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el-Sayed el-Aswad

# The Quality of Life and Policy Issues among the Middle East and North African Countries

Springer

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*This book is dedicated to the people of the Middle East and North Africa region, people living at the grassroots in this region, and to those in the region who are fighting to enhance their quality of life, happiness, and well-being.*

# Preface

The Middle East and North Africa region, including the Gulf States (hereafter the MENA region), is made up of countries that have received considerable attention by scholars and the media, especially since the terrorist events of September 11, 2001 directed at the United States (el-Aswad 2013), the financial crisis of 2008 that resulted in a sharp downturn in the economies of financially advanced countries, the Arab Spring of 2011 that impacted the political and social well-being of people throughout the MENA region (el-Aswad 2016), and the current and ongoing wars being fought in Syria and Yemen with their profoundly negative impact on the well-being of people in the predominately Islamic countries of North Africa and West Asia.

The book, first of the Springer book series of Human Well-Being Research and Policy Making, is a timely work in that it addresses quality of life in the 21 nations of the Middle East and North Africa Region by focusing on multiple policy dimensions of well-being, including economy, health, education, technology, and social welfare among other objective as well as subjective dimensions of quality of life and well-being. The study deals with culturally, socioeconomically, demographically, and politically diverse countries that make up the MENA region. By broadly addressing the social realities that characterize the MENA countries, the research reported in this monograph seeks to delineate cross-cultural similarities and differences by extensively and comparatively focusing on six of the region's most influential countries—Egypt, Iran, Israel, Turkey, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), selected specifically to highlight the diversity found in the region.

This monograph reflects a holistic approach to the analysis of a wide range of policy frameworks that currently are in place in the MENA region. The monograph also identifies the major *drivers* of governmental and private sector approaches to well-being policy development that impact directly on the quality of life of the more than 381 million people living in the region—approximately 6% of the world's total population. The approach to policy development analysis adopted in this monograph is intended to both advance our understanding of the nature of well-being policy development under the conditions of the considerable political turbulence that exists in the region and, at the same time, suggests with broad brush strokes the

dimensions of a more coherent policy framework designed to enhance the quality of life of the people that are living in a defined geographic area and are loosely joined together through a shared faith—in this case, predominately Islam and its teachings (Estes and Tiliouine 2016; Tiliouine and Estes 2016).

Further, the policy analysis approach adopted in the monograph assigns priority to the enhanced well-being of people and their development as the central focus of policy development in the region and its neighbors more broadly. Thus, and as viewed from the author's perspective,

> At the center of well-being is a deep sense of peace, personal satisfaction, and happiness within ourselves and in our relationships with others. All four of these states of being—peace, personal satisfaction, happiness, and well-being—are outcomes achieved through a combination of personal reflection and interpersonal exchanges. They also are associated with the often-complex interplay of the social, political, economic, religious, ideological, and other forces that surround us (Estes 2017: 3).

This monograph demonstrates the special appeal and significance of such interrelated topics as quality of life, well-being, and policy issues.

## About the Book

The book contains six chapters: Chap. 1, *Introduction* and Chap. 2, *Methodology* present the main approach, which is to address well-being and policy issues from multiple lenses. Chapter 3, *Historical Background*, delineates briefly and in broad terms the successes, challenges, quality of life, and overall human development experienced by the MENA region from ancient to present times. This chapter provides a rationale for identifying 21 countries as comprising the MENA region as well as for focusing on 6 selected countries, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Tunisia, Turkey, and the UAE, for the purpose of extensive comparative inquiries. In addition, the chapter provides an account of the region's core geographic, demographic, and political features as well as its overall human development achievements, particularly in the domains of economy, health, and education. Other key characteristics of the MENA region in terms of culture, religion, ideology, minority relationships, technological developments, and militarization are provided. Within this historical context, the chapter addresses external and internal factors along with religious and ideological orientations impacting the quality of life in the MENA region.

