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National Approaches to Extremism

EGYPT
Marco Pinfari

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Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

Egypt is formally a republic that is self-identified as "Arab" – hence its official denomination as the "Arab Republic of Egypt" (ARE – *Jumhuryah Misr Al-Arabiyah*), which has been in use since 1971. The system of government is semi-presidential, with a directly-elected President serving – according to the latest constitutional amendments passed in 2019 – up to two six-year terms in office. The current President, Abd el-Fattah Al-Sisi, took de facto power after the 2013 coup d'état that deposed the previous President Mohammed Morsi, and was formally elected in 2014. Based on an *ad personam* norm included in the 2019 constitutional amendments, the duration of his current term in office has been extended to 2024, when he will be allowed to run for a third and final six-year term.

After the 2011 revolution, Egypt engaged in a short-lived democratic transition that culminated in several electoral rounds in 2011 and 2012. According to international observers, these elections showed "at least some core elements of electoral democracy" (Kirkpatrick, 2012). By contrast, since the 2013 coup d'état that led to the removal of Mohammed Morsi from power, Egypt has been ruled in an "increasingly authoritarian manner" (Freedom House, 2020). According to the 2020 Freedom in the World report by Freedom House, currently in Egypt:

> [m]eaningful political opposition is virtually non-existent, as expression of dissent can draw criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Civil liberties, including press freedom and freedom of assembly, are tightly restricted. Security forces engage in right abuses with impunity, and physical security is further undermined by terrorist violence centered in the Sinai Peninsula.

Moreover, an official state of emergency was declared in Egypt in April 2017 and has been renewed every three months since. Egypt's emergency law gives sweeping powers to Egyptian authorities to prosecute and detain individuals in breach of established legal procedures and, in several circumstances, to refer them to military rather than civilian courts.

Finally, while the country as a whole is run as a centralised state with no significant authority assigned to its 27 regions or "governorates" (*muhafazat*), the political and military grip of the Egyptian state is significantly stronger in the populated areas of the Nile Valley and of the Delta than in the peripheries. In particular, it is often argued that the Egyptian state has "lost control" over vast parts of the Sinai Peninsula (Horton, 2017: 23) in light of the recurrence of armed attacks and episodes of guerrilla warfare since the early 2000s.

Population

As of May 2020, Egypt's official population is 100.3 million (Central Agency For Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2020),[1] positioning it among the 15 most populated countries in the world. The highly-symbolic 100

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[1] Egypt's national statistics authority, responsible for publishing official population count and other relevant demographic and statistical data, is the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). https://www.capmas.gov.eg/HomePage.aspx.

million mark was passed in February 2020, prompting comments from senior policy-makers that "population increase represents the biggest challenge before the [Egyptian] state," which should be approached as an "issue of national security" (Egypt Today, 2020). The estimated annual population growth rate for 2020 is 2.28% a rate that has remained mostly constant since the 1990s. The average fertility rate is 3.29 children born/woman.

Egypt's population pyramid (Figure 1) has a broad base. In 2020, almost exactly one in three Egyptians (33.62%) is younger than 15, and more than half (51.63%) are younger than 25 (CIA, 2020). The relative size of the 0-14 age group (see Figure 2) peaked in the early 1990s – when it amounted to almost 42% of the overall population – and it has marginally but steadily declined since (CIA, 2020: 36). As of 2020, the estimated median age in the country is 24.1 years. In 2014, the median age at first marriage was 20.8 years (BASEERA, 2016), and a mother's mean age at first birth was 22.7 years.

In July 2019, an official report of the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) claimed that in 2018 32.5% of Egyptians were living below the poverty line (defined as living with less than USD1.45/day), up from 27.8% in 2015 and 16.7% in 2000 (Associated Press, 2019). The same report also stated that 6.2% were living in extreme poverty (less than USD1/day). The wide-reaching economic reforms prompted by the USD12b IMF loan received by Egypt in 2016 are widely credited for this substantial and sudden increase in the poverty rate.

At the time of the 2013 coup, 55% of internet users were below the age of 24 and 71% of Facebook users were aged between 15 and 29 (Pinfari, 2016: 128). As of 2018, approximately 39 million Egyptians had access to Facebook, approximately 2/3 of whom were male (Figure 3) (Reda, 2018).

