



## Tracking The History Of Egypt As The Middle East: Initiers And Critics

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### ABSTRACT

*Egypt has played an important role in the history of the Middle East region from ancient times to the modern era. This research aims to trace the historical development of Egypt in the context of the region, with a focus on Egypt's contribution as an influential initiator of political, social and cultural thought in the Middle East as well as the emergence of criticism of Egypt's role from internal and external perspectives. Through historiographic analysis and primary source research, this research examines key periods such as the Ancient Pharaohs, the Islamic era, European colonialism, the rise of Egyptian nationalism, as well as Egypt's role in contemporary Middle Eastern politics. This research reveals that Egypt is not only the center of ancient civilization, but also continues to transform into a major power in the Middle East, both through modernist ideologies such as pan-Arabism, Nasserism, and as a major player in international relations in the region. However, Egypt's historical journey has also been marked by criticism from neighboring countries as well as internal groups regarding Egypt's policies on political and social issues. This research contributes to enriching the understanding of Egyptian history and its relevance in the dynamics of the Middle East, providing a new perspective on the relationship between Egypt as an initiator of change and a critic of its regional role.*

**Keywords:** Egypt, Middle East, history, initiator, criticism, politics, pan-Arabism, nationalism.

### ABSTRAK

*Mesir telah memainkan peran penting dalam sejarah kawasan Timur Tengah sejak zaman kuno hingga era modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melacak perkembangan sejarah Mesir dalam konteks kawasan tersebut, dengan fokus pada kontribusi Mesir sebagai penggagas pemikiran politik, sosial, dan budaya yang berpengaruh di Timur Tengah serta munculnya kritik terhadap peran Mesir dari perspektif internal dan eksternal. Melalui analisis historiografi dan telaah sumber primer,*

*penelitian ini mengkaji periode-periode kunci seperti Firaun Kuno, era Islam, kolonialisme Eropa, kebangkitan nasionalisme Mesir, serta peran Mesir dalam politik Timur Tengah kontemporer. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Mesir tidak hanya menjadi pusat peradaban kuno, tetapi juga terus bertransformasi sebagai kekuatan utama di Timur Tengah, baik melalui ideologi modernis seperti pan-Arabisme, Nasserisme, maupun sebagai pemain utama dalam hubungan internasional di kawasan. Namun, perjalanan sejarah Mesir ini juga diwarnai oleh kritik dari negara-negara tetangga serta kelompok internal yang mempertanyakan kebijakan Mesir dalam isu-isu politik dan sosial. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam memperkaya pemahaman sejarah Mesir dan relevansinya dalam dinamika Timur Tengah, memberikan perspektif baru tentang hubungan antara Mesir sebagai penggagas perubahan dan kritik terhadap peran regionalnya.*

**Kata Kunci:** Mesir, Timur Tengah, sejarah, penggagas, kritik, politik, pan-Arabisme, nasionalisme.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Egypt, with its ancient civilization of more than five thousand years, has played a central role in world history, especially in the political, social, and cultural dynamics of the Middle East (A. Kemet, 2021). As a country located in the heart of the Arab world and adjacent to strategic regions such as Africa and Asia, Egypt has long been known as a major player in shaping the history of the Middle East region (A. Goldschmidt, 2020).

Since the time of the Pharaohs, Egypt's influence in trade, politics, and religion has spread throughout the region, making it one of the regional powerhouses. Egypt is not only the center of ancient civilization, but also pioneered important developments in the modern history of the Middle East region (William L. Cleveland & M. Bunton, 2021).

One of Egypt's greatest contributions to the history of the modern Middle East was during the rise of Arab nationalism in the early 20th century. Under the leadership of figures such as Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt became one of the main drivers of the pan-Arabism movement that advocated Arab unity against Western colonialism and imperialism (A. Hourani, 2022). The ideology of Nasserism and the spirit of nationalism that he brought created a wave of political change throughout the region, marking Egypt as a major initiator in the formation of a modern political identity in the Middle East (E. Thompson, 2021). However, Egypt's role is not only as an ideological initiator, but also as a center of various political dynamics and criticisms. Egypt is often the focus of criticism, both from its neighboring countries and from within the country itself (H. El-Shazly, 2022). Egypt's political stance in the international arena, both during the Cold War and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has sparked various reactions and criticisms from other regional powers with different interests (J. Beinin & Z. Lockman, 2020). Egypt's ambivalent and dynamic policies towards the West, especially the United States and the Soviet Union, have often sparked debate in the context of Middle Eastern politics (Robert L. Tignor, 2022).