Chapter 4, *Indicators of Quality Of Life and Well-Being in the MENA Region: A Comparative Analysis*, focuses on the quality of life and well-being issues in the selected MENA countries (Egypt, Iran, Israel, Tunisia, Turkey, and the UAE). This chapter applies multiple objective and subjective indicators to assess multiple dimensions of well-being including health, education, economy, work force, communication, technology, human rights, happiness, religious freedom, tolerance, political terror, corruption, and freedom of expression, to mention a few. This chapter presents a comparative analysis focusing on indicators of equity and

inequality in differing domains of human development and well-being or ill-being. In addition, the chapter concludes that despite the variations in quality of life across the MENA region, there is a cross-cultural similarity or a common pattern of well-being related mainly to the progress made in the multiple dimensions of people's lives. In brief, although indicators of freedom of expression, religious tolerance, and happiness are still low in the MENA countries, they have achieved remarkable progress in overall human development, particularly in the domains of health care, education, economy, and technology.

Chapter 5, *Key Drivers of Well-being and Policy Issues in the MENA Region*, investigates the staging of drivers of well-being and social–public policies in the MENA region. The essential thesis or objective of this inquiry is to show to what extent the drivers, indicators, and outcomes of well-being help the policy makers generate sociocultural plans and public policies aimed at improving the quality of life of people living in the MENA region. This study provides an assessment of the relative role of economic and noneconomic drivers such as health, education, economy, demography, political stability, security, technology, and culture in shaping policy priorities and the policy options available to the MENA region. The chapter addresses the most critical challenging factors hindering social–public policies from improving the quality of life in the MENA region. This research underscores that, although the ordinary people in the MENA region work diligently to improve their standards of living, the major challenges facing them relate mostly to incapacitated governments and inept political systems. The chapter, however, proposes that a better understanding of the drivers and determinants of well-being in the MENA region will provide relevant considerations concerning policy issues in that region.

Chapter 6, *Conclusion*s, provides the most important findings of the research and recommendations to authorities and policy makers interested in the promotion of well-being and quality of life in the MENA countries. Put simply, this chapter accentuates the fact that well-being research can help policy makers target public services in effective manners and guide national and regional authorities in implementing social policies adequately and productively toward advancing people's lives.

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With appreciation,
el-Sayed el-Aswad

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**Prof. el-Sayed el-Aswad, Ph.D.** received his doctorate in anthropology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He has taught at Wayne State University (USA), Tanta University (Egypt), Bahrain University, and United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). He achieved the CHSS-UAEU Award for excellence in scientific research publication for the 2013–2014 academic year. He served as Chairperson of the Sociology Departments at both the UAEU and Tanta University as well as the Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Horizons in Humanities and Social Sciences: An International Refereed Journal* (UAEU). He has published widely in both Arabic and English and is the author of *Muslim Worldviews and Everyday Lives* (AltaMira Press, 2012), *Religion and Folk Cosmology: Scenarios of the Visible and Invisible in Rural Egypt* (Praeger Press, 2002; translated into Arabic in 2005) and *The Folk House: An Anthropological Study of Folk Architecture and Traditional Culture of the Emirates Society* (*al-Bait al-Sha'bi*) (UAE University Press, 1996).

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| DIAC | Dubai International Academic City |
| DKV | Dubai Knowledge Village |
| FGH | Financing Global Health |
| FH | Freedom House |
| GCC | Gulf Co-operation Council |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| GFP | Global Firepower Index |
| GMI | Global Militarization Index |
| HAAD | Health Authority Abu Dhabi |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IHME | Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation |
| ILO | International Labor Organization |
| ILS | Internet Live Stats |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IT | Information technology |
| IWS | Internet World Stats |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OPEC | Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries |
| PPP | Purchasing Power Parity; Public–Private Partnership |
| SDGs | United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals |
| SGI | Sustainable Governance Indicators |
| SPI | Social Progress Index |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDAF | United Nations Development Assistance Framework |
| UNDP | United Nation Development Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |

| | |
|---|---|
| UNRISD | United Nations Research Institute for Social |
| WB | World Bank |
| WDA | World Data Atlas |
| WEF | World Economic Forum |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organization |