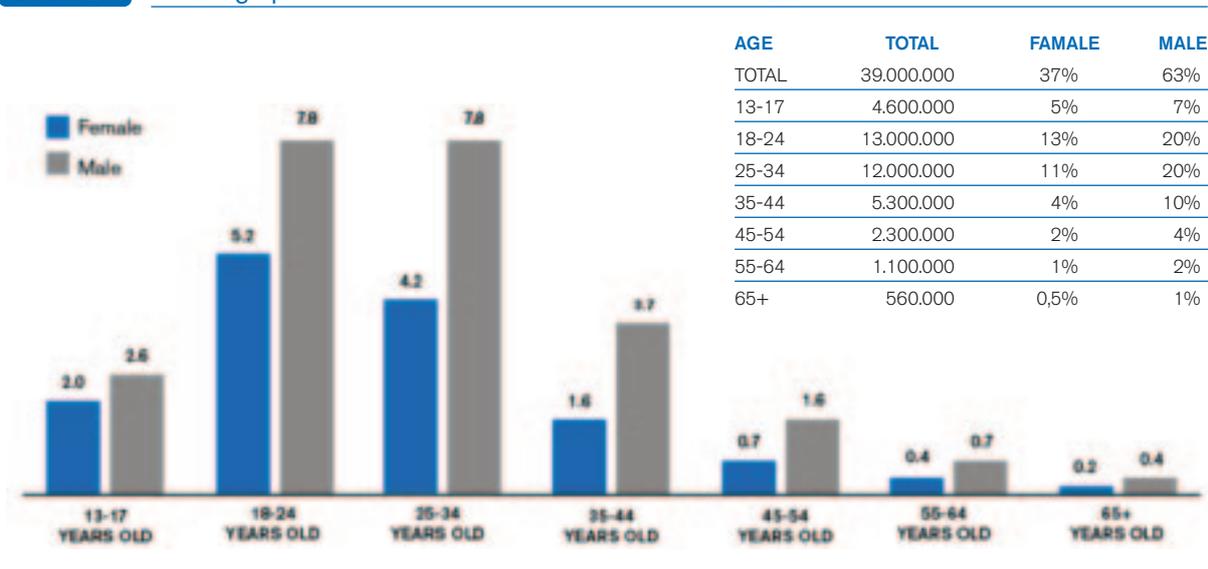**FIGURE 1.**   Egypt's population pyramid, 2020 (CIA, 2020)

Own production. Source: CIA, 2020
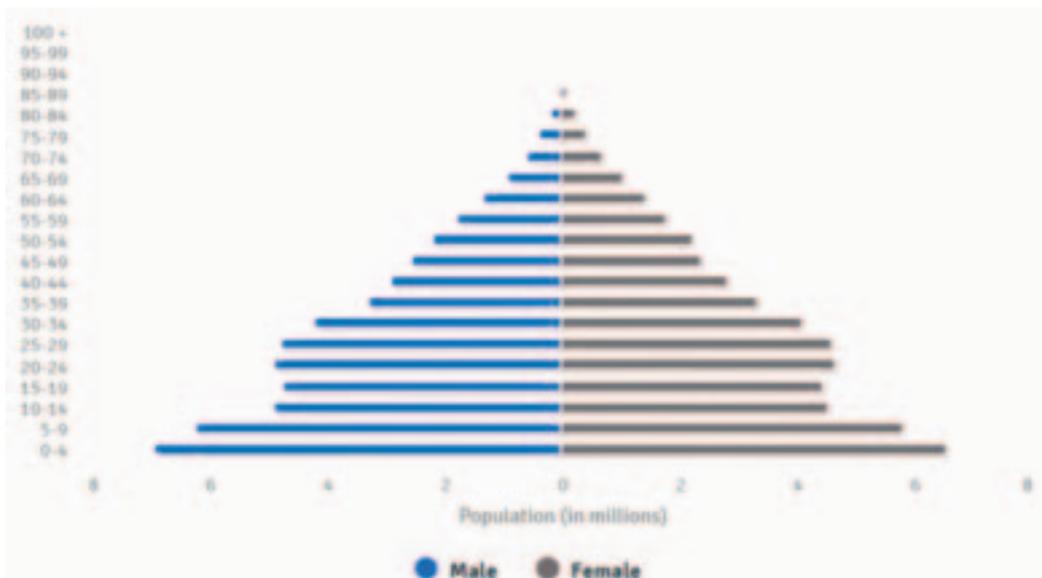
FIGURE 2. Trends in population distribution by age in Egypt, 1988-2014

