Christians tend to experience discrimination in private sector employment, and Islamic leaders and media personalities occasionally use discriminatory language against Christians. Further, Christians are underrepresented in the military and security services and occupy few high-ranking government positions, though President Sisi appointed two Christian governors in 2018.

Christian churches and individual followers have been the target of sectarian attacks in recent years. Some attacks trace to ISIS and other Islamist extremist organizations (see *Political and Social Relations*). Others appear to be the result of spontaneous bursts of mob violence resulting from inadequate law enforcement. This violence has compelled thousands of Christians to permanently leave Egypt.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview
While urbanization and population growth have altered Egyptian housing patterns and family structures in recent decades, family remains the foundation of society, with members relying on each other for emotional, economic, and social support.

Residence
As of 2023, some 43% of the population lives in urban areas. In recent decades, Egypt has seen significant internal migration and urbanization, especially in the Nile Delta (see *Political and Social Relations*) and around Cairo. While access to electricity and running water are widely available, water shortages are frequent due to pollution in the Nile (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Urban: Some 1 million Egyptians move to cities every year, and Cairo was the world's fastest growing city in 2017. Upper-class urban dwellers typically inhabit luxurious apartments in the city center or villas in gated communities on city outskirts. Most urban areas lack affordable housing, forcing poorer residents to crowd into small apartments. Almost two-thirds of Cairo residents live in makeshift homes in informal settlements on city peripheries. Lacking other alternatives, some city residents illegally reside in cemeteries.

Rural: Rural communities are typically small, comprising 500-10,000 people. To preserve farmland, houses are usually built close together, often of earth and mud plaster. By contrast, the rural homes of upper-class Egyptians are typically large, free-standing structures surrounded by open land. Egypt's Nubian residents (see *Political and Social Relations*) traditionally construct rural houses with bright, elaborately painted exterior walls.

Family Structure

Familial relationships are an integral aspect of Egyptian daily life and social organization. Generally, extended relatives are expected to help each other, avoid actions that may bring shame to the family, and value the needs of the family over individual desires. Households often include extended family members, with other relatives living in close proximity. Children typically remain in the family residence as young adults, moving out only upon marriage. Egyptians highly respect their elders, viewing them as pillars of family honor and integrity. The father is traditionally the main breadwinner and head of the household.

Polygyny: This term refers to the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with Islamic law, Muslim men are allowed to have four wives, if they can treat them equally. In Egypt, the practice appears to be relatively uncommon. In 2019, Egypt's top Islamic cleric criticized most polygynous relationships as unfair to women and children, prompting the government to consider legislation that would require a husband to receive his first wife's permission before taking a second wife.

Children

Historically, Egyptian families had many children but tend to have far fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Extended family members often assist with childcare, with cousins often maintaining sibling-like relationships. Starting around age 10, children help with household chores. Although the legal working age is 15, younger children in poorer families are expected to help supplement the family income. While some children engage in domestic labor or sell goods in the street, others engage in more hazardous work like brickmaking and limestone quarrying. Children living in poverty, especially refugee and displaced children, are often the targets of human trafficking and sexual exploitation (see *Political and Social Relations* and *Sex and Gender*).

Birth: In the Islamic tradition, a Muslim father whispers the *adhan* (call to prayer) into his baby's right ear and the profession of faith in the left ear (see *Religion and Spirituality*) immediately following birth. While traditions vary, most Egyptians regardless of religious affiliation celebrate a birth with a party known as a *Sebou'*. Friends and family present gifts, traditionally gold for girls and money for boys, and sing, chant, and make other loud noises to ward off evil spirits and accustom the baby to the sounds of life.

Names: Many Egyptian names are religiously based, with Muslims favoring names that reference important figures in Islam (such as Muhammad or Omar) or religious virtues like generosity or justice. Similarly, Christians often prefer Biblical names (such as Hana, the Arabic version of John).

Circumcision: Most newborn males are circumcised at the hospital immediately following birth. While historically widespread, the practice of female circumcision has somewhat declined in recent years (see *Sex and Gender*).
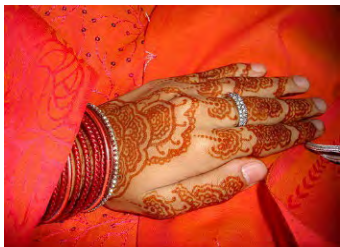
Marriage

Traditionally, a marriage was an arranged union. While arranged marriages among families of similar social standing are still common today, some Egyptians choose their own spouses based upon mutual attraction, though their choice typically must meet family approval. In judging a suitable spouse, families consider education, social status, religiosity, character, and wealth. Families generally do not force arranged matches, and either marriage prospect can reject a proposed partner.

The government performs no civil marriages. Instead, marriage authority lies with religious leaders. While the Constitution gives Christians and Jews the right to marry under their own religious laws, the government frequently ignores this right. As of early 2021, the government is considering revising the personal status

laws but currently recognizes marriages between non-Muslims only with documentation from an Islamic cleric. Some interfaith couples cannot legally wed. For example, the law forbids marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, and the Coptic Church requires both bride and groom to be Christian for the marriage to be valid.

Bridewealth: Upon marriage, a Muslim groom traditionally pays the *mahr* or a so-called bridewealth to the bride, which becomes her sole property. The *mahr* symbolizes the bride's financial independence and aims to provide security in the event of death or divorce. In Egypt, the *mahr* typically consists of gold, jewelry, or household wares.

Weddings: Weddings are generally joyous events, which the entire community celebrates, and specific practices vary by group. Muslim events are sometimes segregated by gender. Over several days, a Muslim bride and her female relatives and friends observe a series of celebrations. For example, the day before the wedding, they attend a *Leilet el Henna* (henna party), where they receive intricate temporary henna tattoos. Later, the actual Islamic wedding takes place at the bride's home or

mosque, where the couple signs the *nikah* (official marriage contract). Afterwards, family and friends typically gather at a wedding hall for feasting and dancing.

Christian couples traditionally marry during a church ceremony, followed by a reception in the bride's home or a wedding hall. Some Egyptian couples who cannot afford a traditional wedding opt for an *'urfi*, a customary or common-law marriage, though such a union fails to offer the rights and protections provided by a legal union.

Divorce
As of 2022, some 40% of marriages end within 5 years, giving Egypt one of the world's highest divorce rates. While Muslim women may file for divorce, they lose their *mahr* unless they

provide evidence of spousal abuse (see *Sex and Gender*). Coptic Christians may file for divorce only on the grounds of infidelity.

Death

Funeral traditions also vary by religious affiliation, though neither Muslims nor Coptic Christians traditionally perform cremation. In accordance with Islamic tradition, Muslims bury their deceased as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. The body is bathed, dried, and wrapped in a shroud or clean white cloth. Relatives then transport the deceased to a mosque, where male family members and friends visit to pay their respect, while a cleric reads from the Qur'an (see *Religion and Spirituality*) and leads prayers. Female family members mourn separately, either in a different hall of the mosque or at the home of the deceased. Relatives then transport the deceased to a cemetery, where the body is buried facing the Ka'aba in Mecca (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

For 3 days following the funeral, the family receives mourners, who offer further condolences. On the seventh day after the death, the family gathers again for a reading of the Qur'an, and 40 days after death, the family holds a special service at the deceased's house. To mark the passing of loved ones, women typically wear black for 40 days of mourning following their death.