In addition to politics, Egypt's contribution to culture and thought in the Middle East has also been significant. Egypt has long been an intellectual center in the Arab world, especially with the presence of institutions such as Al-Azhar University, which has been a major source of Islamic education for centuries (P.J. Vatikiotis, 2020). In the modern era, the city of Cairo has been the birthplace of various literary and intellectual movements, making Egypt an influential cultural center in the Middle East. However, Egypt has not been immune from criticism regarding its

domestic policies, especially in terms of democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights (Nazih N. Ayubi, 2020).

Egypt's role in the development of the Middle East must also be understood in the context of colonialism and post-colonialism. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Egypt was at the center of numerous conflicts between imperialist powers such as Britain and France over control of the Suez Canal and other strategic areas (A. Shlaim, 2021). After gaining full independence in 1952, Egypt continued to play a significant role in Middle Eastern politics, both as a leader of the non-aligned movement and as a major driver in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Steven A. Cook, 2021). However, after gaining independence in 1952, Egypt underwent a significant transformation, especially after the 2011 revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak and brought Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power. Under his rule, Egypt implemented authoritarian policies while attempting to address economic and security challenges, including the threat of terrorism in the Sinai. Egypt remains an important mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict and maintains close ties with Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, despite facing a refugee crisis from conflicts in the surrounding region. These developments show Egypt's continuing vital role in Middle Eastern politics, despite facing many internal and external challenges (A. Khalil, 2022).

Egypt has also been at the center of pragmatic foreign policy in recent decades. Under the rule of Anwar Sadat, Egypt drastically changed its political course by signing the Camp David peace accords with Israel in 1979, making Egypt the first Arab country to officially recognize Israel (Edward Wadie Said, 2022). Although this move was praised by some Western countries, it drew sharp criticism from other Arab countries, who considered it a betrayal of the Palestinian cause (R. Owen, 2020).

In addition, Egypt's role as an initiator of various socio-political changes is also challenged by its often unstable domestic conditions. Economic crises, corruption, and social problems at home have weakened Egypt's position as a major power in the Middle East (Dennis Sullivan & Sana Abed-Kotob, 2021). Despite its long history as a prime mover in the region, Egypt has had to deal with internal challenges that have consistently hampered its ability to play a stronger role in international politics (C. Tripp, 2020).

Despite facing various political, social, and economic challenges, Egypt remains an important actor in the Middle East after the 2011 Revolution. The revolution, which was part of the Arab Spring, paved the way for change, but also resulted in instability. Currently, under the leadership of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the government focuses on stability and economic development through major infrastructure projects, although criticism of human rights and civil liberties violations continues.

In this context, Egypt plays an important role in regional diplomacy, especially as a mediator in the conflict between Hamas and Israel. Egypt's relations with Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have strengthened, providing financial and political support for the current government (M. Khan, 2022), a fact that confirms Egypt's position as a driver of change in the region (Leila Tarazi Fawaz, 2021). The revolution not only changed Egypt's domestic political map, but also inspired similar movements in other countries in the Middle East. Although the results of the revolution have not fully met the expectations of the Egyptian people, the country's role as a pioneer in the reform movement is still recognized (R. Zaki, 2023).

Criticism of Egypt, both domestically and internationally, is not only limited to political aspects, but also includes social and cultural aspects (Gamal Abdel Nasser, 2017). Domestically, Egypt is often criticized for its weak social policies that have resulted in sharp economic disparities and high poverty rates. Meanwhile, in the Middle East region, Egypt is sometimes seen as a country that is too close to the West and ignores Arab solidarity, especially in the context of issues related

to Palestine (S. Seddigh, 2021). Under the leadership of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt strengthened relations with the United States and other Western countries, which is often seen as ignoring Arab solidarity. Although Egypt plays a mediator in the conflict between Hamas and Israel, its policies are often seen as more in favor of national security interests and strategic alliances with the West, creating tensions with other Arab countries that are more directly supportive of the Palestinian position (M. Khan, 2022).

Egypt's historical journey as a center of civilization and political power in the Middle East places it in a unique position in global history. This country not only serves as a major initiator of many major changes in the region, but also as a target of criticism from various parties who have different views on Egypt's role (S. Ibrahim, 2023). It is true that even though there are criticisms from several experts towards Egypt - which is considered Eurocentric - because as part of the majority of Egypt's territory is geographically located in North Africa. However, Egypt continues to exist to make major changes in the Middle East region.