Age group	1988	1992	1995	2000	2005	2008	2014
Less than 15	41.2	41.7	40.0	37.3	34.2	34.0	35.3
15-64	55.0	54.6	56.3	59.1	61.7	61.9	60.4
65+	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6	4.1	4.1	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Dependency Ratio	81.8	83.2	77.6	69.2	62.1	61.5	65.6

Own production. Source: BASEERA, 2016

FIGURE 3. Demographic information about Facebook users in Egypt, 2018

AGE	TOTAL	FAMALE	MALE
TOTAL	39.000.000	37%	63%
13-17	4.600.000	5%	7%
18-24	13.000.000	13%	20%
25-34	12.000.000	11%	20%
35-44	5.300.000	4%	10%
45-54	2.300.000	2%	4%
55-64	1.100.000	1%	2%
65+	560.000	0,5%	1%

Own production. Source: Reda, 2018.
Notes: The "Total" column of the inset table shows original values, while graph values have been divided by one million. Table percentages represent the respective gender and age groups share of total national Facebook users. Table values may not sum exactly due to rounding in the source data.

Main ethnic/religious groups

No ethnic groups are officially recognised by the Egyptian state, with essentially the entire population being labelled as "Egyptian" in official statistical reports. Three religious affiliations are recorded on official documents, including personal ID cards – (Sunni) Muslim, Christian and Jewish. However, no up-to-date information exists about the relative and absolute size of these groups – and of other groups that are informally present in the country (including Shi'a Muslims and Baha'i) – because since the 1980s questions related to personal religious affiliation are no longer included in the national census.

Based on informal estimates, Christians amount to anywhere between 5% and 10% of the Egyptian population, with peaks surpassing half of the local population in some areas along the Nile Valley, south of Cairo. Up to 95% of Egyptian Christians are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is therefore by far the largest Christian denomination in the Middle East. The Egyptian Jewish community has been

substantially depleted by migration and demographic decline, and probably currently amounts to fewer than 100 individuals living in Cairo and Alexandria. Other ethnic groups include the Nubian people – traditionally settled in the Nile Valley south of Aswan but subject since the 1950s to several waves of internal displacement – and Bedouin tribes, settled primarily in the Eastern Desert and the Sinai Peninsula.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

The role of Egypt's cultural and religious milieu in the development of what is usually referred to as "radical Islamism" (Musallam, 2005) has been the object of substantial scholarly and political attention. In particular, events such as the foundation and development of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1920s, the scholarship and activism of Sayyid Qutb, and the terrorist campaigns of the organisation known as *Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiyya* (GA) in the 1980s and 1990s have been extensively covered in the literature (Ashour, 2007; Aziz, 1995; Blaydes and Rubin, 2008; Wheatley and McCauley, 2008).

As the research framework of CONNEKT focuses predominantly on the current political and social environment of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Balkan region, however, the scope of this analysis will concentrate predominantly on the period that followed the 2011 revolution to the present day (May 2020).

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

Especially in a country like Egypt that since 2013 has experienced a clear authoritarian regression, with the extensive use of emergency powers and the almost total erosion of freedom of press, the distinction (or lack thereof) between "radicalisation"/"violent extremism" (as ideological and social phenomena, including their potential but not exclusive relation with religion and political violence) and terrorism (as the actual, bifocal use of political violence at the service of a political agenda) should be analysed and problematised in its own right.