Coptic Christians also wash, perfume, and dress the deceased in white linen, everyday apparel, or special clothing, such as that worn on a religious pilgrimage. The body is then placed in a casket. Mourners gather to offer condolences, with some mourners engaging in *suwat*, ritual wailing meant to honor the deceased, and others refraining from eating until the burial is completed. The funeral service is typically held in a church and features prayers, hymns, and incense, followed by burial in a cemetery.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

The Egyptian social system is patriarchal, meaning that men hold most power and authority. While women increasingly take advantage of educational and professional opportunities, legal and institutional discrimination plus certain cultural norms limit women's full participation in society. In a 2023 study, Egypt ranked 134 out of 146 countries in gender equality.
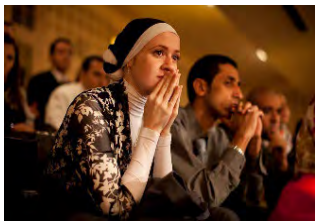
Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Women traditionally hold responsibility for childcare, cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the household budget, typically retaining those responsibilities even if they work outside the home.

Labor Force: In 2024, some 15% of Egyptian women worked outside the home, lower than the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) average (19%) and neighbors Libya (33%), Sudan (28%), and Israel (62%). Laws bar women from certain fields, such as construction, mining, and those considered "morally inappropriate." Some women refrain from taking jobs outside the home due to widespread sexual harassment in the workplace. Although the Constitution guarantees equal pay, men's salaries average almost four times those of women.

While women earn post-secondary degrees at similar rates as men (see *Learning and Knowledge*), they remain underrepresented in management roles, comprising 6% of senior executives in 2021, though this is lower than the MENA average of 7%. Further, women represent just 5.2% of firm owners, reflecting the barriers women face in accessing capital and financing. To encourage women to enter the workforce, the government's 2017 National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women provides childcare and financial support to working women and families with a female breadwinner.

Gender and the Law

Women are guaranteed at least 90 days of paid maternity leave, and firms with more than 100 female employees must provide childcare facilities. The Constitution guarantees gender equality and prohibits discrimination based on sex, yet women face unequal treatment before the law. Judges typically subject all Egyptians, including non-Muslims, to **sharia** or Islamic law (see *Political and Social Relations*). Such rulings are sometimes biased against women or restrict women's rights. To be admissible in court, a woman's testimony must be judged credible and conveyed through an adult male representative. Daughters receive half the inheritance granted sons, and the Christian widow of a Muslim man (see *Family and Kinship*) has no inheritance rights.

Gender and Politics

While women gained the right to vote in 1956, their political participation in subsequent decades was low. In 2011 (see *History and Myth*), Bothaina Kamel

became the first woman to campaign for the Presidency. Since 2019, 25% of parliamentary seats are reserved for women, and as of 2024, women hold 28% of the seats, compared to neighboring and Israel (24%). As of 2023, women hold 19% of ministerial posts and 45% of governmental positions, well above the 32% global average. In 2018, President Sisi appointed two female governors.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is widespread, with some 31% of married women aged 15-49 reporting having experienced GBV in a 2021 survey. The law criminalizes rape but does not outlaw domestic violence or spousal rape. While these crimes may be prosecuted as assault, victims face significant hurdles in pursuing justice. To file a criminal complaint, a victim must have apparent injuries and produce multiple eyewitnesses. Generally, the authorities tend to treat domestic violence as a family rather than a criminal matter.

Child marriage (legal or common-law) (see *Family and Kinship*) is most common among poorer families, with some 17% of girls married by age 18 and 2% before age 15 in 2017. Some girls are forced into temporary marriages with tourists, a form of prostitution and sex trafficking. In 2020, Egypt opened its first shelter for such victims.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Also known as female genital cutting and female circumcision, FGM is a procedure whereby a woman's sex organ is modified in a way that reduces her ability to experience sexual pleasure. Proponents of FGM see it as a way to mark a girl's passage into adolescent and discourage her from premarital sex and infidelity. Although FGM is illegal in Egypt, some 86% of women and girls aged 15-49 were subjected to the procedure in 2021, a decrease from previous years.

Sex and Procreation
Between 1960-2024, Egypt's birthrate dropped from 6.7 births per woman to 2.7, comparable to neighboring Libya (3) but higher than Saudi Arabia (1.9) and Israel (2.9). This decrease is primarily due to rising cost of living, lack of urban housing, and the evolving role of women in society. Abortion is permitted only if the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother. Both women who seek an illegal procedure and providers are subject to imprisonment.

Homosexuality in Egypt
While the law does not explicitly criminalize consensual same-sex activity, the authorities use other laws to prosecute and imprison homosexual people. The authorities also target members of the homosexual community for harassment, sometimes utilizing dating apps and social media to entrap suspects. Many homosexuals conceal their sexuality to avoid discrimination and persecution. At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Egypt. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview
Arabic is the official and primary language of business, government, education, and the media.

Arabic
Most Egyptians speak Egyptian Arabic as their first language. In school, Egyptians learn to read and write Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a standardized variety used across Arabic-speaking countries. Egyptians use MSA for writing, formal discussions, speeches, and in many national news broadcasts. With a 28-character alphabet, Arabic is written horizontally from right to left.

Egyptian Arabic and MSA differ in vocabulary and pronunciation. Egyptian Arabic has several dialects, notably Sa'idi Arabic (25.1 million speakers), Eastern Egyptian Bedawi (1.23 million), and Western Egyptian Bedawi (474,000). Egyptian Arabic is widely understood across Arabic-speaking countries due to Egypt's historic film industry (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Around 5.7 million residents speak other Arabic dialects such as Algerian, Gulf Arabic, and Moroccan, all of which may differ in notable ways from Egyptian Arabic.

Other Languages
Other languages include Bedawiyet, an Afro-Asiatic language spoken by Bedouins in the Red Sea governorate (83,000 speakers); the Nilo-Saharan languages of Nobiin (461,000) and Mattokki (35,000) spoken by Nubian people in Upper Egypt; and Siwi, an Afro-Asiatic language spoken by ***Amazighen*** (formerly known as Berbers) in northwest Egypt (20,000). Languages spoken primarily by refugees and immigrants include Yemeni, Sudanese, and Syrian dialects of Arabic (some 1.84 million speakers), Armenian (6,000), and Amharic (8,000). Coptic, the ancient language used in the Coptic Church before it adopted

Arabic (see *Religion and Spirituality*), is considered a dead language though it is used in some religious contexts.

English and French: English and French are part of the national education curriculum (see *Learning and Knowledge*). In general, the Egyptian elite and upper-middle class are more likely to speak English or French than lower-income Egyptians. Many foreign companies conduct business in these languages.

Communication Overview
Communicating competently in Egypt requires not only knowledge of Arabic, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style
Egyptians' communication patterns reflect their regard for politeness, generosity, hospitality, and respect for tradition. Accordingly, Egyptians devote significant time to greetings and

other formalities, such as inquiring about one's family and health in detail. In their interactions, Egyptians strive to emphasize respect for their conversation partners and their social status, while avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others, particularly in business meetings and in interactions with elders and social superiors. They may insert blessings into conversation as a demonstration of respect and hope for the future. In relaxed social situations, Egyptians tend to be expressive and humorous and consider the display of emotions during discussions to be indicative of deep and sincere concern for the subject.

The emphasis Egyptians place on politeness is evident in a widely held preference for indirect or non-specific answers. Further, Egyptians tend to provide a positive response to most requests, usually accompanied by the phrase *insha'allah* ("if God wills"). However, this "yes" answer is not necessarily a promise of action. Similarly, foreign nationals should not interpret a noncommittal answer to a request as neutral. Instead, such an answer might actually be negative.

Greetings

Egyptians typically extend greetings with great care and respect. Upon entering a room, Egyptian Muslims say *As-salam 'alaykum* ("peace be upon you"), and all present respond *Wa 'alaykum al-salaam* ("and upon you be peace"). Following this verbal exchange, men usually exchange light handshakes or kisses on the cheek, depending on their relationship. To indicate deep respect and sincerity, men pat each other's back.

Women commonly exchange cheek kisses when greeting each other. Some Egyptians of the opposite gender refrain from touching when greeting. In such cases, men greet women verbally or with a nod, though some women may extend their hands for a handshake with foreign men. Foreign nationals should wait for members of the opposite sex to initiate the greeting.

