

Document #2026355

USDOS – US Department of State

2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Egypt

Executive Summary

According to its constitution, Egypt is a republic governed by an elected president and unicameral legislature. Presidential elections were held in March 2018. Challengers to the incumbent President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi pulled out ahead of the election, citing personal decisions, political pressure, legal troubles, and unfair competition; in some cases they were arrested for alleged violations of candidacy rules. Domestic and international organizations expressed concern that government limitations on association, assembly, and expression severely constrained broad participation in the political process. Domestic and international observers concluded that government authorities professionally administered parliamentary elections in 2015 in accordance with the country’s laws, while also expressing concern about restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly, association, and expression and their negative effect on the political climate surrounding the elections.

The Interior Ministry supervises law enforcement and internal security, including the Public Police, the Central Security Force (CSF), the National Security Sector (NSS), and Customs and Immigration. The Public Police are responsible for law enforcement nationwide. The CSF protects infrastructure and is responsible for crowd control. The NSS is responsible for internal security threats and counterterrorism along with other Egyptian security services. The armed forces report to the minister of defense and are responsible for external defense, but they also have a mandate to “assist” police in protecting vital infrastructure during a state of emergency. Military personnel were granted full arrest authority in 2011 but normally only use this authority during states of emergency and “periods of significant turmoil.” Defense forces operate in the Sinai as part of a broader national counterterrorism operation with general detention authority. The Border Guard Forces, under the Ministry of Defense, are responsible for border control. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

In April the country held a national referendum that approved new constitutional amendments, which among other outcomes extended President Sisi’s current term from four years to six years and allowed the president to run for a third six-year term in 2024. Domestic and international press reported multiple violations of the elections law by the government in the referendum process, including arrests of opponents. The State Council blocked all legal challenges to the referendum and amendments.

President Sisi requested that parliament approve a nationwide state of emergency (SOE) after the 2017 terrorist attack on Coptic churches. Since then, the government has requested, and parliament has renewed, SOEs with one- or two-day gaps between every two SOE periods to meet the legal requirement that SOEs may only be renewed once. In North Sinai, a partial SOE has been in effect since 2014. The government regularly renews that SOE every three months and has imposed partial curfews on parts of North Sinai.

Significant human rights issues included: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by the government or its agents and terrorist groups; forced disappearance; torture; arbitrary detention; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; political prisoners; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; the worst forms of restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including arrests or prosecutions against journalists, censorship, site blocking, and the existence of unenforced criminal libel; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, such as overly restrictive laws governing civil society organizations; restrictions on political participation; violence involving religious minorities; violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons; use of the law to arbitrarily arrest and prosecute LGBTI persons; and forced or compulsory child labor.

The government inconsistently punished or prosecuted officials who committed abuses, whether in the security services or elsewhere in government. In most cases the government did not comprehensively investigate allegations of human rights abuses, including most incidents of violence by security forces, contributing to an environment of impunity.

Attacks by terrorist organizations caused arbitrary and unlawful deprivation of life. Terrorist groups conducted deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets throughout the country, including places of worship. Authorities investigated terrorist attacks and prosecuted alleged perpetrators. Terrorists and other armed groups abducted civilians in North Sinai, some of whom they beheaded. There were incidents of societal sectarian violence against Coptic Christian Egyptians.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including incidents that occurred while making arrests or holding persons in custody or during disputes with civilians. There were also reports of civilians killed during military operations in Sinai. Impunity was a problem.

There were instances of persons tortured to death and other allegations of killings in prisons and detention centers. The government charged, prosecuted, and convicted perpetrators in some cases. A local human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported 302 unlawful killings by the government from January through June.

According to press reports, Italian authorities requested an update from the Egyptian government in August regarding the continuing joint investigation of the 2016 killing in Egypt of Italian graduate student Giulio Regeni, who was found dead with what forensic officials said were marks of torture. Italy suspected involvement by Egyptian security forces, based on reporting indicating he was detained prior to his death. At the G7 Summit in August, President Sisi claimed Egypt was continuing efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. Media reported that the new prosecutor general, Hamada El Sawy, invited Rome’s judicial authorities on October 23 to hold a meeting in Cairo to resume bilateral investigations into Regeni’s killing. On December 17, Italian prosecutors investigating Regeni’s death told an Italian parliamentary commission that Egyptian authorities made deliberate attempts to conceal how he died.