If we accept the official definitions adopted by Egyptian authorities and their equating of (Islamist) extremism with terrorism, (as discussed below), we can argue that since 2011 Egypt has undergone two parallel processes.

    a. *The intensification* of processes of radicalisation. This signals a reversal of the processes that characterised the years preceding the 2011 revolution (approx. 1998-2011), during which Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and even groups that had previously engaged in terrorist activities, such as the GA, had instead increasingly become involved in mainstream politics. In the late 1990s, some of these groups – most notably the GA – had undergone formal processes of deradicalisation that were sanctioned and overseen by state authorities. In the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, some of these even formed political parties that acknowledged (at least formally) the rules of electoral democracy. After the 2013 coup, however, the exclusion of Islamist groups from government and their systematic and violent repression stopped and then quickly reversed this process, leading to the recrudescence of terrorist activities and campaigns across the country (Figure 4). This particularly affected the regions, like the Sinai Peninsula, in which state authorities were less able to assert their control.

    b. *The diversification* of radical groups and militias involved in terrorist activities. In contrast to earlier wave of radicalisation and terrorism – during which it was possible to point at one group or alliance as the

single, key extremist/terrorist actor active in the country, whether the GA in the 1990s or the Bedouin-Islamist alliance in the early 2000s – the current scenario sees a wider variety of groups and actors active in Egypt, the breadth of which is summarised in the following paragraph. While some operational and ideological commonalities among these can clearly be identified, their international affiliations and – most importantly – their domestic agendas tend to differ; as a result, a broader variety of C/PVE initiatives should also be considered to engage with their ideological frameworks and potentially address their political grievances.

**FIGURE 4.** Monthly numbers of "terrorist" attacks in Egypt (January 2010-April 2018) (TIMEP, 2018)
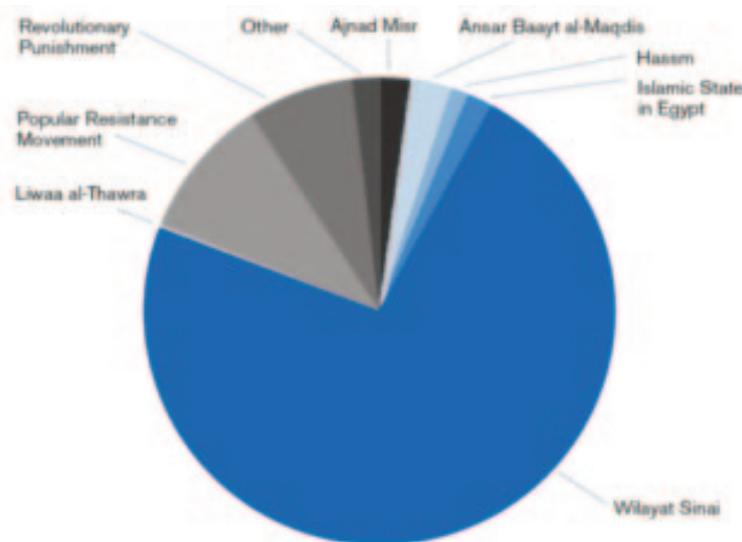
Own production. Source: TIMEP, 2018

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Three main types of violent non-state groups have been operating in Egypt since at least 2013:

a. Groups (currently) *affiliated with the Islamic State (IS)/ISIS,* operating primarily from the Sinai Peninsula in conjunction with, and with the operative support of, members of local Bedouin communities. At the heart of the so-called "Sinai insurgency" is the group known between 2011 and 2013 as *Ansar Beit al-Maqdis,* which later swore allegiance to IS and became known as the "Sinai Province" (*Wilayat Sina*'). Since 2013, these groups have engaged in an intense quasi-conventional war in the Sinai Peninsula against the Egyptian security forces.

b. Groups *affiliated with Al-Qaeda,* operating primarily in the Western Desert and Cairo with several operational connections with groups previously or currently based in Libya. These include *Ansar al-Shari'a, al-Morabitoon* and *Ansar al-Islam* – the latter of which formally claimed one of the deadliest attacks against Egyptian security forces, the 2017 Bahariya attack which killed at least 16 policemen during a desert raid. However, little is known about their organisational structure, agenda and exact ideological framework.

