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Examining The Impact of Visa Regime Policies on International Travel Decisions of Egyptian Outbound Tourists

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Abstract

Visa regime policies are continuously changing worldwide to mirror the fluctuating political and commercial relations between different countries. Some countries impose substantial visa restrictions on developing countries. Other countries enhance visa facilitation to increase tourist flows from certain countries. These varying visa regimes can have important consequences in policy terms for tourism management. Some scholars in fact consider visas as a competitive advantage or disadvantage a destination can have in comparison with its competitors. While general opinion agrees that visa restrictions reduce the flow of tourists, it remains an empirical question to evaluate the actual impact. This paper examines the impact of the current visa regime policies of certain countries on the travel decisions of Egyptian outbound tourists. The research attempts to understand how visa restrictions or facilitation can impact the travel decision of international Egyptian tourists. Data was collected through a field survey conducted among Egyptian outbound tourists to realize the

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aim of the research. The data from the survey was analyzed statistically using multiple regression analysis, analysis of variances tests and other statistical tests. Results revealed the direct impact of visa policies on travel decisions and future travel intentions of Egyptian outbound tourists.

Keywords
Visa policies, visa restrictions, visa facilitation, Egyptian outbound tourists, travel decisions.

Introduction
A visa is an endorsement, usually in the form of a certificate or a stamp in a visitor's travel document, which shows that the visitor is allowed to enter the country of destination for a specific length of time and for specific activities (African Development Bank Group, 2021). Therefore, visas are considered to be authorization methods or entry permits used by countries to regulate the potential access of non-nationals to their territory (Recchi et al., 2021). Some of the earliest known travel visas originated in France by the French king Louis XIV who used to issue a document permitting a "pass par tout" over international borders for his court favorites (Lieberman and Lautenberg, 1991). However, visas were not strictly reinforced until after World War II, when border security became a vital issue for many countries (Rizzi, 2014).

Today's visa policies are created with three principal objectives in mind: border security (Bianchi, 2006), minimizing illegal migration (UNWTO, 2019; OECD, 2020) and reciprocity (Lieberman and Lautenberg, 1991). Reciprocity reflects bilateral country relations, where one country may deny or require full visas for citizens of

another country in response to similar policies by another country (Rizzi, 2014). Reciprocity used in the formulation of visa policies generally varies according to the fluctuation in international relations.

At present, visa procedures vary greatly; some countries are visa-free, other countries have electronic visas or e-visas that save the traveler's money, time & procedures. E-visa refers to an electronic visa that can be obtained before the visitor's departure from an official platform online (African Development Bank Group, 2021). Further countries still adopt more traditional visa procedures, that require the countries' consulates and embassies to issue the visa. Even embassy visas vary in their process from simple paperwork, procedures, and time to complicated requirements, longer processing time and higher chances of visa denial.

For a country to augment the revenues from the tourism industry, it is important to question how visa policies may affect the tourists' travel decision. Some of the important issues that need to be studied in this context are; how do excessively restrictive and time-consuming policies influence the travel decision to a certain destination; Do restrictive visa policies affect revisitation tendency? Does visa facilitation affect the travelers' destination choice?

In this context, the importance of this study lies in the attempt to better understand the impact of visa regime policies on international travel decisions of Egyptian outbound tourists. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of the various visa regime policies on the travel decisions of Egyptian outbound tourists. The research attempts to understand how visa restrictions or facilitation can impact the travel decision of international Egyptian tourists in terms of destination choice & repeat visitation.

Moreover, the research attempts to study the variance in visa facilitation and restriction between some popular destinations among Egyptian outbound tourists and how this might affect their travel decisions.

This study is divided into four sections. Section one is the literature review, while section two presents the methodology of the empirical study. Section three features the results and discussion of the empirical study. Finally, section four provides the conclusion and implications of this research.

Literature Review

In order to enter foreign countries, travelers currently need passports or other documents, which only countries have the authority to issue, in addition to a valid visa depending on the destination they want to travel to. The modern system of passports and visa restrictions has gradually evolved over time. The comprehensive system as we know it is inseparably connected to the evolution of the modern nation-state (Anderson, 2000).