Names

Egyptian names for both genders reflect the genealogy of the father's side. The full name consists of a first (given) name, the person's father's (first) name, and the paternal grandfather's (first) name.

The full name may also include a family name or trade, which frequently begins with *al*- or *el*-, the article meaning "the," and typically indicates origin in a particular geographic location or relationship with a respected ancestor. Traditionally, an Egyptian woman does not take her husband's name upon marriage.

Forms of Address

Friends and relatives of the same sex usually address each

other by first name. In formal settings, honorifics such as military ranks and professional or personal titles (Dr., Engineer, Mr. or Mrs.) are often combined with the person's first name (e.g. Dr. Bill, Engineer Sarah).

Conversational Topics

Polite conversation typically involves a series of elaborate and repetitive inquiries about the general well-being of each other and the extended family. Male Egyptians usually avoid inquiring in detail about another man's female relations, and male foreign nationals should do the same. When confronted with a sensitive topic like politics or religion, foreign nationals should attempt to change the subject rather than refuse to discuss the matter outright. Suitable topics include Egyptian culture, food, and soccer, and overall impressions of the country. While the vast majority of Egyptians are supportive of Palestinian causes and critical of Israel, it is best to avoid this topic when interacting with Egyptian partners.

Gestures

To beckon, Egyptians wave the fingers of the right hand with the palm facing down. Holding the right hand out, palm upward, then touching the thumb and tips of the fingers together while slowly moving the hand up and down means "calm down," "be patient," or "slowly." To indicate "no," Egyptians move their head upward. Foreign nationals should avoid the "OK" hand gesture and use a thumbs-up instead. Generally, they should avoid gesturing with the left hand (see *Time and Space*) and showing the soles of feet or shoes to Egyptians.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of spelling out Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. The table below shows sounds or letters having no English equivalent or that vary from MSA pronunciations. When texting or writing informally online in Romanized Arabic, Saudis frequently replace certain Arabic letters with numbers, also depicted below.

Arabic Letter	Transliteration and Description	Number (if applicable)	Example
أ	a	2	**A**frica
ع	'a or aa	3	sound from deep in the throat as in the name **'A**li or the instrument **'ou**d
خ	kh; strong "h"	5	lo**ch** (as pronounced in Scotland)
ط	ṭ or t	6	**t**ar
ح	ḥ or h; whispered "h"	7	**h**oot
ق	g	8	**g**olf (pronounced like **cou**gh; transliterated q in MSA)
ص	ṣ or s	9	**sa**w
غ	gh; like the guttural French "r"		Pa**r**is (as pronounced by a French person)
ذ	dH; Soft "th"		**th**is
ء	' (glottal stop)		pause in the middle of "uh-oh"
ج	y (or j)		**y**es
ك	ch (or k)		**ch**in

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Egyptian Arabic (Romanized)
Hello (May peace be upon you)	As-salam 'alaykum
Response: And upon you be peace	Wa 'alaykum al-salaam
How are you?	Ezayik?
Hi	Ahlan
Good morning	Sabah al-khayr
Good afternoon/evening	Masaa al-khayr
My name is...	Ismi…
Yes	Aiwa or Na'am
No	La'a
Please	Min fadlik or law samhat
Thank you	Shukran
You're welcome	'Al-'awf
Good night (when leaving)	Tisbah 'ala khayr
Where are you from?	Inta minayn? (Inti for female)
Where do you live?	Inta 'ayish fayn? (Inti 'aysha for female)
I am American	Ana amriki (amrikiyya for female)
Do you speak (English/Arabic)?	Bi titkalim 'arabi? (titkalimi for female)
Today/Now	El-naharda/dilwa'ti
Tomorrow	Bokra
Yesterday	Imbarih
The meal was very good	Al wagbah kanit hilwa awi
Look!	Bos!
Excuse me	Law samaht
Pardon?	Law mu'akhza?
I don't understand you	Mish fahim (fahma for female)
What?	Eh?
Where?	Fayn?
How?	Izay?
Me/you	Ana/inta/inti (you for female)
Him/her	Huwa/heya
What time is it now?	Al-sa'a kam dilwa'ti?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy
- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 75%
- Male: 80%
- Female: 69% (est. 2022)

Early Education
In ancient Egypt (see *History and Myth*), formal education focused on instructing male priests and government officials primarily in writing, astronomy, and mathematics. During the Greek Ptolemaic period, education emphasized the cultivation of a Greek identity, and Alexandria became a center of philosophy, art, and science (see *History and Myth*). Education during the subsequent Roman period (see *History and Myth*) followed the Greek model, with instruction largely restricted to the upper classes.

Following the spread of Islam after the 7th century (see *History and Myth*), the focus of education shifted, with teachers giving lessons in Qur'anic verses, Islamic rituals and duties, and Arabic calligraphy to the children of elite Muslim families. In 998, the ruling Fatimid dynasty founded Al-Azhar University, still the world's primary center of Islamic and Arabic learning (see *Religion and Spirituality*) and beginning a tradition of Al-Azharite education that continues today (see below). The 8th-14th centuries were a "Golden Age" of learning in the Islamic world, with significant advances in mathematics, physics, astronomy, and philosophy.

In 1805, Ottoman Governor Muhammad Ali (see *History and Myth*) introduced a dual educational system, with most students attending a ***kuttab***, a traditional Islamic school. By contrast, the ***madrasa*** was a government-funded secular school that aimed to produce graduates aligned with Egypt's workforce requirements. Secular educational opportunities expanded in

subsequent decades with the opening of institutions of higher learning in military studies, medicine, engineering, accounting, and agriculture, among other subjects.

20th Century Education

Educational access shrank when Egypt was under British control in the late 19th-early 20th centuries (see *History and Myth*). The British made English the language of instruction in government schools, while cutting their funding. Consequently, most public schools began charging fees, effectively restricting educational access to a small class of elites. Over time, the literacy rate plummeted, reaching 5% by 1922. Nevertheless, opportunities for the elite grew during this period with the founding of several private foreign language institutions, notably the American

University in Cairo.

With Egypt's 1922 transition to a parliamentary monarchy (see *History and Myth*), the Egyptian government gained authority over public education, making Arabic the primary language of instruction and increasing budgets substantially. In 1923, 6 years of primary education became mandatory and free for all children, and by 1950, fees for pre-primary and secondary levels were abolished. Nevertheless, enrollment lagged, with fewer than half of primary school-aged children attending school in 1952.

The military regime under Gen Gamal Abdel Nasser that seized control in 1952 (see *History and Myth*) pledged to expand educational opportunities and doubled the educational budget over the next decade. In 1962, Nasser extended universal free education to the post-secondary level, while guaranteeing public sector employment to all university graduates. However, the authorities struggled to supply the necessary teachers and infrastructure to accommodate surging enrollment, causing many schools to operate in shifts and the quality of public education to deteriorate.

President Anwar Sadat's "open-door" foreign investment policy (see *History and Myth*) allowed more private, foreign-language

schools to open. By the mid-1970s, educational spending comprised 25% of the government's budget, and the number of primary schools had doubled to 10,000 since 1952. Nevertheless, the quality of public schools remained substandard, and a dual education system was reestablished. Consequently, the vast majority of students attended resource-poor and overcrowded public schools, while a small elite attended private, foreign-language institutions.

In 1981, mandatory education was lengthened to 9 years, though enforcement was limited. Enrollment continued to outpace capacity, and class sizes swelled. The labor market was unable to absorb the growing numbers of secondary and post-secondary graduates, and by the early 1990s, the government had ended its public sector employment guarantee.

Historically, girls' participation in education has lagged, with low enrollment and high drop-out rates. Over the last decades, the government has prioritized closing this gender gap. Today, girls enroll at similar rates as boys at all levels.

