



UNM

National Security Studies Program

Undergraduate Problems: Middle East Issues

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Islam and Religion in Egypt

Dr. Emile Nakhleh

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Population

- **80 million**
- **33% are under the age of 14**
- **Median age: 24 years**



Religion

- **85-90% Muslim (mostly Sunni with Sufi influence; a very small minority Shia)**
- **10-15 % Christian (mostly Orthodox Coptic)**
- **Al-Azhar Mosque and University (founded in 970 A.D. or C.E.)**
- **Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria (established 1st Century by Saint. Mark)**



Islam in Egypt

- Islam entered Egypt in 640 A.D.
- Cairo: “City of 1,000 minarets”
- Egypt’s Islam is diverse and complex
- Salafi (*salaf*) conservative traditions grounded in Sunni Islam
- Orthodox *Ulama* and *imams* (religious scholars and clerics) have played a central role in Egyptian society and politics over the centuries
- Islam is recognized as the official religion of the state



Sufism

- Popular Islam based on oral tradition
- Strong Sufi culture (*tariqats*, saints, *moulid* festivals, etc.)



Islam in the 20th Century

- **Moderate Islam and Islamic reformists (Afghani, Rida, Abdo)**
- **Islam and nationalism against British colonialism**
- **British presence, Suez Canal, and the fight for independence**
- **WWI and Egyptian independence**



Muslim Brotherhood

- Establishment by Hasan al-Banna in 1928
- *Da'wa* (proselytization) and Islamizing society from below
- The MB under the monarchy: violence and assassinations
- The MB under Nasser: Arrests, imprisonment, and deportation



Arab Defeat in the 1967 War

- **Islamization of Egyptian politics following Nasser's defeat**
- **Banning of Muslim Brotherhood**
- **Radicalization of MB and Islamic activism (Sayyed Qutb)**
- **Gama'a Islamiyya and Sadat's assassination**



Mubarak and the MB

- **Persecution of MB**
- **MB's growing influence in Egyptian society**
- **MB's involvement in politics in the 1990s (partnership with other parties)**
- **MB's election as "independents"**



“Arab Spring” and Fall of Mubarak

- Re-emergence of MB in Egyptian politics
- One of many new centers of power
- Freedom and Justice Party (*Hizb al-Huriyya wa al-Adl*)



Egypt's Islam in Post-Autocracy: Opportunities and Challenges

- **Support of pluralism, inclusion, and democracy**
- **MB as a central, but not sole, player**
- **US and the MB: Engagement through a common narrative**
- **MB and secular parties**

Concluding Comment

- **From the days of the Pharaohs...**
- **Through Christianity and Islam...**
- **Religion has been an integral part of Egyptian life**



Research Topics

- **Religion and politics in Egypt under Mubarak**
- **Rise and ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood**
- **Islamic and secular political parties in post-Mubarak Egypt**

For Further Reading

- **Abdo, Geneive. *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002)**
- **Baker, Raymond William. *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003)**
- **Fuller, Graham. *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2004)**
- **Hoffman, Valeri. *Sufism, Mysticism, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009)**
- **Hussain, Gaffar. *Modern Muslim Political Thought* (London: The Quilliam Foundation, 2011). Available at <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/images/modernmuslimpoliticalthought.pdf>**
- **Mitchell, Richard. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University press, 1969)**
- **Nakhleh, Emile. *A Necessary Engagement: Reinventing America's Relations with the Muslim World* (Princeton and London: Princeton University press, 2009)**

Presenter

Dr. Emile Nakhleh

abucr@msn.com

505-385-8334 (C)

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