There were reports of suspects killed in unclear circumstances during or after arrest. On July 22, according to Amnesty International (AI), Hossam Hamed died following five days in solitary confinement in al-Aqrab Prison in Cairo. Hamed was serving a 25-year sentence on charges of joining a banned organization. According to an AI statement, prison guards physically assaulted him while in solitary confinement and found him dead with a swollen, wounded, and bloody face.

There were several reports of groups of suspected terrorists and other suspected criminals killed during security raids conducted by security forces. The Interior Ministry stated police officers fired at suspects only when suspects fired first. An April report by Reuters documented 465 such killings from July 2015 to December 2018. Based on interviews with family members and witnesses and analyses of photographs of those killed, rights groups and media argued there was credible information that some of these shootings may amount to extrajudicial killings, and in some cases there was evidence the suspects were in police custody prior to their deaths.

At year’s end the government had not held accountable any individual or governmental body for state violence in 2013, including the deaths of hundreds of civilians during the dispersals of the sit-ins at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo and Nahda Square in Giza.

Terrorist groups, including “Islamic State”-Sinai (formerly known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis), Muslim Brotherhood -splinter group Harakat al-Suwad Misr (HASM), Liwa al-Thawra, and Ajnad Misr, among others, conducted deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets throughout the country, including places of worship. There were no published official data on the number of victims of terrorist violence during the year. Terrorist groups claimed responsibility for killing hundreds of civilians throughout the country. As of November in Sinai alone, militant violence killed at least 22 civilians and 58 security force members, according to publicly available information. During the same period in Sinai, the government killed at least 144 terrorists in counterterrorism operations, according to public statements.

On August 4, an explosion occurred outside of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in downtown Cairo when a car transporting explosives to an unknown location collided with three or four other cars, according to media. The blast killed 22 persons and injured more than 30 according to local press reports. On August 9, the Interior Ministry stated that it killed in shootouts 17 HASM members suspected of involvement in the NCI explosion. HASM denied involvement in the explosion.

b. Disappearance

International and local human rights groups reported continuing large numbers of enforced disappearances, alleging authorities increasingly relied on this tactic to intimidate critics. One local NGO documented 336 enforced disappearances between August 2018 and August 2019 and nearly 500 since August 2019. Another local NGO documented 492 disappearances January to June. On November 22, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Omar Marwan said there was no evidence of enforced disappearances.

Authorities also detained individuals without producing arrest or search warrants. According to a local NGO, authorities detained many of these individuals in unspecified NSS offices and police stations, but they were not included in official registers. Authorities held detainees incommunicado and denied their requests to contact family members and lawyers. The length of disappearances documented by the local NGO ranged from a few days to more than 12 months, with two to six months being the most common. According to a local NGO, the organization received more than 5,600 reports of enforced disappearances since 2013, but it had only been able to document 1,856 due to resource constraints.

According to local NGOs, Ezzat Ghoneim, a human rights lawyer who worked on enforced disappearance cases for the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, appeared on February 9 for a hearing at the Cairo Criminal Court in which the judge ordered his continued pretrial detention for 45 days. Ghoneim's whereabouts in custody had been unknown since September 2018, when a court ordered Ghoneim's release on probation, but he was apparently never released. Ghoneim was originally arrested in March 2018 on charges of spreading false news and joining a terrorist group and was subsequently added to case number 441/2018, which contains cases involving at least 13 activists, journalists, and researchers facing similar charges of spreading false news and joining a terrorist group. Ghoneim remained in detention at year's end.

There were reports military authorities continued to hold civilians in secret at al-Azouly Prison inside al-Galaa Military Camp in Ismailia. Authorities did not charge the detainees with crimes or refer them to prosecutors or courts. They also denied detainees access to their lawyers and families. According to the 2019 annual report of the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), the working group was reviewing hundreds of disappearance cases. While the report noted the government's increased meetings with the working group, it expressed concern an increase in disappearances of detained individuals despite court orders for their release, as well as reports of reprisals against individuals and civil society organizations working on behalf of detained individuals.