FIGURE 5. Proportion of attacks claimed by different "terrorist" groups (January 2010-April 2018) (TIMEP, 2018: 6)
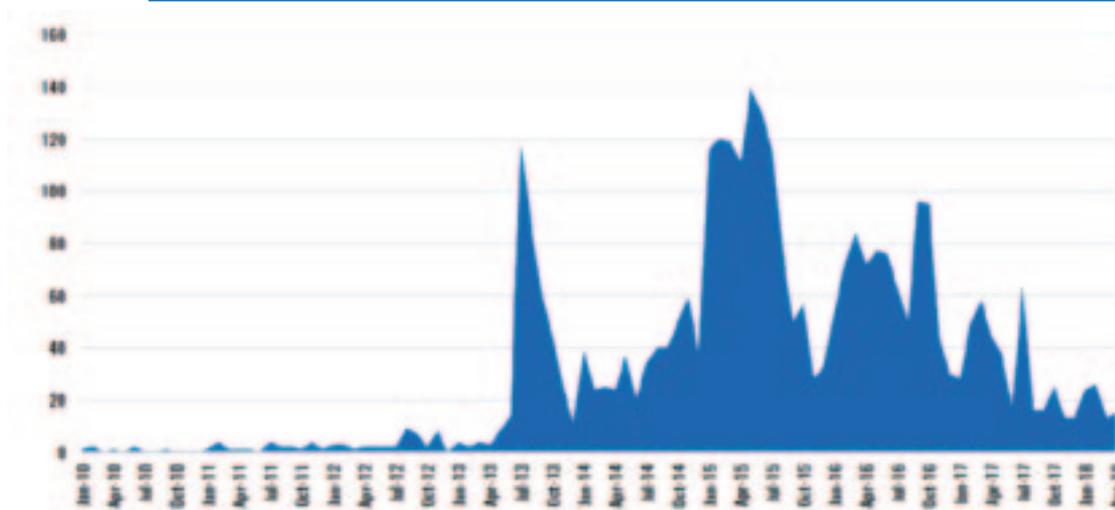
Own production. Source: TIMEP, 2018: 6

    c. Groups *emanating from domestic opposition groups outlawed by the current regime,* primarily pursuing a domestic agenda and operating primarily in urban settings (Cairo, Giza and Alexandria). The official government-supported narrative implies that these groups are directly affiliated with the (now outlawed) Muslim Brotherhood and GA but, in most cases, little is publicly known about their organisational structure and membership. These include groups such as the *Helwan Brigades* and *Ajnad Misr.* The latter, in particular, was a splinter group of *Ansar Beit al-Maqdis* who explicitly sought revenge for the *Rabaa Al-Adawiyya* massacre – the killing of more than 800 Islamist militants in the immediate aftermath of the 2013 coup – by (exclusively) targeting security forces over at least two years (2014-15).

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

No independent source of information is available about the so-called "Sinai Insurgency" and "there is no official estimate of the number of Egyptians who joined ISIS" (Emam, 2019). At the peak of the insurgency in 2015-15, unofficial estimates of ISIS-affiliated operatives in Sinai were "between 1,000 and 1,500" active fighters (BBC, 2016), who probably relied on a larger network of local supporters and informants.

While Egyptian citizens are known to have joined ISIS-related groups abroad – most notably in Syria – no official estimate of their numbers exist, even though they are probably "in the low hundreds" (Emam, 2019). Other non-ISIS-affiliated groups in Egypt probably rely on loosely-connected networks of small cells, likely amounting to a few dozen active members overall.

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

Key information and analysis on violent extremism and terrorism in Egypt is produced by three key sources.

    a. Official government sources. Since 2016 journalists are not allowed to report from the Sinai Peninsula, and independent reporting on any terrorism-related events is heavily restricted. As a result, the only

official source of factual information about security-related events is the State Information System (SIS)[2] – a governmental agency that reports directly to the Egyptian Presidency.

