

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

Egypt

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1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

Located in the northeast corner of Africa, Egypt lies at the heart of the Arab World. Consisting primarily of desert, the country has 95 percent of its 100 million population living along the banks of the Nile River. Egypt remains the largest country by population in the Arab world. After the Arab Spring and several years of internal political turmoil, the former military leader, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, rose to power and sought to build a new Egyptian identity that is antithetical to Islamism and grounded in the pharaonic heritage.

Egypt has rich sources of soft power, including Egyptian history, culture, music, and dialect.¹ Especially during the 1950s and 1960s, President Gamal Abdel Nasser advocated for the pan-Arab ideology, which is a nationalist notion of cultural and political unity across the Arab world. He effectively used the media, especially radio, to project Egypt's soft power. A rich cultural legacy and wide-reaching influence made Egypt a major regional player during this time. Today, Egypt remains an important player in Middle East despite its relative economic decline and the rise of the other two comparable regional powers, Turkey and Iran, in their soft power capacity in the two decades leading up to the Arab Spring.

Ten years since the Arab Spring, Egypt has gone through periods of widespread unrest, general instability, and social changes. While strengthening its soft power is not among the top priorities for Egypt today, Egypt is trying to regain its position as a regional leader by investing in tourism and large-scale cultural events, such as the Pharaohs' Golden Parade. Since President el-Sisi came to power in 2013, mega-projects have also been launched, including the Grand Egyptian Museum.

Table 1: Economy of Egypt

	2019	2015
Population (millions) / ranking	100.39 / 14 th	92.44 / 15 th
GDP ranking	40 th	31 st
GDP per capita	\$ 3,019	\$ 3,563
Cultural economy (%GDP)	3.0	-
Education economy (%GDP)	-	3.9
R&D economy (%GDP)	0.61 ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾	0.72

Sources: World Bank, UNESCO

After three decades of political stagnation under Hosni Mubarak and a short-lived Islamist government led by the Muslim Brotherhood, el-Sisi seeks to build a post-Arab Spring national identity grounded in Egypt's pharaonic heritage rather than pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism

¹ The Egyptian dialect was once the lingua franca of the Arab world thanks to the popularity of the Egyptian cinema industry in the 1960s and 1970s. Now the dialect, like many other areas of Egypt's soft power, has declined along with the country's cultural and political leadership. For more information, see The Economist (2018).

advocated by his predecessors (Tella, 2021; Winter & Shiloah, 2019). There is also a growing need for Egypt to recognize its African identity in recent years, even though Egypt has historically prioritized the Arabic-Islamic world over Africa. However, to inculcate the new Egyptian identity, Egypt will still take a more practical approach, taking into socio-economic factors. After all, steep population growth, deep and increasing poverty, and widespread unemployment are central challenges Egyptian society must tackle to consolidate its national identity. Economic and development concerns will continue to play a major role in Egypt's foreign and external cultural policies.

Table 2: Egypt's geopolitical and geo-economic position

	2019	2015
Hard power rank	13 th (2021)	-
World trade ranking	44 th (Import) / 109,291	42 nd (Import) / 95,827
Soft power rank	-	-
Diplomacy rank	-	-

Sources: World Trade Organization, Global Firepower

Tourism is one of the four largest sources of foreign income for the country, along with petroleum exports, Suez Canal revenues, and remittances from nationals working abroad (Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.). Since 2011, the number of international tourists in Egypt has decreased drastically. Compared to other top African destinations like Morocco (10.33 million) and South Africa (10.04 million), the tourist arrivals in Egypt in 2016 were 5.26 million, about one-third of the number in 2010 (AFDB, 2018). In recent years, Egypt's tourist industry has been slowly recovering.

The tourism budget of Egypt for the 2018/19 fiscal year is EGP 1.8 billion (€105 million), more than four times its total budget for culture. In 2018, total revenue from tourism reached EGP 174.1 billion (€10 billion), representing 15 percent of the country's GDP. It is also worth noting that the tourism sector alone provides 3.1 million jobs or 9.5% of the total workforce in Egypt (OECD, 2020).