Tracing the history of Egypt in the context of the Middle East cannot be separated from global influences. From the colonial era to the era of globalization, Egypt has continued to adapt to major changes in the international order. As one of the largest countries in the region, Egypt has a responsibility to balance regional and global interests, which often create tensions in its foreign policy (A. Zohry, 2022).

The explanation above emphasizes that Egypt is not only the initiator of influential ideas and policies in the Middle East, but is also the subject of growing criticism. This research will explore the various periods of Egyptian history, from ancient civilization to the modern era, and how the country continues to play a role in shaping the future of the Middle East region into the contemporary era.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODE

In this study, the method used is a literature study that aims to analyze and explore the history of Egypt as an integral part of the Middle East, with a focus on the initiators and critics that emerged along with the development of the era. The data collection process was carried out through a study of various written sources, including books, journal articles, research reports, and historical documents that are relevant to the research theme. This study utilizes academic databases, university libraries, and online sources to identify literature that discusses Egypt's influence in the political, social, and cultural contexts in the Middle East (Sugiyono, 2019). Furthermore, the analysis was carried out using a qualitative approach to evaluate how Egypt played a role as an initiator of significant ideas and movements in the region, as well as the criticisms that emerged against the policies and practices of the Egyptian government. The main focus of this study is on key figures, developing ideologies, and social dynamics that influenced Egypt's position in the Middle East. Through a critical analysis of existing literature, it is hoped that this study can provide in-depth insight into Egypt's role as an initiator and critic in its history, as well as the challenges faced in the modern context. With this approach, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding of Egyptian history and its contribution to the development of the Middle East can be produced (Sugiyono, 2019).

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Indeed, Egypt's historical role has the dynamics and complexity of a civilization that continues to develop. Egypt's existence not only plays a role as a witness to history, but also as an initiator of significant political, social, and cultural changes. In this discussion analysis, the researcher will explore Egypt's role as an initiator in the development of Arab ideology and the criticism it faces from various parties, both internal and external.

#### A. Egypt as the Initiator

Egypt has a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which has existed for thousands of years. As one of the oldest civilizations in the world, Egypt has been an intellectual and spiritual center, giving birth to many important thinkers and figures (A. Khan, 2022). Likewise in the modern context, Egypt has been the initiator of many social and political movements that have influenced developments in the Middle East region (A. Hassan, 2023). Since the early 20th century, Egypt has played a key role in developing the ideology of Arab nationalism. Figures such as Saad Zaghloul and Gamal Abdel Nasser have become symbols of the Arab nation's struggle to gain independence from colonial rule (Rashid Khalidi, 2021). Moreover, Gamal Abdel Nasser's thoughts with the concept of pan-Arabism aimed at uniting Arab countries in one political and economic entity. In this context, Egypt not only functions as an initiator, but also as a leader in the movement (Ahmed Kassem, 2022).

Egypt, under Nasser's leadership, took the initiative to lead Arab states in responding to challenges in the region, including the conflict with Israel and the Palestinian issue. Egypt is currently led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who took power after a military coup in 2013. A former Defense Minister, el-Sisi has focused on domestic stability and economic reforms to attract foreign investment. He has launched massive infrastructure projects and addressed security challenges, particularly from extremism in the Sinai. In terms of international relations, el-Sisi has sought to maintain stability, strengthen ties with Western countries, and play a role in mediating between Israel and the Palestinians. Unlike his predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was known as a pan-Arabist leader who refused to recognize Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War, el-Sisi is more pragmatic. Nasser promoted socialist and nationalization policies, while el-Sisi has leaned more towards market reforms. El-Sisi's approach to international relations tends to be pragmatic, reflecting a shift in focus from pan-Arab ideology to political and economic stability in the domestic and regional context. For example, the Cairo Conference in 1964, for example, showed Egypt's efforts to unite Arab countries in the face of external threats. Egypt's foreign policy reflects the country's active role in formulating political strategies in the Middle East (M. El-Sayed, 2022).

#### B. Criticism of Egypt

Although Egypt has played a role as an initiator, there has been much criticism from within the country. Under authoritarian leadership, such as Nasser and Anwar Sadat, government policies were often limited by political interests, leading to a lack of civil and political freedoms. Opposition movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, criticized the government for betraying the people's aspirations for democracy and social justice (R. Hassan, 2023). The protests and demonstrations that took place, especially before the 2011 Revolution, showed the people's dissatisfaction with the existing regime.