According to a local human rights organization, Ibrahim Ezzedine, a housing rights researcher, disappeared on June 12 after he criticized the government’s policies for urban slums. On August 1, that organization filed a lawsuit against the Interior Ministry to determine his whereabouts. On November 26, he appeared before the State Security Prosecution accused of “joining a banned group” and “spreading false news.” On December 22, the State Security Prosecution renewed his detention for 15 days pending investigations.

In July the organization also filed a lawsuit against the Interior Ministry to determine the whereabouts of Mustafa al-Naggar, a former member of parliament who disappeared in September 2018 after criticizing the government on Facebook. According to local press, al-Naggar was trying to flee the country to avoid a three-year prison sentence.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution states that no torture, intimidation, coercion, or physical or moral harm shall be inflicted upon a person whose movements are restricted or whom authorities have detained or arrested. The penal code forbids torture to induce a confession from a detained or arrested suspect but does not account for mental or psychological abuse against persons whom authorities have not formally accused, or for abuse occurring for reasons other than securing a confession. The penal code also forbids all public officials or civil servants from “employing cruelty” or “causing bodily harm” under any circumstances.

Local rights organizations reported hundreds of incidents of torture throughout the year, including deaths that resulted from torture (see section 1.a.). According to domestic and international human rights organizations, police and prison guards resorted to torture to extract information from detainees, including minors. Reported techniques included beatings with fists, whips, rifle butts, and other objects; prolonged suspension by the limbs from a ceiling or door; electric shocks; sexual assault; and attacks by dogs. On March 12, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that torture was a systematic practice in the country. According to HRW and local NGOs, torture was most common in police stations and other Interior Ministry detention sites. A local NGO that tracks torture cases documented an average of 40 to 50 instances of torture per month. Government officials denied the use of torture was systematic. A 2017 UN Committee against Torture report concluded that torture was a systematic practice. Authorities stated they did not sanction these abuses and, in some cases, prosecuted individual police officers for violating the law.

Following a wave of arrests of opponents of the government that began in September (see section 2.b), media and rights organizations reported an increase in reports of detainees being subjected to torture or other abuse. For example, on October 12, security forces arrested activist Esraa Abdel Fattah; there were reports she was abused while in custody, including beatings and suspension from a ceiling. On December 22, the state security prosecutor extended Esraa Abdel Fattah’s pretrial detention for 15 days.

There were reports that prisoners detained on politically motivated charges were held in prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement. The report also stated such prisoners were subjected to physical abuse, including beatings, lack of food, humiliation, and restricted movement—sometimes for years. In response the government denied widespread use of solitary confinement.

On April 24, press reported that a Cairo Criminal Court sentenced six police officers to one to eight years in jail in connection with the June 2018 death of Ahmed Zalat due to physical abuse in custody at a police station in Hadayek al-Qobba District, east Cairo. An appeal was pending.

Local rights groups and international NGOs reported authorities sometimes subjected individuals arrested on charges related to homosexuality to forced anal examinations (see section 6).

There were reports of “virginity tests” conducted on female detainees. In July authorities reportedly conducted a “virginity test” on a 15-year-old girl who was accused of killing a man who had tried to sexually assault her (see section 6).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in prisons and detention centers were harsh and potentially life threatening due to overcrowding, physical abuse, inadequate medical care, poor infrastructure, and poor ventilation.

Physical Conditions: According to domestic and international NGO observers, prison cells were overcrowded, and prisoners lacked adequate access to medical care, proper sanitation and ventilation, food, and potable water. Inmates often relied upon outside visitors for food and other supplies or were forced to purchase those items from the prison canteen at significantly inflated prices, according to a September 2018 local NGO report. Tuberculosis was widespread. Provisions for temperature control and lighting generally were inadequate. Reports that guards abused prisoners, including juveniles, in adult facilities were common. Prison conditions for women were marginally better than those for men. Media reported that some prisoners protested conditions by going on hunger strikes. On July 31, AI stated that 130 detainees in al-Aqrab Prison went on a six-week hunger strike to protest inhuman prison conditions and the denial of legal and family visits. AI reported that authorities retaliated against the detainees by beating them, firing tasers, and imposing disciplinary measures, according to a statement issued by detainees from prison.

Authorities did not always separate juveniles from adults and sometimes held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. Rights organizations alleged the use of CSF camps as detention facilities, which violates the law regulating prisons.