b. Semi-official sources (government-organised non-governmental organizations – GONGOs – and government-supervised think tanks). The bulk of the research and analytical work conducted in Egypt on security-related issues is conducted by organisations that are directly related to governmental agencies and ministries, but maintain a degree of operational independence. The most prominent of these is the Ahram Center for Political Strategic Studies (ACPSS), which over the years has produced several high-profile reports and studies on Egyptian terrorist movements and radicalisation processes. Its latest three-year project in this area focuses on "using the concepts of human security to counter radicalisation and violent extremism in Egyptian society"; this project recommended that the use of "hard security" is limited to the fight to "territorial terrorism" in regions like the Sinai Peninsula, while a more comprehensive strategy based on a "diverse platform of actors from various sections of society and the state" is adopted to counter radicalisation (Akl, 2019). Among other relevant policy and research centres, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA), directly affiliated with the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, is active both in producing collaborative research on terrorism and domestic/regional security, and in several C/PVE initiatives. However, the security-related activities of the CCCPA focus exclusively on radicalisation processes outside Egypt and have no direct impact on Egypt's own internal policies – since the domestic politics of Egypt are considered as the realm of activity of the Ministries of Defence and the Interior.

c. Independent think tanks and university projects. Independent projects and reporting on security issues are tightly scrutinised by state authorities, with public events on themes perceived to be politically sensitive regularly called off by the Egyptian state security. As a result, only a few institutions that are not affiliated with state authorities produce research and analysis on extremism and domestic terrorism. A partial exception is the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) – which operates from Washington, DC – that curated several detailed reports on Egyptian extremist groups and their range of activities. Noticeably more critical of Egypt's regime than the ACPSS or CCCPA, TIMEP has provided a variety of policy recommendations to the Egyptian government especially for addressing the territorial insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula. TIMEP is particularly keen to dissuade Egyptian authorities from resorting to repressive strategies and "collective punishment" and has pointed at the need for encouraging "accountability in the security sector" to "ease restrictions on political discourse" and to "provide job training and employment opportunities" in the areas most directly affected, especially North Sinai (TIMEP, 2015).

Only a few studies on radicalisation and violent extremism in Egypt since 2011 have made extensive use of primary material and fieldwork; the lack of reliable, independent data and the difficulties in interviewing imprisoned operatives, politicians and activists are among the major obstacles to effective empirical research on these topics. A notable exception to this trend is the report by Human Rights First *Like a Fire in a Forest: ISIS Recruitment in Egypt's Prisons.* This report, published in 2019 and based on interviews with several

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[2] Website: https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/7272/5021?lang=en-us

Egyptian detainees, concluded that "prison conditions in Egypt are fuelling recruitment to ISIS" and that radicalisation in Egyptian prisons is aided by the "rampant use of torture and other forms of mistreatment, abysmal prison conditions, and the frequent mixing of violent and non-violent offenders" (Human Rights First, 2019).

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

As will be discussed in section *Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation* below, Egyptian authorities have not provided a definition of violent extremism and radicalisation. Still, a recent report by the ACPSS has attempted to promote a "differentiation between terrorism and radicalisation" (Akl, 2019). As part of this project, radicalisation was defined as:

> a multi-platform process in which different variables come together to create a tendency towards violence, both psychologically and operationally. The creation of this condition later on breeds terrorism, but the reasons and causes differ between the processes. Radicalisation is a process that works on changing a mentality towards more violent forms of action, but terrorism is a matter of logistical and organisational capacities. (Ibid).

Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches
Egyptian state authorities and their policies focus explicitly and exclusively on Islamic "extremism". However, Egypt experienced waves of "Christian extremism" in the early 2000s (Iskander, 2012: 114), even though the relevance of these groups and movements since 2013 has not been analysed thoroughly. More recently, in 2014 the constitutionally-protected claims of the Nubian people to return to their ancestral land south of Aswan (or receive proportionate compensation) have been "shot down […] on the basis of national security" by Egyptian state authorities (Mahmoud, 2018).

Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

While other countries covered by CONNEKT (such as Kosovo and Morocco) have complied with the recommendations of the UN Secretary General to prepare their own National Plans of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, Egypt has not yet produced one. This seems to reflect the lack of a comprehensive approach to C/PVE in the country, which has so far been characterised primarily by an over-reliance on repressive counter-terrorism measures carried out by army and police forces, by an increasingly obtrusive role played by Islamic religious authorities in controlling religious discourses in the country, and by the adoption of a "broad" but largely "inconsistent anti-terror legislation" that gives swiping powers to civilian and military authorities, with little oversight (TIMEP, 2018: 43).