Modern Education System
According to the 2014 Constitution, education is free and compulsory from ages 6-17, though the authorities tend to view secondary education as optional. Generally, the educational system remains split between free public and fee-based private schools. Private alternatives include "ordinary" schools that largely follow the national curriculum in Arabic; foreign-language schools that offer the national curriculum in English, French, or German; religious schools; and international schools. As of 2023, private enrollment accounted for 17% of total school enrollment and 9% of the primary level.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees K-12 education. The Constitution requires government spending on education to equal at least 4% of GDP, slightly less than the global average, and between 2014-19, government spending on health and

education combined increased by 82%. Nevertheless, some 20% of school buildings are dilapidated, and trained teachers are severely lacking. Classrooms are often overcrowded, especially in urban areas, compelling some schools to conduct lessons in shifts. In 2025 funding for education was only 2.7% well below the constitutional mandate. As of 2024, more than 49% of public schools had Internet access.

Classrooms are typically segregated by gender after the primary level. All private and public-school students are required to attend Islamic or Christian religious instruction, with alignment based on official designations, not personal or parental preference. However, international schools are exempt from the religious education requirement. Public schools generally fall into two types: Arabic schools that follow the national curriculum and teach English and French as foreign languages, and "experimental language schools" that teach part of the national curriculum (generally science, mathematics, and computer science) in English.

In 2018, the MoE initiated a major reform program with full implementation by 2030. Called EDU 2.0, the program is designed to increase the use of technology, replace rote memorization with critical thinking skills, and decrease inequalities. Other aspects of the plan include the phasing out of experimental language schools and making English the language of instruction for math and science in all public schools from the 7th-grade onward. It also created public international schools using international curricula and opened schools combining Japanese and Egyptian curricula.

Pre-Primary: Children aged 4-5 attend free public or fee-based private pre-primary programs. While enrollment rates are low, they are slowly increasing, with some 29% of children of the appropriate age attending such programs in 2019.

Basic Education: Basic education comprises 6 years of primary and 3 years of preparatory studies. Instruction focuses on Arabic, mathematics, natural sciences, social studies, English, and religious studies. In 2021, almost 99% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled. To continue to the next grade, students must pass a year-end exam. Successful completion of a standardized exam at the end of 9th-grade earns students the Basic Education Certificate.

Secondary Education: Depending on their performance on the 9th-grade standardized exam, students may continue their education at a general or technical secondary school. Lasting 3 years, the general secondary track prepares students for university studies and adds several elective subjects. To graduate and receive the General Secondary Education Certificate, general secondary students must pass a standardized examination called the ***Thanaweya Amma***. Adequate performance on this exam qualifies students for admission to public universities, with access to some majors determined by score.

By contrast, the technical track provides training in industrial, agricultural, or commercial subjects and lasts 3 or 5 years, with the longer program providing specialized instruction and recognition as a senior technician. Graduates of the technical track may also progress to higher education, given adequate performance on a standardized exam. As of 2021, about 94% of students were enrolled in lower secondary education with a completion rate or 86%. That same year, 72% were enrolled in upper secondary with a completion rate of 84%.

Al-Azharite Education: The government-funded Al-Azhar University (see *Religion and Spirituality*) operates its own low-fee education system, with instruction from the primary through secondary levels. Al-Azharite schools supplement the national curriculum with Islamic religious instruction and are open only to

Muslim students. In 2020, some 2 million students attended around 11,000 Al-Azharite schools. As of 2019, Al- Azharite students comprised 7% of Egypt's primary and 4% of secondary students.

Post-Secondary Education

Egypt's post-secondary offerings have continued to expand in recent decades. Since the 1990s, the government has eased restrictions on the establishment of private institutions, resulting in the number of private universities growing from 1 (the American University in Cairo) to 16 by 1996. Today, Egypt is home to some 28 public and 62 private universities enrolling some 3.8 million students in 2024. Of those, 10% were attending private institutions, primarily small, undergraduate programs in Cairo. The rest attend low-tuition public institutions, notably Cairo University (with some 192,000 students) and Alexandria

University (170,000). As one of the world's oldest institutions of higher learning still in operation, Al-Azhar University serves as a center of Sunni Islamic learning (see *Religion and Spirituality*) but also offers programs of study in the humanities, medicine, and engineering, among others, enrolling some 371,000 students as of 2021. Other options for higher education include public and private technical institutes.

In recent years, women have comprised a growing proportion of higher educational graduates, increasing from 40-56% between 2005-16. As of 2022, women and men enroll in post-secondary programs at almost equal rates, and men enroll in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs at only slightly higher rates than women. Egypt is also a popular destination for international students, hosting more than 26,000 in 2024. Unemployment among university graduates is high, causing many educated Egyptians to seek opportunities abroad (see *Economics and Resources*).

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview
Egyptians view interpersonal connections as key to conducting business. While public displays of affection are considered inappropriate, social touching among friends and family is common.

Time and Work
Egypt's workweek runs Sunday-Thursday. While normal business hours are 8am-5pm, some businesses follow a 10am-9pm schedule, closing for a break from 2pm-4pm. Banks and government offices open from 8am or 8:30am-2pm, and post offices remain open until 3pm. During Ramadan (seen *Religion and Spirituality*), the workday is typically shorter. Some Christian-owned businesses have limited hours or close on Sundays.

Working Conditions: Egyptian labor laws establish an 8-hour workday and 5-day workweek. Laws also guarantee overtime pay, 21 days of paid vacation, and paid maternity leave (see *Sex and Gender*). Despite these and other benefits and protections, lax enforcement often results in unsafe working conditions, and the private sector recognizes no minimum wage. Many Egyptians are engaged in informal employment (see *Economics and Resources*), where labor codes and workplace standards remain unenforced. Child labor (see *Family and Kinship*), sexual harassment, and workplace discrimination are also common.

Time Zone: Egypt observes Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Egypt does not observe daylight savings time.

Calendars: Egyptian Muslims use the ***Hijri*** (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer.

Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening. Egypt's Coptic community (see *Religion and Spirituality*) uses its own calendar to track religious holidays. Based on an ancient Egyptian calendar, the Coptic calendar has 12 months of 30 days and 1 month of 5-6 days.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January 7: Coptic Christmas
- January 25: Revolution/Police Day (see *History and Myth*)
- March/April: ***Sham El Nessim*** (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*)
- April 25: Sinai Liberation Day (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*)
- May 1: Labor Day/Workers' Day
- June 30: Revolution Day (see *History and Myth*)
- July 23: Revolution Day (marking the abolition of the monarchy—see *History and Myth*)
- October 6: Armed Forces Day

These holidays occur on variable dates:
- ***Eid al-Fitr*****:** End of Ramadan
- ***Eid al-Adha*****:** Festival of Sacrifice
- ***Awal Muharram*****:** *Hijri* New Year
- ***Mawlid al-Nabi*****:** Birth of the Prophet Muhammad

Time and Business: Egyptians tend to have a relaxed approach to time, considering schedules and deadlines less important than relationships and social obligations. While business meetings typically begin on time, lengthy introductions, small talk, and the serving of tea and sweets may delay the start or progress of meetings. Workplaces are typically hierarchical, and subordinate staff's inability to act without management's approval may prolong negotiations and decision making.

Public and Personal Space

Egypt maintains gender segregation in some public spaces, though the practice is not always strictly enforced. Many educational institutions above the primary level provide segregated instruction (see *Learning and Knowledge*), and mosques designate separate areas for men and women. Most Egyptians maintain an arm's length when conversing with strangers. Friends of the same gender may maintain very little personal space when interacting.

Touch: Unrelated Egyptians of the opposite sex tend to refrain from touching, even during greetings (see *Language and Communication*). Close friends and relatives often touch while interacting, and friends of the same gender may hold hands in public. Because the left hand is reserved for personal hygiene, Egyptians tend to use only the right hand when eating, gesturing, passing and accepting items, and shaking hands. Foreign nationals should adhere to this custom to avoid offense.