The large number of arrests and the use of pretrial detention during the year exacerbated harsh conditions and overcrowding, contributing to a significant number of deaths in prisons and detention centers. During 2017 the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) reported police detention centers were at 150 percent

of maximum capacity and that prisons were at 300 percent of maximum capacity. Health care in prisons was inadequate. Local NGOs reported as of June 20 that at least 25 prisoner deaths during the year were due to possibly treatable natural causes. Human rights groups and the families of some deceased prisoners claimed that prison authorities denied prisoners access to potentially life-saving medical care and in some cases denied requests to transfer the prisoners to the hospital, leading to deaths in prison.

On June 17, former president Mohamed Morsi died of a heart attack during a court appearance. Several local and international human rights organizations claimed his death was caused by medical neglect while in prison. The spokesperson for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) raised concerns regarding Morsi's access to medical care and prolonged solitary confinement during his nearly six years of detention and called for a thorough independent inquiry into the circumstances of Morsi's death. The prosecutor general conducted an inquiry into his death and stated there was no evidence of abuse or mistreatment. In a November 8 statement, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention released a statement saying, “the prison regime in Egypt may have directly led to the death of former president Mohamed Morsi” and that they had credible evidence that thousands of other detainees “may be suffering gross violations of their human rights, many of whom may be at high risk of death.”

International NGOs alleged that journalist Hisham Gaafar's health, including his eyesight, was deteriorating because prison authorities could not provide him necessary health care. On March 27, a court ordered Gaafar's release on condition that he check in at a police station three times per week. On August 5, a court allowed him to only check in only once per week. Gaafar had been arrested in 2015 on charges including membership in the MB and illegally receiving foreign funds for his foundation.

According to media reports and local NGOs, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, former presidential candidate, a former leader in the MB, and leader of the opposition party Strong Egypt, suffered two heart attacks in July while in prison, shortly after two rights groups submitted a petition to the public prosecutor calling for urgent intervention because of his “deteriorating health condition.” On December 23, the Cairo Criminal Court renewed the detention of Aboul Fotouh for 45 days pending investigations.

There were reports authorities sometimes segregated prisoners accused of crimes related to political or security issues from common criminals and subjected them to verbal or physical abuse and punitive solitary confinement. On January 9, the retrial of imprisoned activist Ahmed Douma resulted in a 15-year prison sentence. Douma appealed the verdict; the Court of Cassation has yet to set a hearing date. Since his arrest in 2015, authorities have held Douma in solitary confinement for more than 1,500 days.

The law authorizes prison officials to use force against prisoners who resist orders.

Administration: The penal code provides for reasonable access to prisoners. According to NGO observers and relatives, the government sometimes prevented visitors’ access to detainees. Rights groups also claimed that authorities administered some court hearings and trials inside state security premises not accessible to family or legal counsel and denied detainees access to legal counsel during times of heightened security, such as during the country’s hosting of the Africa Cup in July. According to an August 9 HRW report, Khaled Hassan, a prisoner who HRW reported in 2018 had been tortured and raped while in custody, attempted suicide on July 29 after authorities repeatedly denied him visits from his brother. Prisoners could request investigation of alleged inhuman conditions. NGO observers claimed, however, that prisoners sometimes were reluctant to do so for fear of retribution from prison officials. The government did not investigate most of these allegations. AI reported that al-Aqrab prison officials tortured detainees in retaliation for their hunger strike over prison conditions. As required by law, the public prosecutor inspected prisons and detention centers.

Independent Monitoring: The government did not permit visits by nongovernmental observers, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, but it did permit some visits by the National Council for Women (NCW) to a prison in Lower Egypt and by parliament’s Committee on Human Rights to prisons and detention centers in Lower Egypt, Alexandria, and Minya. The NCHR and parliament’s Committee on Human Rights visited prisons during the year. The law formally recognizes the NCHR’s role in monitoring prisons, specifying that visits require notifying the prosecutor general in advance. In November the Interior Ministry and SIS took journalists and public figures on a tour of Tora and Borg al-Arab prisons. Human rights activists claimed the tours were staged and not realistic of actual prison conditions. On December 16, the Arab Organization for Human Rights conducted an inspection tour of El-Marg General Prison. Authorities did not permit any other human rights organizations to conduct prison visits.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court but reported incidents of arbitrary arrests and detentions remained frequent, according to local and international rights groups.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

For persons other than those apprehended in the process of committing a crime, the law requires that police act on the basis of a court-issued warrant issued either under the penal code or the code of military justice, but there were numerous reports of arrests without a warrant.