From an international perspective, Egypt has also faced criticism regarding its foreign policy and diplomatic relations. Egypt's approach to the Palestinian issue, for example, has often been considered insufficiently firm by other Arab countries. In the peace agreement

with Israel at Camp David in 1978, Egypt was accused of betraying the Palestinian cause, which led to Egypt's isolation from most Arab countries. Critics saw this move as evidence that Egypt prioritized good relations with the West, especially the United States, over Arab solidarity. Criticism of the Egyptian government is not limited to foreign policy. Restrictions on freedom of speech and human rights have also been highlighted. International organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have reported human rights violations in Egypt, including arbitrary detention of activists, journalists, and political opponents. This has created tensions between the government and society, and reduced the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the world (World Report 2024: Events of 2023 - Human Rights Watch - Google Books, n.d).

### C. Implications and Future Challenges

As information and communication technology advances, Egyptian society is increasingly able to organize itself and voice its opinions. Social media has become an effective tool for mobilization, as seen in the 2011 Revolution. However, the government still tries to control the public narrative and restrict access to information that is considered a threat to stability. Egypt now faces the challenge of finding a national identity that reflects its cultural and historical diversity. In the context of globalization, many young people are questioning existing traditions and values, prompting debates about Egypt's identity in the modern world (N. El-Bendary, 2022). However, current developments based on a view of the sacred values of world religions in a complex-dynamic rather than partial-static way show that spirituality is not only personal, but also influenced by the environment, social interactions, and the context of globalization (Sassi, 2023). Therefore, as one of the largest and most important countries in the Middle East, Egypt has a responsibility to play a constructive role in promoting stability and cooperation in the region. Egypt must be able to balance national interests with regional aspirations in order to remain relevant on the international stage.

Tracing Egypt's history in the context of the Middle East shows that the country is not only the originator of great ideas but also faces significant criticism from within and outside the country. Egypt must face new challenges in modern politics and society, while continuing to adapt and seek its proper role in a changing region. Recognizing these criticisms and challenges is essential for Egypt to continue to contribute to the history and future of the Middle East. In the context of education, recent ideas point to the importance of integrating modern technology and methodologies into the curriculum to prepare the younger generation to face the challenges of globalization. Education in Egypt should focus on developing critical thinking and creativity, enabling students to contribute to discussions of national identity and aspirations. As a key country in the Middle East, Egypt has a responsibility to promote stability and cooperation in the region, while balancing national interests with regional aspirations. Facing criticism from within and outside the country, it is essential for Egypt to continue to adapt, seek its proper role, and strengthen its contribution to the history and future of the Middle East (M. Zaki, 2021).

## 4. CONCLUSION

Mesir, sebagai salah satu negara tertua dan terpenting di Timur Tengah, telah memainkan peran kunci dalam pengembangan ideologi nasionalisme Arab dan pan-Arabisme. Sejak awal abad ke-20, tokoh-tokoh seperti Saad Zaghoul dan Gamal Abdel Nasser telah menginspirasi gerakan sosial dan politik yang mempengaruhi kawasan. Di bawah kepemimpinan Abdel Fattah

el-Sisi, Mesir berusaha untuk menyeimbangkan stabilitas domestik dan hubungan internasional, meskipun pendekatannya yang pragmatis telah memicu kritik terkait pengabaian terhadap solidaritas Arab dan hak asasi manusia. Masyarakat Mesir, khususnya generasi muda, semakin aktif dalam menggunakan media sosial untuk menyuarakan pendapat dan mencari identitas nasional yang mencerminkan keragaman budaya dan sejarah mereka.

Namun, tantangan yang dihadapi Mesir tidak hanya datang dari dalam negeri, tetapi juga dari tekanan internasional untuk meningkatkan kebebasan sipil dan hak asasi manusia. Kritik terhadap kebijakan luar negeri Mesir, terutama terkait masalah Palestina, menunjukkan adanya ketidakpuasan yang lebih luas terhadap arah politik negara ini. Untuk terus relevan di kanvas internasional dan berkontribusi pada stabilitas kawasan, Mesir perlu mengakui kritik-kritik ini dan melakukan reformasi yang diperlukan, terutama dalam sistem pendidikan yang harus mengedepankan pemikiran kritis dan kreativitas. Dengan demikian, Mesir dapat memainkan peran yang konstruktif dalam sejarah dan masa depan Timur Tengah yang terus berkembang.

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