Eye Contact: While Egyptians consider direct eye contact a demonstration of sincerity and interest, foreign nationals should avoid prolonged staring and winking, particularly with members of the opposite sex.

Photographs

Most archaeological sites require photography permits. Photographing airports, military installations, government buildings, and infrastructure, such as the Aswan Dam and Suez Canal, is forbidden. Foreign nationals should obtain permission before photographing an Egyptian.

Driving

Egyptians drive on the right side of the road. Conditions are often poor, with roads lacking adequate illumination and signage. Other hazards include unmarked lanes, potholes, and drivers who disregard traffic laws. Traffic safety has improved significantly in recent years, with Egypt recording 9 traffic-related deaths per 100,000 people in 2021, lower than neighboring Libya (34) and the US rate (14).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Egypt's clothing, music, and art reflect its unique history and the country's location at the intersection of the Middle East and North Africa.

Dress and Appearance

Standards of dress tend to be conservative. Both male and female visitors should also dress conservatively, avoiding shorts, mini-skirts, and sleeveless tops, except when visiting private beaches or pools.

Most clothing is made from natural fibers such as cotton or linen and tends to be loose-fitting. Both men and women commonly wear the traditional *galabeya*, a long-sleeved cotton garment that falls to the ankles. While men's *galabeyas* are typically white, beige, gray, or light blue, women's versions are typically brightly colored. Some men pair the *galabeya* with a turban or a *kufi* (skullcap) worn underneath a red-and-white checked headscarf.

In formal and business settings, men often wear Western-style business suits. In casual settings, both traditional and Western styles are common, typically slacks or jeans with collared knit or woven shirts, usually with long sleeves.

Western-style clothing is also popular among women, though slacks and pants are common only among the upper classes and in higher education settings. Affluent women tend to prefer Western-style silk dresses with high heels and gold jewelry. Lower- and middle-class women tend to dress more conservatively, preferring loose dresses, blouses with long skirts, or *galabeyas*. Unlike in other Muslim-majority countries in the region, the *abaya* (a loose black robe that covers most of the body) is fairly uncommon, worn primarily by Bedouins (see *Political and Social Relations*) and devout Muslims. Many Egyptian women wear a *hijab* (headscarf).

Recreation and Leisure

Egyptians tend to spend their leisure time with friends and family. Popular pastimes include dining, shopping, and socializing at shopping malls and traditional open-air markets. Men typically enjoy gathering at *ahwas* (coffee shops) (see *Sustenance and Health*) to socialize and play card games, backgammon, and dominoes. During the hotter months, affluent families vacation along the Mediterranean or Red Sea coasts.

Holidays and Festivals: Several national holidays commemorate important dates in Egypt's history. For example, Sinai Liberation Day marks the Sinai Peninsula's 1982 return from Israeli occupation. Other holidays mark changes in Egypt's political leadership (see *Time and Space*). Still others reflect the country's religious diversity (see *Religion and Spirituality*). During the 3-day Eid al-Fitr and 4-day Eid al-Adha festivities (see *Religion and Spirituality*), families gather for prayer, feasting, gift-giving, and charity donations.

Since 2002, Coptic Christmas has been a national holiday. However, the most significant Christian holiday is Easter, which followers mark with a special church service and shared family meal. Egypt's oldest holiday, *Sham El Nessim*, celebrates the beginning of spring and traces to the ancient Egyptian Old Kingdom (see *History and Myth*). Egyptians typically eat *fasikh*, fermented fish, on *Sham el Nessim*. The holiday falls on Easter Monday, and both Christians and Muslims mark the day by enjoying the outdoors and dyeing eggs. In rural areas, some Egyptians, both Christians and Muslims, celebrate the *mulid* ("birthday") of saints. Festivities include games, feasting, singing, and dancing.

Sports and Games

Due to high outdoor temperatures, indoor sports such as basketball, volleyball, tennis, handball, and squash are popular.

On the Red and Mediterranean seas and the Nile, sailing, jet skiing, waterskiing, rowing, fishing, diving, and snorkeling are common pastimes, and Egypt hosts a variety of international watersports competitions each year. Due to Egypt's long tradition of breeding and training show horses, equestrian sports are also popular.

Soccer: Football (soccer) is Egypt's most popular sport and pastime. Many Egyptians begin playing at a young age, and children often create makeshift soccer fields in streets or open fields. The men's domestic premier league comprises 18 teams. The Cairo-based Al Ahly Sporting Club has won a record 42 league titles and is considered Africa's most successful team. The men's national team (nicknamed "the Pharaohs") is also one of Africa's top teams and has won the Africa Cup of Nations a record seven times. However, the Pharaohs have had little success in global competitions, competing in the World Cup just three times (in 1934, 1990, and 2018). The women's national team ("the Cleopatras") is underfunded and has had limited success.

Music

Traditional Egyptian music reflects ancient Egyptian, Arabic, Turkish, and Western influences and typically features fast rhythms and hand clapping. Traditional instruments include the *oud* (a stringed instrument similar to a guitar), the *rahab* (a two-stringed fiddle), the *nay* (flute), and various percussion instruments. Traditional music was popular throughout the 20th century, and during the Nasser regime (see *History and Myth*), lyrics often focused on Egyptian nationalism. The 20th century's most beloved singer was Umm Kulthum, known as the "Star of the East," whose music explored themes of love and loss. Some 3-4 million mourners attended her 1975 funeral procession in Cairo.

In recent decades, some Egyptian music has reflected political dissent and societal frustrations. Emerging in the mid-20th century, **al jeel** ("the generation") music combines elements of traditional Arabic styles with Western-style pop and features fast rhythms and politically themed lyrics. Although repressed during the Mubarak era (see *History and Myth*), *al jeel* songs reemerged during the 2011 Arab Spring (see *History and Myth*) and inspired the sub-genre **shaabi**, music with a similar style but more provocative political themes. Today, **mahraganat**, a type of hip hop with similarly incendiary lyrics, is popular in urban areas.

Dance
Performed throughout the Middle East, belly dancing is known as **raqs baladi** ("local dancing") or **raqs sharqi** ("oriental dancing") in Egypt. The art form involves barefoot female dancers in flowing dresses performing circular arm and hip movements that reflect the emotions and rhythm of the accompanying music. While some Egyptians reject belly dancing as incompatible with Islamic modesty standards, it is considered a national dance and is often an integral part of weddings and other festivities.

Other traditional dances vary by region and ethnic group (see *Political and Social Relations*). For example, Nubian dance styles typically involve simple footwork, symmetrical arm movements, and shoulder tilts. While men lean forward when dancing, women remain upright, and neither move their hips. A well-known dance from Upper Egypt is the **tahtib**, a type of **raqs assaya** ("stick dance") in which male dancers use sticks in choreographed moves to simulate fighting.

Cinema
Throughout the 20th century, Egypt's film industry was the Middle East's largest, producing over 100 movies annually in the 1940s-50s. One of Egypt's most notable directors, Youssef Chahine, made several films that received international acclaim, notably *Cairo Station*, *Alexandria… Why?,* and *An Egyptian Story*. While Egypt's film industry has declined in the 21st

century, Egyptian-made movies and documentaries centering on the 2011 Arab Spring, notably Ahmad Abdalla's 2013 film *Rags and Tatters*, have recently received international recognition.

Literature

Contemporary literature began to blossom with the 1914 publication of Muhammed Huseyn Haykal's book *Zaynab: Country Scenes and Morals*. Considered the first Egyptian novel, the work explored marital relationships in rural Egypt. In subsequent decades, authors explored all aspects of Egyptian life, often focusing on the challenges of living through political upheaval and under authoritarian regimes (see *History and Myth*).