According to the UNCTAD report on creative industries, Egypt has the highest level of Cultural & Creative Industry Exports (CCI) exports in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with a total value of about 1 billion euros in 2014 (UNCTAD, 2018).² Egypt's handicraft sector's exports amount to around €360 million per year (Abdelaziz et al., 2018). The size of the local handicrafts market, which heavily relies on tourism, was estimated to be around €152 million in 2017 (CREACT4MED, 2021).

² The creative goods measured in the report fall under the following sub-categories: Art crafts, Audiovisuals, Design, Digital fabrication, New media, Performing arts, Publishing and Visual arts.

Table 3: Government spending on ECP fields as a % of total outlays

	2019	2015
Culture	2.6	3.5
Education	8.4	11.5
R&D	0.72	0.72
Media	-	-

Source: CAPMAS

2. External cultural policy: an overview

Egypt is a nation rich in its history, heritage, and culture. With its triple identity as an Islamic, African, and Arabic country, Egypt has great potential for creating an attractive image for several distinct international audiences. However, Egypt's need to publicize its culture is often overridden by other domestic and political needs. Its cultural and media policy space is constrained by increasing centralization, and there is a noticeable lack of strategy in promoting public diplomacy.

Additionally, Egypt also faces the rise of Turkey and Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar as new competitors in the region (Yee & Hubbard, 2021). Qatar's TV news station, Al-Jazeera, has a broad reach in the Arab world, including Egypt. Egypt has not constructed an appealing narrative of its own socio-political state. Its foremost agency for public diplomacy, State Information Service (SIS), after the June 30 protests in 2013, is mainly concerned with correcting and responding to misconceived images of Egypt rather than creating and proactively communicating diplomatic messages (Abd El-wahed, 2016).³

After the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, a number of cultural initiatives attempted to develop contemporary culture, art, literature, and music to interpret the ambiguous legacy of the Arab Spring and understand the present political uncertainty (Zakzouk, 2016). Film and television industries—which were badly affected by the political turmoil—and religious groups have engaged in the debates about the future of Egyptian arts and culture. However, these private, bottom-up initiatives often face many hurdles like a lack of funding and state censorship.

According to Egypt Vision 2030, Egypt's foremost goal toward culture is still to support cultural industries as a source of economic power (UNESCO, 2020). While tourism has been a source of strength for Egypt before 2011, accounting for 15 to 20 percent of its GDP, many independent Egyptian artists and cultural professionals prefer to be perceived separately from economic activities and have their own voice heard. Many cultural activities are also conducted through private organizations. In general, Egypt's diplomatic channels, informational agencies, and mainstream media have remained muddled. All sectors still need

³ The June protests that occurred on June 30 2013 were a series of protests that demanded Mohamed Morsi and his Islamic government to step down. The events ended with the 2013 Egyptian coup d'état and el-Sisi's rise to the presidency in July.

a comprehensive external cultural strategy that identifies and promotes a coherent and modern Egyptian culture.

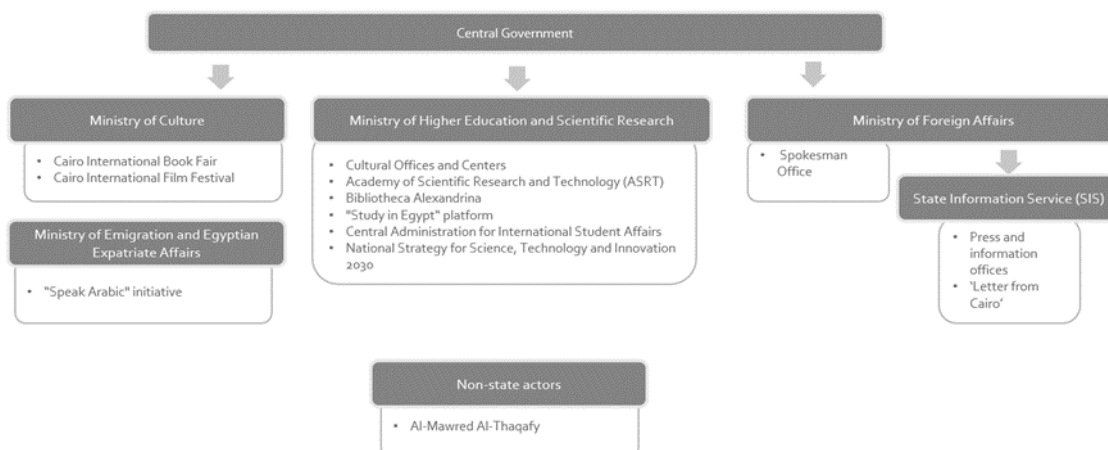
While Egypt may not seem to have a clear-cut budget for activities conducted at an international level in the five ECP fields (arts & culture, language, education, science, and media), it nevertheless has exercised soft power in related areas, including sports, peacebuilding, Egyptology and religious learning (Abdel-Wahed, 2019).

