

# UPRISING

## THE BIRTH OF THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION

Beginning in December 2010, unprecedented mass demonstrations against poverty, corruption, and political repression broke out in several Arab countries, challenging the authority of some of the most entrenched regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Such was the case in Egypt, where in 2011 a popular uprising forced one of the region's longest-serving and most influential leaders, Pres. Ḥosnī Mubārak, from power.

The first demonstrations occurred in Tunisia in December 2010, triggered by the self-immolation of a young man frustrated by Tunisia's high unemployment rate and rampant police corruption. Rallies calling for Pres. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to step down spread throughout the country, with police often resorting to violence to control the crowds. As clashes between police and protesters escalated, Ben Ali announced a series of economic

and political reforms in an unsuccessful attempt to end the unrest. Demonstrations continued, forcing Ben Ali to flee the country. The apparent success of the popular uprising in Tunisia, by then dubbed the Jasmine Revolution, inspired similar movements in other countries, including Egypt, Yemen, and Libya. In Egypt, demonstrations organized by youth groups, largely independent of Egypt's established opposition parties, took hold in the capital and in cities around the country.

Protesters called for Mubārak to step down immediately, clearing the way for free elections and democracy. As the demonstrations gathered strength, the Mubārak regime resorted to increasingly violent tactics against protesters, resulting in hundreds of injuries and deaths. Mubārak's attempts to placate the protesters with concessions, including a pledge to step down at the end of his term in 2011 and naming Omar

Suleiman as vice president—the first person to serve as such in Mubārak's nearly three-decade presidency—did little to quell the unrest.

After almost three weeks of mass protests in Egypt, Mubārak stepped down as president, leaving the Egyptian military in control of the country. Although protesters in Egypt focused most of their anger on domestic issues such as poverty and government oppression, many observers noted that political change in Egypt could impact the country's foreign affairs, affecting long-standing policies. Central elements of Egypt's foreign policy under Mubārak and his predecessor as president, Anwar el-Sādāt, such as Egypt's political-military alignment with the States and the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty, embraced by Egypt's leaders but unpopular with the Egyptian public, could be weakened or rejected under a new regime.

<b>OFFICIAL NAME:</b>	<b>Arab Republic of Egypt</b>
<b>AREA:</b>	386,874 square miles (1,002,000 sq. km)
<b>POPULATION (2010 EST.):</b>	84,474,000
<b>AGE BREAKDOWN (2009):</b>	Under 15, 31.7%; 15–29, 31.3%; 30–44, 18.5%; 45–59, 12.4%; 60–74, 5.1%; 75 and over, 1%
<b>FORM OF GOVERNMENT:</b>	Republic with two legislative houses
<b>CAPITAL:</b>	Cairo
<b>OTHER MAJOR CITIES:</b>	Alexandria, Al-Jīzah, Shubrā al-Khaymah, Port Said, Suez
<b>OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:</b>	Arabic
<b>OFFICIAL RELIGION:</b>	Islam
<b>RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION (2000):</b>	Muslim, 84.4%, of which nearly all are Sunni; Christian, 15.1%, of which Orthodox are 13.6%, Protestant 0.8%, Roman Catholic 0.3%, nonreligious 0.5%
<b>UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (APRIL 2009–MARCH 2010):</b>	9.3%
<b>LITERACY RATE (2007):</b>	Total population age 15 and older, 72%; males 83.6% and females 60.7%



# KEY TERMS

**Arab Spring:** A revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests, riots, coups and civil wars in North Africa and the Middle East that began in 2010 with the Tunisian Revolution

**Coptic Christians:** the largest Christian community in the Middle East, as well as the largest religious minority in the region, accounting for an estimated 10-15 percent of the Egyptian population

**Hosni Mubarak:** A former Egyptian military and political leader who served as the fourth President of Egypt from 1981 to 2011. Mubarak stepped down after 18 days of demonstrations during the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 and transferred authority to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

**Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant:** (also known as ISIL, ISIS, Islamic State, and Daesh) An Arabic Salafi jihadist militant group and unrecognized proto-state that follows a fundamentalist, Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam. This group has been designated a terrorist organization by the United Nations and many individual countries.

**Islamism:** The term can refer to diverse forms of social and political activism advocating that public and political life should be guided by

Islamic principles, or more specifically to movements which call for full implementation of sharia. It is commonly used interchangeably with the terms political Islam or Islamic fundamentalism.

**Muslim Brotherhood:** The Society of the Muslim Brothers is a transnational Sunni Islamist organization founded in Egypt in 1928. The organization influenced other Islamist groups such as Hamas with its model of political activism combined with Islamic charity work, and in 2012 sponsored the elected political party in Egypt after the January Revolution in 2011.

**Repression:** the use of force or violence to control a group of people.

**Revolution:** a forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favor of a new system

**Salafism:** An ultra-conservative reform branch or movement within Sunni Islam that developed in Arabia in the first half of the 18th century. It advocates a return to the traditions of the "devout ancestors" and is considered a fundamentalist approach to Islam, emulating Muhammad and his earliest followers.

**Secular:** Denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis.

**Self-Immolation:** A deliberate sacrifice of oneself, usually by fire and usually for the purpose of bringing attention to social injustice.

**Shia Islam:** A denomination of Islam which holds that the Islamic prophet Muhammad designated Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor

**State of Emergency:** a situation of national danger or disaster in which a government suspends normal constitutional procedures in order to regain control.

**Sunni Islam:** largest denomination of Islam. Its name comes from the word Sunnah, referring to the exemplary behavior of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

**Tahrir Square:** Also known as "Martyr Square," Tahrir Square is a major public town square in Downtown Cairo, Egypt. The square has been the location and focus for political demonstrations in Cairo, most notably those that led to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

## “Uprising” Study Questions

1. How did technology and social media such as Twitter and Facebook play a role in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011?
2. Youth activism - specifically the April 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Movement - were crucial to the success of the Egyptian Revolution. What can the youth of the United States learn from this revolution in an effort to fight against injustice in America?
3. The Egyptian Revolution represented the people's demand for human and political rights. Do you see any parallels between that movement and any movements in the United States?
4. What role does music, visual art, and other forms of creative expression play in movements for social justice?
5. Do you think that anything as extreme as the Egyptian Revolution could ever happen in the United States? If so, what could be the demands of such a movement?