In 1988, novelist and playwright Naguib Mahfouz became the first Egyptian and Arabic-language writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Mahfouz produced some 50 novels and 350 short stories, often focusing on contemporary society and using a unique style meant to evoke conversations in Egypt's coffee shops. Literature in the 21st century often centers on political themes and societal criticism.

Iaa al Aswany received international acclaim for his 2002 novel *The Yacoubian Building*, a work that illuminates societal inequities by focusing on the residents of one Cairo apartment building and notably includes a gay main character (see *Sex and Gender*). Other recent works, such as Salwa Bakr's *The Golden Chariot* and Mansoura Ez Eldin's *Maryam's Maze*, explore women's experiences in Egyptian society.

Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Egypt has a rich tradition of folk arts and crafts, including brass and copperware, ceramics, jewelry, and glassware. As a major cotton producer (see *Economics and Resources*), Egypt is also known for its cotton textiles. Some rural areas produce high-quality silks, often woven with bright and elaborate patterns. Bedouins are known for their intricate and beautiful jewelry, often incorporating coins.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events, where family and friends linger to enjoy conversation and companionship. Egyptian cuisine reflects the country's long history of foreign presence with Turkish, Levantine, and European influences.

Dining Customs

Most Egyptians eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. The largest is traditionally the mid-day meal, often served in the mid- to late afternoon, when all family members have returned from work or school. Diners typically share large, centrally placed dishes, using their right hands to scoop food, as most Egyptians do not use the left hand to pass items or eat (see *Time and Space*). When invited to an Egyptian home, guests typically arrive a few minutes late and present the host with a small gift, such as flowers or sweets. During the meal, the host typically offers multiple servings to show their hospitality, and guests should try every dish.

Diet

Grains and legumes grown in the Nile valley are important staples, with ***aiysh baladi*** (flatbread), rice, ***fuul*** (fava beans), and lentils incorporated into most meals. These staples are typically accompanied by vegetables stewed with meat, most commonly beef or lamb, but also chicken and pigeon. Fish is also an important part of the diet, with freshwater varieties from the Nile common in Upper Egypt and seafood from the Mediterranean Sea popular along the coast and in the Nile Delta. Many Egyptian dishes are heavily spiced. Common flavorings including garlic, coriander, cumin, bay leaves, and cardamom. ***Samna*** (clarified butter) is the preferred cooking fat for both sweet and savory dishes. Common fruits include oranges, peaches, strawberries, and melons.

Observant Muslims consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they adhere to particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is *halal*, allowed by Islamic law. Laws prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol in public places other than in hotels and other tourist facilities.

Meals and Popular Dishes

For breakfast, Egyptians eat a variety of sweet and savory foods like *fuul medames* (mashed fava beans cooked with garlic, cumin, lemon, and olive oil), eggs boiled or fried in *samna*, or bread eaten with jam, pickles, or *labneh* (thick, creamy yogurt garnished with olive oil or served strained with diced cucumber, fresh mint, and crushed garlic). Another popular breakfast dish is *ta'amiya* (also known as *falafel*), fried balls of ground fava beans flavored with parsley and cumin and served with bread and a dip such as *baba ghanoush* (mashed roasted eggplant with sesame paste, garlic, lemon, and oil) and salad.

The mid-day meal is usually eaten between 2pm-5pm. It typically begins with *mezze*, a series of starters that are shared among diners, then followed by heartier dishes, such as *molokhiyya* (garlic and jute-leaf soup) or grilled meats prepared as *kebabs* (skewered) or *kofte* (minced with onion and spiced).

Dinner is usually served around 10pm and may consist of leftovers from the afternoon meal. Popular dishes on special occasions include *hamam mashi*, a young pigeon stuffed with *freekeh* (cracked green wheat), onions, and giblets, and *fattah*, spiced chunks of meat layered over toasted bread and rice and topped with tomato sauce. Common desserts include *mahalabia* (milk pudding topped with nuts), *Umm Ali* (bread pudding with raisins and pistachios), and *baklava* (a pastry of layered filo dough, nuts, and rose-water syrup).

Beverages

Egyptians drink strong black coffee brewed in the Turkish style, sweet black tea, often garnished with mint, or black tea with milk.

Other popular drinks include **karkadeh** a spiced hibiscus tea, fresh fruit juices, and **asab**, pressed sugarcane. The ancient Egyptians (see *History and Myth*) began brewing beer around 3000 BC. This tradition continues in **bouza**, a homemade fermented alcoholic beverage made from barley and bread, though the practice appears to be dying out. Modern beer production dates to the late 19th century, when a Belgian businessman opened a brewery in Alexandria. Today, popular Egyptian brews include Stella and Sakara, with non-alcoholic versions marketed to observant Muslims. Winemaking has a similarly long history. While the industry is small today, some Egyptian wines have received international awards in recent years.

Eating Out
Restaurants in urban centers such as Cairo or Alexandria range from upscale establishments specializing in international cuisine to inexpensive food stalls. Because traditional Egyptian cuisine is often labor intensive, few restaurants specialize in it. However, establishments selling *ta'amiya*, **koshari** (lentils cooked with rice, noodles, onions, and tomato sauce), **fatir** (a stuffed flatbread), and other Egyptian "fast foods" are common. Similarly, grills specializing in *kebabs*, *kofte*, or **Denise** (gilt-head seabream) from the Mediterranean are popular. Coffee shops offering **shisha** (flavored tobacco smoked through a water pipe) are common gathering spots. Most restaurants add a surcharge of 12%, but an additional 10% tip for good service is expected.

Health Overview
While their overall health has improved by some measures in recent decades, Egyptians continue to face communicable disease outbreaks and other serious health challenges. Life expectancy at birth has increased from about 65 to 75 years since 1990, while this figure is on par with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) average (72), it is below the US (78) average. Between 1990-2024, infant mortality (the proportion of

infants who die before age 1) decreased from 63 deaths per 1,000 live births to 16, on par with the MENA average (18) yet higher than the US rate (6).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. While medicine in ancient Egypt was a well-developed field that included dental and surgical procedures, traditional medicine today focuses primarily on herbal remedies to cure both physical and spiritual illness. The use of herbal medicines is most common in rural areas, where access to government-run medical facilities is limited, and among the Bedouin (see *Political and Social Relations*) of the Sinai Peninsula. Besides herbal remedies, some Egyptians practice **hijama** (also known as wet cupping, the process of applying heated cups to the skin to extract toxins from the body, improve blood flow, and alleviate pain).

Healthcare System

While Egypt's 2014 Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) gives every citizen the right to comprehensive medical care, many Egyptians continue to lack access to quality treatment. Most Egyptians receive healthcare through a public system overseen by the Ministry of Health (MoH). Egyptians laboring in the informal sector (see *Economics and Resources*) or living in rural areas rely primarily on free care provided by a network of MoH-managed hospitals.

The MoH also oversees the Health Insurance Organization (HIO), which provides medical coverage to Egyptians employed in the formal sector, school-aged children, and widows. While considered part of the state-run system and the recipient of government grants, the HIO also receives funding through a system of paycheck deductions and employer contributions.

Residents of some regions also have access to a network of providers, which the Curative Care Organization, a nonprofit organization under the authority of the MoH, oversees.

While this system provides healthcare access to needy Egyptians, chronic underfunding means most public facilities lack equipment and qualified staff and experience lax enforcement of sanitation standards. In 2020, Egypt had just 7 physicians per 10,000 people, far below the World Health Organization's recommendation of 23 and the US rate of 36.

Lack of access and low quality compel many low-income and rural residents to forego healthcare.

By contrast, Egypt's private healthcare facilities are typically well-equipped with up-to-date resources and highly qualified medical personnel. However, high out-of-pocket costs mean their services are only accessible to middle- and upper-income Egyptians. The stark differences between the private and public systems have resulted in notable disparities in health outcomes across socio-economic groups.