Table 4: Key ECP Statistics for Egypt

	2019
Number of countries with ECP activities	over 80
Total number of institutions abroad	Cultural offices and centers: 20 ⁽²⁰²¹⁾ Press and information offices: 29 ⁽²⁰¹⁴⁾
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	-
Government financial support (€ million)	-
Total expenditure of all ECP operators (€ million)	-
Comparative ECP ranking	-

Egypt is the only Arab country with cultural offices in some of its embassies. In 2017, it had 31 cultural offices and centers around the world; presently, the number has reduced to 20. Two other ministries are also involved in cultural activities organized at these offices. The Ministry of Culture provides materials for presenting Egyptian culture and facilitates the conclusion of cultural agreements, while the Ministry of Higher Education selects Cultural Attaches and supervises Egyptian students abroad.

Figure 1: Institutional map of Egypt's ECP



Egypt's major governmental bodies responsible for public diplomacy are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Higher Education. More specifically, the Spokesman Office under the MOFA is directly involved in communicating with foreign publics, and it has three divisions: (1) media center for monitoring media mainly in Egypt and

the Arab world; (2) internet unit manages web contents of its official channels, including embassies abroad; (3) public diplomacy division.

The Ministry of Culture is both at the center and periphery of the cultural sector in Egypt. On the one hand, it is the central player in cultural policy planning, with several thousand staff employed in state-funded institutions. On the other hand, its authority is increasingly overridden by other powers, such as the military (which has a stronger say on internal and external political priorities), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism representing a much stronger economic interest for Egypt, and even non-state cultural organizations (Helly, 2014).

The State Information Service (SIS), directly subordinate to the Egyptian Presidency, is in charge of the state media outlets. The SIS is the nation's main informational public relations agency, as stated on its website. In recent years, the SIS mainly aims to promote Egypt as a stable state and carefully navigates from any perception of terrorism and political conflicts.

For official institutes overseas, the MOFA is responsible for embassies, the Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Culture for cultural centers, and the SIS for press offices. However, all these governmental entities often work independently, and key players such as the MOFA do not strategize or differentiate promoting the national image domestically and internationally (Abd El-wahed, 2016). This lack of coordination and planning undermines the clarity and consistency of Egypt's messages to the world and thus impacts Egypt's influence abroad.

3. Fields of ECP

3.1 Culture and the arts

Egypt does not enjoy an abundant presence of cultural institutes overseas. It projects its cultural power mainly through tourism and cultural preservation. The main actors for the latter include the Ministry of Antiquities and a number of well-networked local institutions like the Grand Egyptian Museum, National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and the Museum of Islamic Arts. All of these museums are in active international cooperation with nations and intergovernmental organizations in the fields of museology, Egyptology, archaeology, and cultural heritage management. For example, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is financing the construction of the Grand Egyptian Museum through two official development assistance (ODA) loans of a total of around \$800 million. In 2019, the European Union launched a 3-year project with funding valued at 3.1 million euros aimed at transforming the Egyptian Museum of Cairo (EU Neighbours, 2019).