Public policies and programmes

Egypt's official strategy to fight violent extremist groups has "primarily relied on a security crackdown – specifically on the Muslim Brotherhood – and large-scale military operations against IS in North Sinai" (Fanack, 2018).

This approach at least partially contrasts with the strategies pursued by Egyptian authorities in the late 1990s vis-à-vis the GA. At that stage – "after initial scepticism" – they decided to support and "actively foster" the process of "collective de-radicalisation" of imprisoned GA members that was initiated by members of their senior leadership in conjunction with Egyptian religious scholars (Brzuszkiewicz, 2017). This process began with the announcement of a ceasefire by senior members of the GA, which is typically described in the literature as "unexpected by security and other officials, commentators and even some of the [GA] membership itself" and was followed by a process of "ideological and organisational de-radicalisation" led by its own leadership (El-Said and Harrigan, 2018: 81). As part of such initiatives, state authorities "started to soften the measures targeting members already in prison, allowing visits and organising prison tours for the former leaders who wanted to spread their ideological revisions among the lower rank" (Brzuszkiewicz, 2017). Members of the ACPSS have called for extending this "very successful" experience to post-2013 Egypt (Akl, 2018); however, currently the overwhelming emphasis of Egyptian authorities on repressive measures made Egyptian prisons a hotspot for radicalisation and the spread of ISIS's ideology rather than as a place where the ideological reorientation of extremist groups can be achieved.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

Egyptian leaders (including President Al-Sisi and the Egyptian parliament Speaker Ali Abd el-Al) (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019) have not provided a definition of violent extremism and radicalisation. In official statements, "violent extremism" (as an ideological and social phenomenon) and "terrorism" (as the actual, bifocal use of political *violence* at the service of a political agenda) are typically mentioned together as part of the same

"threat" that Egypt faces, with no clear differentiation being drawn between the two concepts. The lack of a clear distinction between these concepts is compounded by the notoriously wide and inclusive definition of terrorism included in Article 2 of Egypt's "Anti-Terrorism Law" No. 94/2015[3], under which a remarkably broad variety of actors risks prosecution and detention in the pursuit of their constitutionally-protected rights – including "trade unions, […] journalists, human rights defenders, opposition parties and public-sector workers" (OHCHR, 2020).

Civil society

De-radicalisation and P/CVE strategies are treated in Egypt as matters of national security and, as a result, the involvement of civil society in these realms is extremely limited. For the purpose of this initial country report, no specific civil-society P/CVE initiative could be identified. A partial exception to this trend is the work of the CCCPE, a GONGO affiliated with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which pursues training and policy-oriented agendas in the fields of Preventing Radicalization and Extremism Leading to Terrorism (PRELT) and on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). However, its initiatives are directed exclusively to other African countries rather than Egypt itself – even if, especially on DDR, they can also have an indirect impact on Egypt's own militant groups.

Religious communities

Together with the repressive measures discussed above, Al-Sisi's repeated call for "renewing religious discourse" based on a "true understanding of Islam" (SIS, 2016) has been at the heart of Egypt's P/CVE strategies. Three key religious institutions are at the forefront of the development and implementation of this process – the Ministry of Religious Endowments/*Awqaf* (which primarily controls religious buildings like mosques and charitable institutes), Al-Azhar and the *Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyya.* The latter two institutions act as semi-governmental bodies (formally independent in the conduct of their tasks as supreme religious authorities, but institutionally and legally bound to Egyptian state authorities) and share the responsibility for overseeing religious education in the country and the issuance of key *fatwas.*

Since 2014 the role and competences of the Ministry of Religious Endowments have been expanded, making it the main governmental actor in this process. This involved three main sets of initiatives: (1) extending the control of the Ministry to all mosques and religious buildings, and their activities; (2) setting and disseminating a unified script for Friday sermons across all Egyptian mosques, to be followed diligently across the whole country; (3) positioning the Ministry as the only authority authorised to issue new preaching permits, with the further provision that even older preaching permits would also be vetted by the Ministry. Al-Azhar, whose graduates remain the only scholars allowed to apply for preaching permits, has also organised several public conferences and events to discuss the framework and content of such a "renewal" process.