Egypt's spending on healthcare as a proportion of GDP has historically been low – less than 5% in 2022 compared to around 6.8% in Jordan, 7.3% in Israel and almost 17% in the US. Egypt's Constitution requires that healthcare spending equal at least 3% of GDP. To improve Egyptians' healthcare access and health outcomes, the government introduced a new universal health insurance system (UHIS) in 2018. Rolled out in phases, the UHIS will eventually provide mandatory coverage for all citizens, with vulnerable groups receiving government subsidies.

Health Challenges
As in most countries, the leading causes of death in Egypt are chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, which accounted for 86% of deaths in 2019.

Preventable "external causes," such as suicides, car accidents, smoking, drug use, and other injuries resulted in about 5% of deaths, slightly lower than the US rate of 7%. A lack of proper sanitation and safe drinking water combined with urban crowding contribute to the spread of communicable and infectious diseases such as typhoid fever, hepatitis, and measles. These diseases impact primarily low-income Egyptians living in urban areas with limited access to preventative care. In all, communicable diseases represented about 10% of deaths in 2019.

For the past 3 decades, Egypt has been combatting an epidemic of hepatitis C, an infection of the blood that causes liver damage.

Egypt has had some of the world's highest prevalence rates in recent years, with some 6% of the adult population estimated as living with the virus in 2019. In 2018, Egypt launched its "100 Million Healthy Lives" campaign offering free screening and treatment for infected individuals, with the aim of eliminating hepatitis C in Egypt by 2023. This campaign has been successful as the prevalence rate has dropped to less than 1%. To reduce mortality associated with NCDs, the campaign also provides screening for NCD risk factors, such as obesity and cholesterol levels.

Smoking-related illnesses, primarily among men, also represent a significant health burden. While an estimated 48% of men regularly used tobacco in 2020, that rate is expected to rise to 63% by 2025. To discourage tobacco use, the government increased cigarette taxes in 2020.

As of December 2023, the World Health Organization reported some 516,023 confirmed cases of COVID-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus, resulting in some 24,830 deaths. However, the actual numbers are likely much higher. Urban areas with high population density, particularly Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria, have been the hardest hit by the pandemic.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Since ancient times, Egypt has been a significant crossroads of trade. Modernization efforts in the 19th century (see *History and Myth*) also included the introduction of large-scale cotton production. As the global price of cotton soared during the American Civil War, Egyptian farmers doubled production between 1861-63. By the end of the 19th century, 93% of Egypt's revenue derived from cotton.

In 1854, Africa's first railway opened in Egypt. In 1858, tracks were extended to the city of Suez, marking the first modern transport link between the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, interest in a canal in the region had been growing since the late 18th-century French occupation (see *History and Myth*). In 1854, Ottoman Governor Ismail Pasha granted a concession to a French company to build the Suez Canal, which was completed in 1869. However, Ismail Pasha's economic mismanagement forced him to sell Egypt's share in the canal, depriving Egypt of canal income for decades.

Following their 1882 invasion (see *History and Myth*), the British sought to increase agricultural output as a way to ensure political stability. They constructed the first Aswan Dam to improve irrigation, though they also profited by paying Egyptian farmers below market prices for their cotton. During this period, Egypt became increasingly important as a regional commercial hub, attracting immigrants from across the Mediterranean.

By the early 20th century, Egypt was experiencing economic decline. A reduction in global demand for cotton during the 1930s Great Depression hit Egypt hard. With few opportunities in the global market, Egypt turned inward, investing in domestic industry and growing Egyptian business ownership.

The 1952 military coup (see *History and Myth*) brought significant economic changes. Land reform was the first focus, with new laws prohibiting ownership of large tracts, limiting rents, and establishing farming cooperatives and minimum wages. Following his 1954 assumption of power, President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized key industries and pursued several large-scale projects, notably the Aswan High Dam, which opened in 1970 (see *History and Myth*). While his 1956 announcement of the nationalization of the Suez Canal caused an international crisis (see *History and Myth*), the episode ended with the canal under Egyptian control.

Nasser opened new state-run iron and steel, chemical, manufacturing, and transportation firms. He also expanded public educational opportunities (see *Learning and Knowledge*), while guaranteeing public sector employment to university graduates. Meanwhile, subsidies on food and consumer goods helped raise the standard of living.

Economic growth slowed due to the costs of the 1967 war with Israel (see *History and Myth*), and Egypt began to depend heavily on foreign aid. Beginning in 1974, President Anwar Sadat introduced ***infitah*** (open door) economic reforms to increase foreign investment and grow the private sector. The government established free trade zones, which offered foreign investors tax and tariff incentives, and partnered with foreign investors in joint venture projects. Meanwhile, rising oil prices compelled many Egyptians to seek employment in the oil industries of regional Arab states, beginning a flow of remittances that steadily grew over the decades.

Nevertheless, the continued threat of war with Israel discouraged many potential foreign investors, and by the mid-1970s, Egypt's debt burden was becoming intolerable. In an effort to secure loans from the World Bank, Sadat announced the elimination of most consumer goods subsidies in early 1977. As a result, food prices skyrocketed, provoking violent

demonstrations that compelled the government to reinstate the subsidies. Following the 1979 peace treaty with Israel (see *History and Myth*), the US became Egypt's principal aid donor.

In the 1980s, President Hosni Mubarak continued Sadat's *infitah* policies, while privatizing some state companies and introducing antipoverty programs. He also eased restrictions on domestic investors. However, economic challenges remained, and Mubarak faced labor strikes and food riots. Unable to repay its foreign loans, Egypt was compelled to accept an international agreement in 1991 that devalued its currency, raised interest rates, and decreased subsidies on consumer goods. As a result, the income gap widened, and societal discontent increased. Meanwhile, terrorist attacks on foreign tourists (see *History and Myth*) negatively impacted the tourism industry, a notable source of revenue.

Job creation failed to keep pace with Egypt's growing population, and by the mid-2000s, some 40% of Egyptians worked in the informal economy without social safety nets. In 2007-08, Egyptians gathered again to protest high food prices. Ongoing public frustrations with high unemployment, low wages, and high prices contributed to the 2011 Arab Spring events that resulted in Mubarak's removal (see *History and Myth*).

Since taking office in 2014 (see *History and Myth*), President Abdel Fattah al Sisi has strengthened ties with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Kuwait, whose aid has funded several infrastructure projects. He has also pursued closer ties with sub-Saharan Africa, signing the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement in 2015 with 26 African states. To buttress the economy, Sisi negotiated a $12 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund in 2016. The conditions for the loan included austerity measures, increased taxes, and the end of the Egyptian currency's fixed exchange rate.

Launched in 2016, Egypt's Vision 2030 plan aims to reduce poverty, increase employment, and develop a diversified economy, among other goals. Still, Egypt continues to face an array of challenges. Some 10% of Egyptians hold nearly half the country's wealth, and around two-thirds struggle to afford basic necessities. Unemployment and underemployment remain serious problems, especially among youth, who faced a 19% unemployment rate in 2024. Unemployment is particularly high among university graduates, with experts estimating that some 10,000 doctors permanently left the country between 2016-19 (see *Sustenance and Health*).

Up to 63% of Egyptians work in the informal economy, which remains untaxed and unregulated. Experts estimate that informal employment accounted for about 40% of Egypt's GDP and over half of new jobs in 2024. The economy continues to rely on remittances from Egyptians living abroad, which comprised almost 6.1% of GDP or $24.2 billion in 2023. Although GDP grew through 2022, largely due to increased canal revenues, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted economy through the loss of tourism revenue and decreased private sector investment and remittances. GDP growth decreased to 2.5% in 2024.

Services
Accounting for about 51% of GDP and some 53% of employment in 2024, services comprise the economy's largest sector. Key subsectors include tourism and shipping.