Ordinary criminal courts and misdemeanor courts hear cases brought by the prosecutor general. Arrests under the penal code occurred openly and with warrants issued by a public prosecutor or judge. There was a functioning bail system, although some defendants claimed judges imposed unreasonably high bail.

Criminal defendants have the right to counsel promptly after arrest, and usually, but not always, authorities allowed access to family members. The court is obliged to provide a lawyer to indigent defendants. Nevertheless, defendants often faced administrative and, in some cases, political obstacles and could not secure regular access to lawyers or family visits. A prosecutor may order four days of preventative detention for individuals suspected of committing misdemeanors and 15 days for individuals suspected of committing felonies. The period of preventative detention is subject to renewal by the prosecutor for up to 60 days, in cases of both misdemeanors and felonies. On the 61st day, the prosecutor must submit a case to a relevant judge who may release the accused person or renew the detention in increments of 15 days (but no longer than 45 days at a time).

Detention may extend from the stage of initial investigation through all stages of criminal judicial proceedings. Except in cases involving the death penalty or life imprisonment, the combined periods of prosecutor and court-ordered detentions may not exceed six months in cases of misdemeanors and 18 months in cases of felonies. After the detention reaches its legal limit without a conviction, authorities must release the accused person immediately. Legal experts offered conflicting interpretations of the law in cases in which convictions carry the death penalty or life imprisonment, with some arguing there is no time limit to court-ordered renewals of detention in such cases.

Charges involving the death penalty or life imprisonment sometimes could apply to cases related to demonstrations, such as blocking roads or demonstrating outside government buildings; as a result, authorities might hold some appellants charged with nonviolent crimes indefinitely.

Arbitrary Arrest: The constitution prohibits arrest, search, or detention without a judicial warrant, except for those caught in the act of a crime. There were frequent reports of arbitrary arrest and detention. Local activists and rights groups stated that hundreds of arrests did not comply with due-process laws. For example, authorities did not charge the detainees with crimes or refer them to prosecutors and denied access to their lawyers and families (see section 1.b.).

After the September 20 street protests (see section 2.b.), a local human rights NGO stated that authorities arbitrarily arrested illiterate individuals charged with “misusing social media” and “disseminating false news,” as well as citizens of Sudan, Jordan, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and other nations who were not participating in the protests. After about one week, authorities released and deported the detained foreign nationals. According to international media, police arrested Khaled Dawoud, a journalist and former head of the liberal al-Doustour Party, on September 25. On December 22, the State Security Prosecution ordered a renewal of Dawoud’s pretrial detention pending investigations on charges of “joining a banned group” and “spreading false news.”

On May 31, authorities released political activist Sameh Saudi, who security forces arrested in August 2018. Authorities rearrested Saudi on September 27 and renewed his pretrial detention on December 11. Between January 25 and February 11, media

reported that several detainees, including Shady al-Ghazaly Harb, went on a hunger strike to mark the eighth anniversary of the January 25 revolution and protest their unjust detention.

As of year’s end, U.S. citizen Mustafa Kassem remained arbitrarily detained for the sixth straight year.

Pretrial Detention: The government did not provide figures on the total number of pretrial detainees. Rights groups and the quasi-governmental NCHR alleged excessive use of pretrial detention and preventative detention during trials for nonviolent crimes. Authorities sometimes held pretrial detainees in the same facilities as convicted prisoners. Large backlogs in the criminal courts contributed to protracted periods of pretrial detention. Estimates of the number of pretrial and preventive detainees were unreliable. According to a 2016 report by a local NGO, almost 1,500 persons in four governorates remained in detention without bail for more than two years without a conviction and at various stages in the legal process. In 2018 the head of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights said that 25 to 30 thousand persons remained in pretrial detention or detention without a final verdict.