The issue of tourist visa policies is considered one of the many political decisions that directly or indirectly impact the tourism sector (Bangwayo-Skeete & Skeete, 2017). Every country faces the dilemma between facilitating the cross-border flow of people for its own economic and political benefit on the one hand and monitoring, controlling, and limiting that same flow for its perceived security interest (Neumayer, 2005).

Visa restrictions are the primary instrument in international law to control mobility, immigration and border security through pre-selecting or preventing   travelers before they initiate mobility from their country of origin. Visas allow

countries to anticipate and assess potential entries. This assessment and control of entries is usually done remotely through the country's existing consulates in different countries in order to regulate international mobility in advance and far away from its territory (Recchi et al., 2021). Such a remote control of international mobility through visas is echoed by imposing visa checks on air carriers before embarkation (Zolberg, 2006). However, in recent years, front-end visa application processes are frequently outsourced by some countries to commercial associates in an attempt to lighten the burden of extensive consular activities (Bolt, 2020). Artal-Tur et al. (2016) have examined the impact of visa restrictions on international tourist flows using panel data and have concluded that visa restrictions have a remarkable impact on the flows of international travelers. IOM (2020) has examined the substantial economic impact of lost travelers due to the current restrictions of Schengen visa practices. In general, restrictive visa policies and procedures may impact traveler destination perception and choice and discourage genuine tourism revenue as a result (Rizzi, 2014).

Visa facilitation, on the other hand, includes any activities that would enhance the processing of visa applications, as well as policies that would reduce the amount of paperwork required, visa fees and face-to-face interviews. It is important to consider the benefits resulting from visa facilitation. First, visa facilitation can be used to increase tourism numbers and revenues. Moreover, visa facilitation through the use of available technology, visa waivers and a reduced strain on the overall immigration resources, provides another significant benefit of visa facilitation (Rizzi, 2014). This is already taking place in many

countries which implemented visa facilitation policies including visa waivers and e-visas leading to increases in tourist flows. One example for that is Indonesia which introduced a 30-day visa waiver for 169 countries (Pujiharini and Ichihashi, 2016; Adinegara, 2018). India also introduced e-visa for over 40 countries to replace its visa on arrival along with lower fees in 2014 (WTTC, 2019). Zimbabwe also created a visa waiver for many countries (Zengeni & Zengeni, 2012). Turkey has also introduced e-visa in 2013 to replace its Visa on Arrival and extend validity & country coverage with lower fees (Karaman, 2016; WTTC, 2019) leading to increased tourist flows.

Current visa policies worldwide reflect great variances in terms of the complexity of the visa process ranging from visa waiver policies (where you can enter a country with no visa), to e-visas, to traditional visas with or without embassy visits. Visa policies also fluctuate in visa costs ranging from free visas to visas costing hundreds of dollars per traveler. Another wide variance is also detected in terms of visa approval time, ranging from instant visas with no waiting time as in some of the e-visas, to a waiting time of a few weeks or even months. The effect of this fluctuation in visa regimes worldwide has recently been a focus of many related research areas.

Most of the existing empirical research on visa regimes examine the historical evolution of visas, the configurations, determinants and consequences of visa requirements (Neumayer, 2010, Hobolth, 2014; Lawson and Roychoudhury, 2016; Laube and Heidler, 2016; Czaika et al., 2018). A smaller number of empirical studies have particularly focused on 'visa waivers' – that is, the

automatic concession of entry permits to citizens of other states as a consequence of international agreements (Zengeni & Zengeni, 2012; Brabandt & Mau 2013; Gülzau et al., 2016, Adinegara, 2018). Mau et al. (2015) collected systematic information on visa waivers worldwide between 1969 and 2010. They found that the percentage of visa waivers increased globally over four decades, from an average of 24 to 32 destinations per passport. The study also revealed which countries are receiving visa waivers. The number of countries that citizens from OECD countries could cross freely grew significantly, while it changed only marginally for citizens of non-OECD countries. Particularly, visa-free travel possibilities contracted for citizens of African countries which mirrors a polarized world in terms of opportunities for international mobility (Mau et al., 2015; African Development Bank Group, 2021). However, Czaika et al. (2018) argued that the emergence of regional organizations like the EU, ECOWAS and ASEAN, as well as international political alliances have found an echo in visa lifting as a symbol and commitment to further exchanges and proximity between countries. Czaika et al.'s (2018) yearly analysis also highlights that visa requirements can become stricter under different pressures: unwanted waves of asylum-seeking, caution for investments from certain countries, or revenge against opponents in international relations. They classify bilateral visa dynamics into eight possible combinations: "mutual gratification, bilateral opening, unilateral opening, negative turnaround, positive turnaround, unilateral closing, mutual retaliation" (Czaika et al., 2018, p.8).