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[3] "A terrorist act shall refer to any use of force, violence, threat, or intimidation domestically or abroad for the purpose of disturbing public order, or endangering the safety, interests, or security of the community; harming individuals and terrorizing them; jeopardizing their lives, freedoms, public or private rights, or security, or other freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law; harms national unity, social peace, or national security or damages the environment, natural resources, antiquities, money, buildings, or public or private properties or occupies or seizes them; prevents or impedes public authorities, agencies or judicial bodies, government offices or local units, houses of worship, hospitals, institutions, institutes, diplomatic and consular missions, or regional and international organizations and bodies in Egypt from carrying out their work or exercising all or some of their activities, or resists them or disables the enforcement of any of the provisions of the Constitution, laws, or regulations. A terrorist act shall likewise refer to any conduct committed with the intent to achieve, prepare, or instigate one of the purposes set out in the first paragraph of this article, if it is as such to harm communications, information, financial or banking systems, national economy, energy reserves, security stock of goods, food and water, or their integrity, or medical services in disasters and crises."

Beyond these initiatives coordinated by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, which are by nature focused on the political and ideological control of religious discourse by state authorities much more than on its *renewal,* the details of the strategies pursued by Egyptian civil and religious authorities to address religious extremism are unclear – especially because, as convincingly argued by Ishak Ibrahim, "[n]either the presidency, Al-Azhar, nor the endowments ministry has determined a clear concept of what renewing religious discourse entails or how to begin undertaking it" (Ibrahim, 2019). This process has been further undermined, at the institutional level, by the substantial overlaps and conflicts of authority between these institutions, and at the ideological/religious level by the tendency of institutions like al-Azhar to exclude from such a "renewal" process religious norms and principles that impact on the broader socio-economic condition of Muslims in Egypt and other Sunni-dominated countries. This has led to what external observers rightly perceive as inconsistencies in the content of such a "renewal" agenda, whose focus on disavowing the use of violence in the public sphere has been compounded by the promotion of a "conservative personal status law that curtails the rights of women and that reinforces patriarchal norms" (Ibid).

Existence of critical evaluation systems
Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation
At least for the case of Egypt, this breakdown of specific methodological/implementation-related aspects appears as somewhat off-topic. These items assume that the C/PVE strategies implemented in the country are primarily, if not exclusively, programmes with a clear set of goals and targets – which may indeed be the case in other countries but arguably is not in Egypt at the moment.

11

P/CVE initiatives in Egypt, as discussed above, are to date primarily of a military nature – with a focus on tracking down and arresting members of groups perceived to be radicalised or involved in "violent extremism", or of a religious/ideological nature designed to "renew" the religious discourse among Egyptian Muslims. These initiatives are not meant to be specific outcome-driven projects and are pursued in a political and social environment in which state and religious authorities are not subject to direct accountability.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH
No specific initiative is directed to Egyptian women. While Al-Sisi often mentions youth as an age/social group that requires particular attention in combating "ideological extremism" (Ahram Online, 2019), no specific P/CVE initiative explicitly directed to young people could be identified.

Conclusion

Egypt is a key country in the MENA region, with a substantial youth bulge and with several violent militant groups active in its territory. However, the approach to de-radicalisation and P/CVE by state authorities has so far been driven predominantly by military/security considerations and by the assumption that a "renewal" of Islam's religious discourse imposed top-down by religious institutions can be sufficient to tackle any socio-economic or political grievance that motivates armed militant groups and leads individuals towards ideological or religious radicalisation. Especially in the absence of relevant initiatives coordinated by non-state, civil society organisations (CSOs), CONNEKT has the potential to shed light in particular on the socio-economic and political determinants and underpinnings of radicalisation and violent extremism in the country, blazing an alternative path towards addressing its underlying causes and motivations.

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CONNEKT

What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being "the problem" into "the key" for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.