On March 4, a Cairo Criminal Court released photojournalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid (known as Shawkan) following more than five years of detention and a September 2018 sentence to five years’ imprisonment, on condition that he spend 12 hours per day (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.) for the next five years at a police station. Authorities had arrested him in 2013 while he was taking pictures during the security forces’ dispersal of the MB sit-in at Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo. Authorities charged Shawkan and 739 other defendants with belonging to the MB, possessing firearms, and murder. The court sentenced 75 defendants to death, 47 to life in prison, 215 to 15 years in prison, 23 to 10 years, and 374 to five years’ imprisonment. These sentences were pending appeals to the Court of Cassation.

Detainee’s Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: According to the constitution, detainees have the right to challenge the legality of their detention before a court, which must decide within one week if the detention is lawful or otherwise immediately release the detainee. In practice authorities deprived some individuals of this right, according to international and local human rights groups.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. Individual courts sometimes appeared to lack impartiality and to arrive at outcomes that were politically motivated or without individual findings of guilt. The government generally respected court orders. A July 10 report by AI claimed that in at least five cases, the State Security Prosecution bypassed court orders to release detainees by arresting them again in a new case and in some instances on the same charges. On July 3, a court ordered the release of Ola al-Qaradawi, whom authorities had arrested with her husband Hosam Khalaf in 2017. Prior to her release, authorities rearrested her on July 4 in case number 800/2019 while still in custody on charges which included communicating with and facilitating support

for a terrorist group while in jail. Al-Qaradawi went on a hunger strike to protest her renewed detention in solitary confinement in Cairo. She had limited access to a lawyer and had not been formally charged at year's end. On July 20, a court ordered the release of Khalaf, al-Qaradawi's husband, with the requirement that he check in at a police station twice a week; however, he remained in police custody as of year's end on unknown charges. On December 23, a Cairo Criminal Court renewed the detention of Ola al-Qaradawi for 45 days pending additional investigations. According to the family's statements to media and international NGOs, authorities investigated the couple for belonging to the MB and spreading information aimed at distorting Egypt's image.

According to media reports, authorities rearrested Somaya Nasaf, Egypt's “ambassador of the poor,” in May after she had signed her release papers. Reports stated authorities initially arrested Nasaf in November 2018 without providing notice of her whereabouts for 27 days.

Judicial and executive review is available to individuals sentenced to the death penalty.

Some trials involving hundreds of defendants continued, particularly in cases involving demonstrators sympathetic to former president Morsi and the MB in 2013 and 2014.

On March 27, Cairo Criminal Court sentenced 120 defendants to one year in prison and seven others to three years while placing them under police surveillance for one year, on charges of protesting, attempted murder, intentional destruction of public property, and public disturbance. The arrests came after a brief gathering by a few hundred protesters in front of the Press Syndicate marking the third anniversary of the 2014 revolution and was dispersed by riot police.

The law imposes penalties on individuals designated by a court as terrorists, even without criminal convictions. The effects of a designation include a travel ban, asset freeze, loss of political rights, and passport cancellation. The court designation may be appealed directly to the country's highest appeals court, but HRW reported that designated individuals were not allowed to appeal the designation, and authorities had not informed most individuals of their impending designation before the court ruled. On March 16, the Court of Cassation upheld a court verdict to include 169 defendants on the terrorist list for five years. According to media, the prosecution charged the defendants with “plotting to harm the Egyptian economy” by criticizing government economic policies and spreading rumors of state corruption.

The constitution states: “Citizens may not stand trial before military courts except for crimes that represent an assault against military facilities, military barracks, facilities protected by the military, designated military or border zones; military equipment, vehicles, weapons, ammunition, documents, military secrets, public funds or military factories; crimes related to conscription; or crimes that represent an assault against its officers or personnel because of the performance of their duties.” The April constitutional amendments changed the phrase “a direct assault against military facilities” to “an assault.”

Authorities used military courts to try civilians accused of threatening national security. According to a 2016 HRW report, military courts had tried at least 7,400 civilians since the issuance of a 2014 decree ordering the military to “assist” police in securing “vital public facilities.” Public access to information concerning military trials was limited. Military trials were difficult to monitor because media were usually subjected to restraint orders. Rights groups and lawyers stated defense attorneys in military trials had difficulty gaining access to their clients and to documentation related to the cases.