 Apart from visa waivers, even when visas are not lifted, access to visas can range between more or less difficult,

leveraging additional aspects. Countries may impose some restrictions on granting visas on many levels: the time needed to issue them, the primary conditions for applicants, the paperwork needed, the limits on the duration of visits, the cost of visa applications and others (Recchi et al., 2021). Such conditions are meant not only to screen visitors, but even more essentially to discourage the less wanted potential travelers.

Despite its relevance, the impact of visa restriction and facilitation on traveler's destination choice and travel decisions has not been profoundly examined in literature so far. Only a few studies reviewed the impact of visa policies on destination perception (Rizzi, 2014) and destination choice by seniors (Enemuo & Dim-Jacob, 2018). Therefore, the current research paper attempts to fill the gap in literature related to visa's impacts on travel decisions with a special emphasis on Egyptian outbound travelers. To the knowledge of the researcher, the impact of visa policies on travel decisions of Egyptian travelers has not been tackled before. Therefore, the empirical study in the following sections focuses on this subject matter.

Methodology

The objective of the empirical study is to test the research hypotheses which were articulated as follows; *H1*: There is a significant relationship between tourist visa procedures and Egyptian outbound tourists' destination choice. *H2*: Tourist visa facilitation/ restriction affect Egyptian outbound tourists repeat visitation to certain destinations. *H3*: There is a significant difference in the degree of visa

procedure facilitation between popular destinations for Egyptian outbound tourists.

In order to fulfill the research objectives and test the research hypotheses, a quantitative approach was employed. A questionnaire was chosen as the instrument for data collection within the research case study. Throughout December 2021 and January 2022, an online survey was directed to Egyptian outbound tourists through special interest groups and pages on social media networks. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section included the respondents profile questions, in addition to questions about their travel patterns; frequency of travelling abroad; how early they start preparing for their trip and if they apply for the visa themselves or through travel agencies. The second section comprised questions related to the variables of the study in terms of various visa procedures and their impact on destination choice and repeat visitation. The third section contained an assessment of the visa procedures related to the respondent's last visited country.

A total of 429 questionnaires were collected. Results were tabulated and analyzed statistically. In this context, travel decision was recognized as the dependent variable, while a number of independent variables related to visa procedures were identified, namely; cost of visa, application time, visa approval time, required documents, chances of visa denial and embassy visit. The same independent variables were also tested against the other dependent variable of the study which is repeat visitation. In order to statistically test the relationship between the two sets of dependent variables and the independent variables, a multiple regression analysis was performed. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA

Test) was also carried out in order to examine the appropriateness of the multiple regression model used. Other descriptive statistics were also utilized. Additionally, ANOVA single factor test was performed to indicate the variances in visa procedures among the popular outbound destinations for Egyptian travelers.

Results & Discussion

A total of 429 questionnaires were collected, forming the sample of Egyptian outbound tourists. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the survey respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Survey Sample

Demographic Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	115	27
Female	314	73
Age 18-24	48	11
25-34	50	12
35-44	134	31
45-54	132	31
55-64	33	8
65 & above	32	7

Respondents were first asked general questions about their outbound travel patterns. Concerning the frequency of travelling abroad, (54%) of the sample indicated they travel abroad every 2-3 years, while (30%) of the sample mentioned that they travel once per year, the remaining (16%) indicated that they travel abroad more than two times

per year. When asked about how early they start preparing for their trip, the majority (47%) indicated they start preparing 2 to 4 months ahead, (28%) said they started 5 to 6 months ahead, (15%) mentioned they start one month or less, while (10%) specified they start preparing one year ahead. These data are to a certain extent indicative of lengthy visa procedures for Egyptian citizens by many countries.

