Undergraduate Problems: Middle East Issues
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Islam and Religion in Egypt

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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


• Hoffman, Valeri. *Sufism, Mysticism, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009)


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