# Egypt's overpopulation: a real or a feigned crisis?

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Egypt is a meeting point for several civilizations that have contributed to shaping its culture over different ages.

The north African country has gone through several prosperous eras and also witnessed periods of decay and decline. However, every single civilization that arose on the land of Egypt has left an impact on the formation of the Egyptian character.

Moreover, the Egyptian environment has effectively contributed to shaping the personality of the Egyptian citizen, and it has had a great role in determining form of governance that Egypt has undergone.

Since ancient times, the Egyptian citizen has been known for his association with the land, and accordingly he almost had no tendency to travel and wander around. This is due to many factors, most notably his basic dependence in food supply and living on the crops provided by the land that he cultivates, which requires settlement and taking care of his land. This is why the Egyptian population have always been concentrated along the Nile valley.

Egyptians live on an area of about one million square kilometers, with a population density of 89.2 per square kilometer, as stated in a 2016 report. Egypt ranked 115 in terms of population density despite the fact that Egyptians live on approximately 8% only of the total area of Egypt, where residential areas are concentrated around the banks of the Nile from south to north.

In light of concentration of population in this narrow area, the population density is extremely high in populated areas.

Population density increased in 2016 to approximately 1136.5 people per square kilometer, of course after only populated areas were taken into account. Accordingly, Egypt moved from 115th. to 114th. position globally in terms of population density.

However, population density can be linked to low standards of living and the low quality of services provided to citizens, especially when those cities suffer from poor infrastructure.[1]

It is clear that the state from ancient times has always wanted to concentrate this population density in the Nile Valley in order to tighten its security grip on the people, and to keep the people under the state's close watch. Note that the state's security grip in the outskirts may appear to be weak and loose. For example, the power of the state in the Sinai Peninsula, that is considered the eastern gateway to the country, as well as in the western and southern borders, is not as strong as its power in Lower Egypt.

Despite the steadily increasing population in Egypt, the state has not perform its due role to address this overpopulation, including reclamation of agricultural lands, expanding urban areas to cope with the new situation, or to search for ways to activate and benefit from this large human capital.

Even when it appears that the state engages in handling this high density, it fails to expand horizontally in the desert hinterland to allow the citizen to own the land that he can build his own house on, and thus secure a spacious and comfortable home for himself, his family and his children after him.

Instead, the state adopts vertical expansion, where it builds multi-storey buildings with narrow apartments, so that the people may remain under its close watch, and accordingly cannot escape when they are wanted or pursued. However, if a citizen builds his own house on the land that he owns, he may install secret entrances and exits that may hinder the authorities' move to arrest him if he is wanted.

These narrow dwellings that the state only allows do not completely solve the housing problem, where the problem remains, as children need independent housing units to create their new families. Accordingly, the people remain in distress, under the control and tight security grip of the state.

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[1] Dr. Ahmed Ragaa Ragheb and others, Analysis of situation of population in Egypt 2016, December 2016 issue, p. 5

## Population doubled

In fact, the state is not satisfied with this human wealth. Rather, it considers it a great obstacle to development, blaming the population increase for its economic and social failures.

This crisis was exacerbated due to the state's failure to perform its role of reclaiming agricultural lands commensurate with the population increase, expanding the desert hinterland and allowing citizens to build their own houses, reconstructing the Sinai Peninsula, and providing further housing units to include the population increase.

In fact, the average Egyptian population doubled nine times during the period from 1897 to 2015. During the first fifty years of the last century, the population of Egypt doubled. However, the Egyptian population doubled five times during the period from 1947 AD to 2015, which is the same rate of increase that Egypt started with in the early 1950s[2].

The Egyptians make up a third of the Arab population, where this can considered a great benefit if the state works properly to utilize it.

Nations need great manpower, a large vast area, and abundant resources to become great, which are available in Egypt and can make it a great regional power to be reckoned with.

Instead, the state squeezed the Egyptian people into narrow spaces, failed to give them outlets from distress, and even restricted their livelihoods. This situation led to emergence of reprehensible manners among the public in general, but the situation further worsened in slums that some started to describe this phenomenon as the 'misconduct of slums'.

Commenting on this situation, Dr. Mohamed al-Mahdi, professor of psychiatry, says: "The severe over-crowdedness in cities and villages caused a feeling of distress, suffocation and excessive heat, especially in summer, in addition to high rates of audio-visual pollution; where all this led to a growing

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[2] Ibid

state of nervousness, excitement and sometimes aggressiveness among Egyptians in an unprecedented way.[3]

In fact, the rule of the military is the source of this calamity and the basis of the corruption that has deeply struck the Egyptian state, demolished its structure and destroyed its potential.

It is noteworthy that Egypt has been plagued by the military rule since 1952; and even when the January revolution (2011) erupted, the military soon restored government, and have even become worse than they had been before.

Despite the dominant and controlling central government, chaos and indiscipline pervaded Egyptian society, where people deliberately violate the laws, and the nation has failed to catch up with the progress of the global civilization.

Moreover, a split has emerged in the fabric of the Egyptian people, where the media worked to deepen it, taking into mind that such division has been created and inflamed by the military since they dominated the country in 1952. However, this division reached its climax in 2013, following the military coup against the elected president.

Instead of finding solutions to the problems resulting from overpopulation and wrong policies, population density, and provision of a decent life for the people, the Egyptian regime only focused on tightening its security grip on people, silencing them and imposing whatever laws it wanted to restrict their freedoms.

The regime may believe that it can impose stability in Egypt with the excessive use of repression, but the Egyptian citizen that has long been known for patience, may once lose his patience and revolt again against oppression, as he did in the January revolution (2011).

(To read more details about the 'Characteristics of Egyptians: Origins, Developments and Factors of Change' in Arabic, press here.)

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[3] Dr. Mohamed Al-Mahdi: The Egyptian Personality, Maganin website, The Arab Network for Social Mental Health, March 26, 2007, link