Military courts sentenced actor Amr Waked in absentia to eight years in prison in two cases on charges of disseminating false news and insulting state institutions. In March a military appeals court upheld a five-year sentence against Hesham Genena, the former head of the Egyptian Central Auditing Commission, for disseminating false news about the military.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary often failed to uphold this right.

The law presumes defendants are innocent, and authorities usually inform them promptly and in detail of charges against them. Defendants have the right to be present at their trials. Attendance is mandatory for individuals charged with felonies and optional for those charged with misdemeanors. Civilian criminal and misdemeanor trials usually are public. Defendants have the right to consult an attorney, and the government is responsible for providing counsel if the defendant cannot afford a lawyer. Defendants have the right to free interpretation from the moment charged through all appeals. The court assigns an interpreter. The law allows defendants to question witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. The constitution provides for the right of an accused person to remain silent in his own trial. Defendants have the right of appeal up to the Court of Cassation. Judges must seek the nonbinding review of the grand mufti on all death sentences, and the president must confirm all such sentences.

There were reports of authorities arresting lawyers when they appeared to represent their clients at judicial proceedings or detention facilities. For example, on September 22, police arrested lawyer Mahienour al-Massry outside the Supreme State Security Prosecution headquarters in Cairo when she made inquiries on behalf of detained demonstrators. On December 17, the Supreme State Security Prosecution renewed her pretrial detention for 15 days.

In February authorities executed 15 men convicted of killing various government officials.

The OHCHR, AI, and more than 10 local civil society organizations stated the trials leading to the executions lacked due process and that judges ignored confessions obtained under torture and without counsel present.

The law permits individual members of the public to file charges with the prosecutor general, who is charged with deciding whether the evidence justifies referring the charges for a trial. Observers reported, however, that, due to unclear evidentiary standards, the Prosecutor General's Office investigates and refers for trial the overwhelming majority of such cases, regardless of the strength of the evidence. Prosecutors in Giza decided on August 1 to close without further action their investigation of actress Rania Youssef, which had resulted from private lawyers filing charges claiming she committed an “obscene” act by wearing a see-through dress at the 2018 Cairo International Film Festival in November 2018.

After a prime ministerial decree in 2017, authorities have referred certain economic and security crimes, including violations of protest laws, to state security courts instead of the public prosecutor. State security courts may have two military judges appointed to sit alongside three civilian judges and verdicts of state security courts can only be appealed on points of law rather than the facts of the case as in a civilian court.

According to local news outlets, an emergency state security court on March 31 sentenced 25 members of a campaign that opposed President Sisi's 2018 presidential election, 21 of them to five years in prison and five to 15 years. Hossam Eddin al-Shazli, one of the defendants sentenced to five years in prison, was the founder of the Egyptian Council for Change, which describes itself as against military rule in Egypt.

Military courts are not open to the public. Defendants in military courts nominally enjoyed the same fair trial assurances, but the military judiciary has wide discretion to curtail these rights in the name of public security. Military courts often tried defendants in a matter of hours, frequently in groups, and sometimes without access to an attorney, leading lawyers and NGOs to assert they did not meet basic standards of due process. Consequently, the quick rulings by military courts sometimes prevented defendants from exercising their rights. Defendants in military courts have the right to consult an attorney, but sometimes authorities denied them timely access to counsel. According to rights groups, authorities permitted defendants in military trials visits from their attorneys only once every six months, in contrast with the civilian court system, where authorities allowed defendants in detention attorney visits every 15 days.

The Military Judiciary Law governing the military court system grants defendants in the military court system the right to appeal up to the Supreme Military Court of Appeals. The president must certify sentences by military courts.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of political prisoners and detainees, although verifiable estimates of their total number were not available. The government claimed there were no political prisoners and that all persons in detention had been or were in the process of being charged with a crime. Human rights groups and international observers maintained the government detained or imprisoned as few as 20,000 and as many as 60,000 persons solely or chiefly because of their political beliefs.

Amnesty: The government periodically issued pardons of prisoners, sometimes including individuals that human rights organizations considered to be politically motivated. On May 17, President Sisi pardoned 560 prisoners including prominent journalist Abdel Halim Qandil, sentenced in 2017 to a three-year prison term for “insulting the judiciary,” and eight women sentenced in 2018 to several years in prison for belonging to an outlawed group and staging antigovernment protests in Damietta Province. Pursuant to a presidential pardon, authorities released journalist Asmaa Zeidan from al-Haram Police Station on August 19 after she spent more than a year in prison following a February 2018 sentence of five years in prison for “insulting the president” and “possessing narcotics.”