Apart from the afore-mentioned cultural offices and centers that are supported by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Culture, there are a number of other organizations active in Egypt's cultural scene. These include government-affiliated Cairo Opera House and Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Furthermore, Cultural Resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy), a non-governmental organization, has supported and promoted artistic activities in the Arab region since 2003.

In addition, annual events such as Cairo International Book Fair and Cairo International Film Festival also attract visitors and partners mainly from the Arab world. In 2021, the Cairo International Book Fair received 1.7 million people and invited publishing agencies representing 25 countries (Egypt Independent, 2021; “Cairo International Book Fair,” 2021). Cultural events in the private sector, such as the El Gouna Film Festival, have likewise attracted a sizable international audience.

Table 5: Key statistics on culture and the arts

	2019	2015
Number of countries present	20 ⁽²⁰²¹⁾	-
Number of institutes	20 ⁽²⁰²¹⁾	31 ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾
Number of artists in exchange programs	-	-

Sources: International Relations Office of Benha University

3.2 Language

Egypt does not have any language institutions abroad. However, Egypt’s Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs announced in December 2019 the official launch of the ‘Speak Arabic’/’Etkallem Arabi’ (اتكلم عربي) initiative. This initiative aims to promote the Arabic language and Egyptian culture and identity, primarily to and among second and third-generation Egyptians living abroad. In 2021 April, the ‘Speak Arabic’ mobile application is officially online. However, the effectiveness of Egypt’s efforts to mobilize and engage Egyptians abroad is unclear.

3.3 Primary and secondary education

While Egypt does not have any primary and secondary educational institutes abroad, it still tries to strengthen the ties with Egyptian expat students through exams administrated at Egyptian consulates and embassies worldwide. In 2021, The Ministry of Education and Technical Education announced a system named “Our Children Abroad,” through which Egyptian students abroad from the first grade of primary school to the second grade of high school can register for the examination. These exams are based on the curricula in Egypt, and they take place annually (Al-Youm, 2020).⁴

3.4 Tertiary education and science

As of 2019, Egypt had 27 public universities and 35 private universities. And these include the American University in Cairo (est. 1919), the British University in Egypt (est. 2005), and an outpost of the Technical University of Berlin, which opened in 2012. According to State Information Service (2020), between 2014/2015 and 2018/2019, three universities were established under international agreements and three international branch universities were

⁴ For more information, see also Al-Youm, 2020.

also built as part of the government's plan to build eight international universities by 2020 (Egyptian Streets, 2019).⁵ As claimed by the SIS, Egypt is giving out 1,900 scholarships to foreign students of the African continent every year with a budget of about \$17 million.

Notably, the Al-Azhar University, Egypt's oldest degree-granting university, is renowned as the Oxford of Islamic learning, and it plays an important role in pushing intellectual changes in Egypt and beyond. The university attracts 30,000 students a year from over 100 different countries.⁶

Currently, the Egyptian government is adopting a policy of internationalization and reform to retain more students and become an education hub. The most crucial perspective of this reform is building international branch campus programs. In other words, Egypt inclines toward welcoming international universities to build branch campuses in Egypt rather than expanding its presence overseas. There are also practical reasons for Egypt to do so in the sight of its colonial history and an Egyptian 'brain-drain' caused by economic instability (Abdelbaki, 2019).

Table 6: Key figures on tertiary education

	2019	2015
Number of countries	7	6
Number of universities / colleges abroad	3	n/a
Number of domestic universities / colleges	62	41
Number of students		
Number of foreign students	62,542	52,079
Number of students at transnational higher education (TNE)	-	-
Number of government scholarships awarded	~1,900	~1,900
Number of agreements	35	
Budget	-	-
Government financial support	-	-

Sources: State Information Service, Statista

⁵ Universities established under international agreements included 1) Egyptian Japanese University for Science and Technology 2) University of Isaska's branch in Egypt. and 3) German International University; international branch universities included 1) Canadian Universities in Egypt, which hosts the Prince Edward Island University branch. 2) Knowledge International University which hosts the British branch of Coventry University, and 3) Global Foundation which hosting the British branch of the University of Hertfordshire.