Respondents were also asked how they usually apply for a visa, (61%) said they apply for the visa themselves, while (39%) mentioned they apply for a visa through a travel agency or other visa service companies. This reveals that the majority of Egyptian travelers go through all visa procedures on their own, which makes them able to evaluate various visa procedures in detail. Respondents were asked to evaluate the difficulty of various visa procedures from their point of view on a scale from one to 10 (where 1 one indicates an easy procedure while 10 indicates a difficult or challenging procedure). The results of the mean scores and standard deviation for difficulty of visa procedures is tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Scores & Standard Deviation for difficulty of Visa Procedures

Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Visa approval time	6.695	2.901	1
Chances of visa denial	6.685	2.932	2
Required documents	6.354	2.969	3
Embassy visit	5.818	2.818	4
Application time	5.702	3.132	5

Cost of the visa	5.273	3.051	6

The results in table two indicate that some visa procedures are being regarded as more difficult or restrictive than others. Visa approval time had the first rank with a mean score of (6.695), followed by the chances of visa denial (6.685). Required documents with a mean score of (6.354) came in the third rank, while the embassy visit (5.818) came in the fourth rank and application time came on the fifth rank with a mean score of (5.702). The last procedure was the cost of the visa with a mean score of (5.273). This gives an indicator that visa approval time and chances of visa denial represent the most challenging factors if compared to other visa procedures.

In order to test the first research hypothesis concerning the relationship between the first dependent variable (travel decision) and the independent variables (visa approval time, chances of visa denial, required documents, embassy visit, application time and cost of visa), a multiple regression analysis was performed. Results of the multiple regression analysis are indicated in table three.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis (for the first dependent variable)

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	2.458	0.153	16.120	0.000	2.159	2.758
Cost of the Visa	0.057	0.022	2.613	**0.009**	0.014	0.100
Application Time	-0.010	0.025	-0.398	0.691	-0.060	0.040

Visa Approval Time	0.088	0.028	3.169	**0.002**	0.033	0.142
Required documents	0.028	0.027	1.029	0.304	- 0.025	0.081
Chances of Visa Denial	0.020	0.024	0.865	0.387	- 0.026	0.067
Embassy Visit	0.045	0.023	1.913	0.053	- 0.001	0.091

In table three, the independent variables are shown with their standard errors and statistical significance. The p-values of the cost of visa and visa approval time (p-value less than 0.05) show that these two variables are statistically significant in relationship to the dependent variable which is travel decision (destination choice). This indicates that those two variables can have an impact on the travel decision of Egyptian outbound tourists.

The researchers conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA Test) in order to examine the appropriateness of the multiple regression model used and to test whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data or not. ANOVA Results are summarized in table four.

Table 4: ANOVA Results

	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	6.000	118.664	19.777	17.165	0.000
Residual	422.000	486.222	1.152		

Total	428.000	604.886			

ANOVA results indicate that the statistically significant independent variables predict the dependent variable as F= 17.165, p < 0.0005 which confirms that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

In order to test the second hypothesis regarding the effect of visa procedures on repeat visitation, another multiple regression analysis was carried out for the second dependent variable (repeat visitation) with the same independent variables representing visa procedures. The result of the test is summarized in table five.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis (for the second dependent variable)

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	2.610	0.161	16.255	0.000	2.294	2.925
Cost of the Visa	0.044	0.023	1.926	**0.050**	-0.001	0.089
Application Time	-0.030	0.027	-1.120	0.263	-0.082	0.023
Visa Approval Time	0.004	0.029	0.143	0.886	-0.053	0.061
Required documents	0.056	0.028	1.964	**0.050**	0.000	0.112
Chances of Visa Denial	0.009	0.025	0.351	0.726	-0.040	0.058
Embassy Visit	0.111	0.025	4.495	**0.000**	0.063	0.160

In table five, the independent variables are shown with their standard errors and statistical significance. The p-values of the cost of visa, required documents and embassy visit (p-value equals or less than 0.05) show that these three variables are statistically significant in relationship to the second dependent variable which is repeat visitation. This indicates that those three variables can have an impact on the travel decision of Egyptian outbound tourists.