Tourism: Comprising about 8% of GDP and 8% of employment in 2024, the travel and tourism industry generated some $32.2 billion the same year.

The Suez Canal: One of Egypt's main sources of foreign revenue, the Suez Canal is a major transit point for oil and liquefied natural gas traveling to Europe and North America from the Arabian (Persian) Gulf and is the fastest shipping route between Europe and Asia. Since the canal's 2015 expansion, larger ships may

transit it, and waiting times have significantly reduced. Approximately 12-15% of world shipping traffic, including nearly 30% of global container trade, passes through the Suez Canal.

Industry

As the second largest sector of the economy, industry accounts for some 32% of GDP and 27% of employment as of 2024.

Oil and Natural Gas: Oil and gas represented about 20% of GDP in 2024, with reserves and production managed by five state-owned companies. Egypt is the largest non-OPEC oil producer in the region, with around 3.3 billion barrels of proven reserves (see *Technology and Material*). With some 77.2 trillion cubic ft of reserves, Egypt is Africa's second largest natural gas producer.

Mining: While this subsector made up 1% of GDP in 2024, the government aims to increase that proportion to 5% by 2030. Resources include iron ore, phosphates, manganese, uranium, lead, zinc, white sand, gold, and granite, among others.

Manufacturing: Manufacturing comprised some 14% of GDP in 2022 and consists primarily of oil refining and chemical production. Top manufactured goods include petroleum products, metal products, chemicals, and cotton textiles.

Construction: Construction is a key subsector, comprising 12% of GDP in 2024. Government investment in infrastructure projects, notably the construction of a new capital city east of Cairo, combined with private investment in residential and energy projects, drives most growth in this sector.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector consists of farming, livestock, and fishing and accounted for some 13% of GDP and 19% of employment in 2024.

Farming: As of 2021, about 3% of land is used for agriculture, mainly commercial farming. The cotton industry has experienced

fluctuation in recent years, with production decreasing 70% between 2006-16. Although production rebounded somewhat with the introduction of new seed varieties, the land used for cotton production reduced by almost half in 2019. In 2022, the area cultivated with cotton increased by 39%. Oranges are an important export crop, and onions, potatoes, and tomatoes are grown primarily for domestic consumption.

Fishing: In 2024, Egypt harvested some 2 million tons of fish, 85% of it for domestic consumption. About 80% of the catch comes from fish farms with the rest wild caught in the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Nile. Egypt is the world's third largest producer of tilapia and ranks first in Africa and sixth in the world in fish farming. Other common catches include sea bass, gilt-head seabream, mullet, Nile perch, and shrimp.

Currency
The Egyptian pound (LE or E£) is issued in seven banknote values (1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, and 200) and a coin value (1). The Egyptian pound divides into 100 *piastres* issued in both

banknote and coin values (25 and 50). Between 2018-23, US$1 ranged between E£17.86-E£48.50.

Foreign Trade
Egypt's imports, totaling $85.8 billion in 2024, primarily consisted of fuel, foodstuffs, automobiles, and packaged medicines from China (16%), US (7%), Saudi Arabia (6%), and Germany (5%). In the same year, exports totaled $340 billion and included crude oil and petroleum products, nitrogenous fertilizers, and gold sold Turkey (9%), Italy (8%), Saudi Arabia (6%), UAE (5%), US (5%), and Libya (4%).

Foreign Aid
In 2022, Egypt received some $5.8 billion in official development assistance, with Saudi Arabia, the EU, Kuwait, Japan, France, and the US as the top donors. In 2024, US aid to Egypt totaled $220.6 million, with $99 million allocated to economic development. In 2022, the US provided $1.37 million to Egypt.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview
Egypt has a relatively well-developed physical infrastructure and modern telecommunications system. Free speech and press are constitutionally protected, yet the government routinely restricts those freedoms and monitors social media.

Transportation
While some Egyptians travel by privately-owned vehicle, most rely on public transportation. Common options include communal taxis, buses, trams, and tuk-tuks (motorized rickshaws). Cairo also has a three-line metro system that transports some 2 million people daily, and in 2020, the government announced the construction of a metro system in Alexandria.

Transport options beyond urban areas include air-conditioned coaches and rail service along the Nile.

Roadways
Of Egypt's over 40,000 mi of roads, some 30,000 mi are paved. Most major roadways run north-south parallel to the Nile before branching in Lower Egypt to connect towns along the Mediterranean coast and in the Nile Delta. Major roads include the Cairo-Alexandria highway and the Cairo-Aswan road, which is being refurbished to become the first leg in the Cairo-Cape Town Road connecting North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Railways
Egypt has some 3,000 mi of state-owned railways. The first line opened in 1854 as Africa's first railway (see *Economics and Resources*). Today, rail represents a primary method of inter-city travel, transporting some 500 million passengers per year. Supported by foreign funding in 2019-20, Egypt is renovating many stations and train lines. Planned for completion in 2027, Egypt's first high-speed railway will span 620 mi and connect the Mediterranean and Red seas.

Ports and Waterways

Egypt's three busiest ports are on the Mediterranean coast. Alexandria serves as a hub for Egypt's leather, rice, and paper industries and has several petroleum refineries. The port of Damietta is a center of Egypt's growing natural gas sector, and Port Said is situated at the Mediterranean end of the Suez Canal.

Egypt has some 2,000 mi of navigable waterways, about half on the Nile.

Airways

Of Egypt's 73 airports, 72 have paved runways. Servicing some 26 million passengers in 2025, Cairo International Airport is Egypt's busiest and Africa's second busiest. Other major hubs include Borg El Arab Airport in Alexandria, Luxor International Airport, and Hurghada International Airport. Traffic at Sharm El-Sheikh Airport has reduced since a 2015 airline crash was linked to the facility's lax security standards.

Energy

In 2023, Egypt generated some 88% of its electricity from fossil fuels, 7% from hydroelectric plants, and 5% from other renewable sources like biofuels. Egypt has a large oil industry (see *Economics and Resources*), with most petroleum extracted from the Sinai Peninsula, the Eastern and Western deserts, or offshore reserves in the Gulf of Suez. Egypt generates hydroelectric power from three large dams on the Nile (the High Dam, Aswan I, and Aswan II) and aims to increase the share of renewables to 42% by 2035.

Media

While surveillance of private communications was common under previous regimes, the control of media outlets and monitoring of telecommunications have increased since President Abdel Fattah al Sisi took office in 2014 (see *History and Myth*). The authorities use wide-ranging anti-terrorism laws to persecute journalists viewed as critical of the government or

sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood (see *Political and Social Relations*), with journalists subject to arbitrary arrest and trial in mass court proceedings. In the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, Egypt ranked 166 of 180 countries.

Print Media: Egypt's most widely circulated newspapers include *Al Ahram*, the Arab world's oldest newspaper, and *Al Gomhuria*, both government owned. English-language publications include the *Egyptian Gazette* and the *Middle East Times*. Overall, print readership is low, with most Egyptians preferring to access news through television or online.

Radio and TV: Private radio stations like Radio Cairo, Nile FM, and Nogoum FM offer informational, religious, educational, and entertainment programming. In addition to similar offerings, the state-run Egyptian Radio and Television Union broadcasts news in French and English and also operates 8 television stations. Most Egyptians access private channels through satellite and cable services.

Telecommunications

Egypt has a modern telecommunications infrastructure, although penetration rates are generally lower in rural desert areas. In 2023, Egypt had some 11 landlines and 93 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people.

Internet: Around 73% of Egyptians regularly used the Internet in 2023. Government authorities frequently restrict access and block or censor content. President Sisi has recently increased surveillance of web communications and created a Supreme Cybersecurity Council that monitors Egyptians' use of the Internet as part of its broader mission to respond to cyber threats and attacks.

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