

The Jewish community in Egypt has dwindled to a fraction of its original size as a result of forced deportation or voluntary migration, both responses to political and social discrimination.

Anti-Semitic hate speech has become a mainstay of Egyptian popular culture, confronting Egypt's remaining Jews with the constant threat of harassment.

Synagogues in Egypt are closed most of the time, as security concerns and a lack of congregants have forced the cessation of all religious ceremonies. The buildings and Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated.

TINY POPULATION CONTINUES TO FACE HARDSHIP

Over the last sixty years, cultural and military conflict between Israel and Egypt fueled the vilification of Jews in Egypt. Having to choose between marginalization in Egypt and a life elsewhere, Egypt's Jewish population [decreased](#) from over 80,000 in 1947 to as low as [seven](#) to [10](#) today. For Jews that remain in Egypt, discrimination is a daily reality, with anti-Semitism a mainstay of [popular media and political dialogue](#). Due to this constant threat of persecution, some Jews have chosen to [identify themselves](#) on legal documents as Christian or Muslim in order to avoid harassment.

In the years after Mubarak's ousting, Egypt's small Jewish population faced increased hardship. For Jews that remain in Egypt, there exists no active synagogue, with the last one having [ceased religious ceremonies](#) in 2012 amid security concerns following [conflict](#) on the Israel-Egypt border and the [storming](#) of the Israeli embassy in Cairo. State policy also marginalizes Egyptian Jews. In 2013, during the presidency of Muhammad Morsi, the Ministry of Social Affairs [canceled an annual \\$13,000 grant](#) primarily used to provide a source of living for elderly Jews, without notifying any Jewish community representatives.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF EGYPT'S JEWISH COMMUNITY

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Egypt was home to [some 80,000 Jews](#), with large numbers residing primarily in Cairo and

Alexandria. Regional developments, most notably the growth of Zionism, began changing attitudes toward the country's Jewish population. By 1945, Jews began to face regular, though not state-sponsored, persecution. Notably, the November 1945 [anti-British and anti-Zionist demonstrations on the 28th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration](#) brought the burning of one synagogue and the desecration of 27 Torah scrolls. In May 1948, following Israel's declaration of independence and the subsequent onset of the Arab-Israeli war, martial law was declared, Zionist youth movements were [made illegal](#), and hundreds of Jews were arrested as suspected Zionists. These legal actions coincided with a [series of bombings](#) in Jewish neighborhoods and against Jewish-owned businesses. Some 25,000 Jews [left](#) Egypt between 1948 and 1950.

In the wake of the 1956 Suez Crisis, a number of laws were passed further marginalizing the Jewish community. The Egyptian Nationality Law [was amended](#) to prevent Zionists from claiming Egyptian nationality. Army Order No. 4 [facilitated](#) the confiscation of property belonging to individuals and associations, many of them Jewish. As Egyptian Jews fled persecution by traveling abroad, some were explicitly [barred](#) from re-entry after one ministerial decree prohibited the return of any Jew between the ages of 10 and 65. Despite these mounting pressures, a small number of Jews opted to remain in Egypt even though Jewish schools, hospitals, and clubs had all [been closed](#) by the 1970s.

ANTI-SEMITISM NORMALIZED IN EGYPT

Although the Camp David Accords normalized Egyptian and Israeli political relations, anti-Semitic rhetoric grew into a widely accepted facet of Egyptian culture. Both private and state media outlets [regularly publish](#) anti-Semitic material, with reporters, broadcasters, and political figures conflating Jews, Zionists, the Israeli state, and anti-Semitic stereotypes, perpetuating a hateful picture of Jews. This tendency is underlined in statements [denying the Holocaust](#) and blaming Israel for a [broad range of Egyptian issues](#). Attempts to discredit political and religious figures often take the form of [rumors planted in the media](#) fabricating the accused's [Jewish descent](#) or allegiance to Israel.

In May 2015, in an attempt to raise awareness of anti-Semitic Egyptian sentiment, a local Egyptian reporter donned traditional Jewish attire and [took to the streets](#) with a film crew, asking for directions in order to engage Egyptians. While some were helpful, many were seen verbally and physically assaulting him. Some more positive portrayals of the country's Jewish population recently have been depicted in the "[Jews of Egypt](#)" documentary and "[The Jewish Quarter](#)" Ramadan soap opera, though the latter's historical inaccuracies, particularly its omission of government pressure on Jews, [drew criticism](#), including from Jewish community members.

SYNAGOGUES AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

There are no active synagogues in Egypt; there are simply not enough Jewish males to create the necessary [minyan](#) (quorum of 10 adult men) for public services to be held. While all of Egypt's synagogues have been closed due to the community's small size, there are [about](#) 12 non-active synagogues in Cairo and Alexandria. A majority of them have been left in a state of [disrepair](#) and are subject to occasional defacement and attacks. In 2010, a makeshift bomb was unsuccessfully thrown at Cairo's main synagogue. These attacks have not been limited to the country's synagogues: Although Egypt has some of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in the world, the graves of many prominent Jews [have been](#) desecrated. The government does station police outside synagogues on a regular basis, and the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo has been restored and is a tourist destination.

The construction and renovation of synagogues is governed by the [Hamayouni Law of 1856](#), the [Azabi Decree of 1934](#), and [Presidential Decree No. 291 of 2005](#). Although Egypt's Jewish community faces the same construction constraints and regulations as the country's Christian population, the small community has not attempted to exercise its rights as often. The ceiling of the third floor of a historic synagogue in Alexandria [collapsed](#) in February 2015, but no restoration works were launched before or after the collapse of the ceiling to preserve the synagogue due to lack of funds. Egypt's last active synagogue, the Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue, was closed in 2012 due to security concerns. For over three years, security concerns led authorities [to cancel](#) the Abu Hassira celebrations, preventing the annual pilgrimage to the country by non-Egyptian Jews to the shrine of 19th-century scholar Rabbi Yaakov Abu Hassira.

RESOURCES

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR):
<http://eipr.org/en>

Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms:
<https://www.facebook.com/ECRF.Official?fref=ts>

U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Reports:
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm>

"The approaching end of Egypt's Jewish community," Mada Masr:
<http://www.madamasr.com/opinion/approaching-end-egypts-jewish-community>

ESHHAD

Eshhad is an online platform that aggregates and collates alleged religious persecution and sectarian attacks in Egypt.

Eshhad, which previously existed as an independent entity and is now an incubated project at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), seeks to encourage transparency and to influence policy by explaining the context in which sectarianism occurs throughout the Middle East.

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