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA Test) was carried out in order to examine the appropriateness of the multiple regression model used and to test whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data or not. ANOVA Results are summarized in table six.

Table 6: ANOVA Results

	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	6.000	95.398	15.900	12.451	0.000
Residual	422.000	538.872	1.277		
Total	428.000	634.270			

ANOVA results indicate that the statistically significant independent variables predict the dependent variable as F= 12.451, p < 0.0005 which confirms that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

In order to test the third hypothesis to assess whether there is a significant difference in the degree of visa procedure facilitation between popular destinations for Egyptian outbound tourists, respondents were asked to evaluate the degree of visa facilitation for the last destination they travelled to on a scale from 1 to 10 where one indicates

very facilitated visa procedures and ten indicates very difficult/ restrictive procedures. The results for the ten most frequently visited destinations are listed below. ANOVA single factor test was later performed to indicate whether there is a significant variance in visa facilitation between the ten destinations or not.

Table 7: Degree of Visa Procedure Facilitation among
Egyptian Outbound destinations

Country	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Lebanon	12	1.333	0.778	1
UAE	51	1.686	0.836	2
Turkey	53	1.755	1.090	3
Italy	18	2.444	1.199	4
Germany	24	2.667	0.963	5
KSA	24	2.958	1.042	6
France	27	3.148	1.027	7
UK	14	3.286	1.267	8
Spain	19	3.632	0.684	9
USA	58	3.672	1.114	10

The tabulation of results in table seven reveals that Lebanon, UAE & Turkey were ranked as having the easiest visa procedures if compared to other destinations (with mean scores of 1.333, 1.686 and 1.755 respectively). This can be due to the fact that Lebanon gives a visa on arrival for Egyptians in many cases, UAE has an e-visa with a very little approval time. Turkey also has an inexpensive e-visa for age ranges below 18 and above 45. On the other hand, the UK, Spain & USA were ranked as having more

restrictive visa procedures (with mean scores of 3.286, 3.632 and 3.672 respectively). This can be due to the lengthy procedures, extensive paperwork, and costly visas.

Table 8: ANOVA (Single Factor)

Source of Variation	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Between Groups	204.781	9.000	22.753	21.874	0.000
Within Groups	301.656	290.000	1.040		
Total	506.437	299.000			

ANOVA results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in variances of the 10 groups F= 21.874, p < 0.0005 which confirms the third hypothesis that the visa procedures & facilitation is significantly different between the ten destinations under-study

Conclusion & Implications
The research revealed that certain factors such as visa cost and visa approval times were important determinants for destination choice by Egyptian outbound tourists. As for repeat visitation, factors as required documents, cost of visit and embassy visit were more influential on Egyptian outbound tourists.
There is a significant difference between the degree of visa procedure facilitation between various popular destinations for Egyptian outbound tourists. The more facilitating destinations had a low approval time, an e-visa and somewhat lower visa costs. The more restrictive

destinations in visa procedures had a traditional visa with a longer approval time and with a higher cost.

At a difficult economic time where many countries are looking to increase job creation and economic growth, visa facilitation can be an extremely effective and instant tool to secure huge economic benefits as a result of increased tourism demand, tourism spending and job creation.

With available technology and the benefits of visa facilitation: cost savings, increasing tourism revenue and creating loyalty with legitimate visitors, today's destinations need to advance and facilitate their visa policies and procedures in line with modern approaches, including e-visas and other options without compromising their border security.

Visa issuing authorities should pay attention to first time visa applicants as any undesirable outcome might affect their travel decision as well as repeat visitation. Similarly, travelers who have become regular visa applicants should be given some sort of privilege when they apply for visa, this will help to enhance repeat visitation.

Consulates of various countries should attempt to provide a guide for visa applicants when completing visa forms as this will eliminate issues such as incomplete applicant information and wrong application format which are common reasons given for visa restrictions experienced. Likewise, issuing authorities should make visa requirements and criteria public to minimize and eliminate the issue of disqualification of applicants.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), together with the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) should endeavor to create a forum where countries collaborate for discussion and implementation of

an international standard for issuing visas to potential travelers, which will significantly help to enhance inter-border travel experience and equate between developed countries and developing countries.

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