⁶ <https://www.csia-oxford.org/al-azhar-university.html>

Table 7: Key figures on science and research

	2019	2015
Number of countries	over 13	-
Number of institutes	-	-
Number of researchers / staff	-	-
Number of projects	over 58	-
Number scientists in exchange programs	869 ⁷	746 ⁸
Government financial support (€ million) ⁹	11.3	-

Source: CAPMAS, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

3.5 Foreign Media

Egypt's international broadcasting system comprises the Directed Transnational Radio Network (DTRN) and Nile TV International channel, and they are also the main services dedicated to enhancing Egypt's soft power in Africa. For example, Ethiopia's recent mega-project to build the Grand Ethiopia Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile has sparked heated debates with downstream countries like Egypt, and Egypt is working on expanding its broadcasting system targeting Nile Basin countries to promote Egypt's positions on a number of issues, including the GERD (Mikhail, 2021; Polakovic, 2021).

Today, the DTRN has 35 radio stations providing their services in 23 languages. In particular, it has ten radio stations targeting Africa and providing its services in Hausa, Fulani, Swahili, Amharic, Somali, African, English, French, and Arabic (Allam, 2018). However, compared to their past performances, the DTRN and Nile TV International Channel are not effectively communicating messages from the Egyptian government and face serious financial and technical challenges. On the other hand, the Nile TV International channel, launched in 1993, has 25% of its program in French and 75% in English. It is overwhelmingly occupied with domestic affairs, and its credibility has been constantly called into doubt. Faced with competition from Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, the Nile International is no longer influential in the region. It is only considered a strange and internationally unrecognized model.

Egypt had 69 overseas media offices during the 1980s, but now it has about 20 offices. The SIS (State Information Service) also has been publishing 'Letter from Cairo,' a series of information booklets, every one or two months on its website since April 2015 as a reaction to the June 30 protest. Presented in four languages—Arabic, English, French, and Spanish—these booklets regularly update Egypt's diplomatic activities and economic developments.

⁷ CAPMAS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics). (2019b).

⁸ CAPMAS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics). (2017). .

⁹ CRCI (Council of Research Centres and Institutes). (2019). Refer to p.37.

However, like all other Egyptian state media outlets, the SIS was part of the government's agenda to boost its success and achievements. To glorify successive presidents of the nation has been another significant duty of the SIS since its establishment in 1954. The SIS only stopped publishing the annual booklet about Gamal Mubarak's achievements after the Arab Spring in 2011. Still, it quickly resumed the job and started to publish about presidents' foreign visits.

Table 8: Key figures on foreign broadcasting

	2019	2015
TV: Nile TV International Channel		
Number of countries broadcasted to	-	-
Number of languages	2	-
Number of channels	-	-
Audience / weekly (million)	-	-
Radio: Directed Transnational Radio Network		
Number of countries broadcasted to	-	-
Number of languages	23	-
Number of channels	-	-
Audience / weekly (million)	-	-
Digital & social media audience (million)	-	-

Sources: Mehany, 2020

4. Challenges and Future Outlook

Egypt's soft power has seen a decline due to internal and external constraints, including increasing militarization and competitive pressure from other regional powers and Gulf states (Al Qassemi, 2014). Still, Egypt was the only country in the MENA region with a positive GDP growth rate from 2020–2021, avoiding the coronavirus-induced recession that plagued most of the world. Egypt has also confronted terrorism and gone through considerable economic reforms, improved its educational and health care systems, and developed its infrastructure through a number of national projects under the current leadership of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

How to construct an attractive national narrative and enhance its international image will require more coordination from different ministries at a state level as well as reforms and financial support in all of its ECP fields, ranging from cultural and scientific exchange to

international broadcasting. In addition, Egypt should keep strengthening its position as a key defender of state sovereignty and regional stability in the Middle East and building on narratives that can bridge the gap between its historical legacy and the turmoil of the Arab Spring. By harnessing its strengths in cultural heritage, religious learning, and tourism-related creative industries, Egypt can take its soft power to the next level and show the world a new identity grounded in pharaonic heritage.

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