

Articles & Op-Eds

## **Egypt's Public Negative on All Regional Players -- Except Itself**

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A new poll indicates approval for Cairo's recent policies but little interest in religious reform, and very strong opposition toward players such as ISIS, Iran, Russia, the United States, and Qatar.

With violence escalating in Syria and elsewhere in its neighborhood, the Egyptian public maintains a highly unfavorable view of a whole roster of governments and political movements active in the Middle East, whether from inside or outside the region. The sole exception on this list is public opinion toward the Egyptian government's own policies: they score a solid "very positive" (48%) or at least "fairly positive" (24%) rating (for details on the poll that produced these figures, see the last section).

### **MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD STILL HAS SOME SUPPORT; ISLAMIC REFORM LAGS BEHIND**

A clear majority of Egyptians (64%) voice an unfavorable view of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet despite the Sisi government's fierce campaign against that organization, nearly one-third of Egyptians privately say they have either a "very positive" (10%) or at least a "fairly positive" (19%) opinion of it. Five percent say they don't know or refuse to answer the question. These numbers are little changed over the past year.

On a related question, only one-fifth of Egyptians say it would be "a good idea" to "interpret Islam in a more moderate, tolerant, or modern way." Three-quarters reject that notion, notwithstanding Sisi's recent calls for "a religious revolution" at al-Azhar. By comparison, in another recent poll, the proportion of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians who supported this concept was approximately twice as high.

### **ISIS SEEN AS BIGGEST REGIONAL PROBLEM**

By far the most unfavorable ratings of all go to ISIS, or Daesh in Arabic: 90% "very negative" plus 3% "fairly negative." Moreover, the "conflict against Daesh" tops the list of recommended "priorities for our government right now," with 24% picking that as Egypt's first priority and 29% as second priority -- far ahead not only of Syria, Iran, or Yemen, but also of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In addition, a substantial proportion picks "the conflict between sects or movements of Islam" as Egypt's first (22%) or second (15%) foreign policy priority.

### **EGYPTIANS DISAPPROVE OF ASSAD REGIME BUT DON'T WANT TO INTERVENE**

Regarding Syria, Egyptians have an overwhelmingly bad opinion of the Assad regime: 56% "very negative" plus 28% "fairly negative." But just 19% want to assist the Syrian opposition at all, and a mere 4% favor direct Egyptian military intervention on its behalf. Half say Egypt should either "support diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire and political settlement" (24%) or else "stay out of the Syrian conflict completely" (27%).

A surprisingly substantial minority (17%) would prefer "Turkish military intervention to stabilize the situation in Syria." But just 15% select the Syrian crisis as Egypt's top priority from a list including five other current regional conflicts; only the conflict in Yemen ranks lower, with 6%.

### **RUSSIA'S POLICIES RATED VERY LOW, IRAN'S EVEN LOWER**

The large majority of Egyptians, 79%, rate recent Russian policies in the region negatively. An even larger majority, 89%, say that about Iran. And by a huge margin, the Egyptian public expects Arab-Iranian relations to get worse (62%) rather than better (11%) over the next few years. Nevertheless, opinions of the recent nuclear deal with Iran are more mixed: 42% say it is a good deal, against 35% who call it bad, while 24% offer no opinion either way. And just 15% say "the conflict between Iran and Arab countries" should be Egypt's number one regional priority today.

## **U.S., OTHER GOVERNMENTS AND MOVEMENTS ALSO VIEWED NEGATIVELY**

At the same time, three-quarters or more of Egyptians also voice an unfavorable opinion of the United States, Qatar, and Hezbollah. Other key regional players fare only slightly better: Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, Turkey, and Pakistan all receive negative scores in the 60% range. More unexpectedly, perhaps, so do both France and China.

## **POLL REFLECTS ALL SEGMENTS OF EGYPTIAN SOCIETY**

These findings are based on a survey conducted by a leading Arab commercial company in late August/early September, using standard geographic probability techniques. It comprised personal interviews, with strict assurances of confidentiality, among a national sample of 1,000 adult Egyptians, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately plus or minus 3.5%.

Unlike most other Egyptian surveys, this sample is fully representative of the entire national adult population. For example, 93% are Muslim and 7% Coptic Christian; half are under thirty-five years old; and just one-third have completed high school. The sample is also distributed proportionally around the entire country: 20% in metropolitan Cairo/Helwan/Giza/6 October City; 6% in Alexandria; and three-quarters scattered all around the Delta, Upper Egypt, the Suez Canal area, and elsewhere in provincial Egypt, both urban and rural.

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