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals had access to civil courts for lawsuits relating to human rights violations and filed such lawsuits during the year. Nonetheless, courts often dismissed cases or acquitted defendants for lack of evidence or conflicting witness testimonies. Individuals and organizations can appeal adverse domestic decisions to the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

Property Restitution

Since the launching of Operation Sinai 2018 in February 2018, the government has intensified its efforts to establish a buffer zone in North Sinai Governorate to interdict weapons smuggling and incursions to and from the Gaza Strip. The government also created a buffer zone around the Arish Airport, south of al-Arish.

In 2018, based on interviews and analysis of satellite imagery, human rights organizations reported the government destroyed approximately 3,600 homes and commercial buildings and hundreds of acres of farmland in North Sinai. In contrast to such reports, according to statements to media, the government stated it demolished 3,272 residential, commercial, administrative, and community buildings between mid-2013 and 2016. Although the government stated it would appropriately compensate all families whose homes it destroyed, rights groups stated that the security forces continued to evict residents of the buffer zone without adequate compensation for loss of property. Moreover, the government did not compensate residents for agricultural land. Human rights organizations, including HRW, reported that security forces punitively demolished the homes of suspected terrorists, dissidents and their families.

According to media, over the past two years authorities arrested 57 residents of Warraq Island for unauthorized protests or refusal to leave their residences, which the government was preparing to demolish in order to develop the properties on which they were living. On October 26, the Terrorism Circuit of the Dokki Misdemeanor Court acquitted 22 residents of Warraq Island, including four lawyers, on charges of demonstrating and gathering in 2017. The 35 remaining defendants were referred to the State Security Emergency Court, which was examining the case at year’s end. The next session is on January 11, 2020. The government alleges the residents illegally built

homes on the properties. On August 18, news reports stated that the government arrested a leading Warraq activist, Nasser Abul Enein, at Cairo International Airport on his return from abroad.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution prohibits such actions and provides for the privacy of the home, correspondence, telephone calls, and other means of communication. Nevertheless, there were reports that security agencies sometimes placed political activists, journalists, foreigners, and writers under surveillance; monitored their private communications; screened their correspondence, including email and social media accounts; examined their bank records; searched their persons and homes without judicial authorization; and confiscated personal property in an extrajudicial manner. Ahead of planned protests or demonstrations, there were reports of police stopping young persons in public places and searching their phones for evidence of involvement in objectionable political activities deemed antigovernment in nature.

g. Abuses in Internal Conflict

The conflict in North Sinai involving government security forces, terrorist organizations, and other armed groups (including militias and criminal gangs) continued. According to media reports, at least 59 troops were killed in attacks on government positions or in counterterrorist operations. Rights groups and international media reported that the armed forces used indiscriminate violence during military operations resulting in killings of civilians and destruction of property. The government continued to impose restrictions on North Sinai residents' travel to mainland Egypt and movement within North Sinai Governorate. During the year the armed forces and initiated some development projects, such as building houses and a desalination plant.

The government severely restricted access for media to the North Sinai. It organized two separate trips for foreign press to the region in 2018, but there were no new trips since then. There were continuing reports of periodic shortages of food, fuel, and other supplies as a result of security restrictions.

Killings: As of December 16, the government acknowledged no civilian deaths due to security force actions. Human rights organizations stated some persons killed by security forces were civilians. In a May report, HRW asserted it had documented 14 extrajudicial killings of detainees in seven separate incidents in a period between 2016 and 2018. HRW did not find any evidence that prosecutors opened an investigation into any of the incidents, although in one case military intelligence reportedly opened an internal investigation.

Human rights groups and media reported civilian casualties following army artillery fire or stray bullets from unidentified sources in civilian residential areas. An estimated 621 civilians were killed between July 2013 and mid-2017 by stray bullets and shelling from unknown sources, and 1,247 were injured, according to statistics from the North Sinai Social Solidarity Directorate cited in a May press report. On June 27, press reported nine

civilians were reportedly killed when an artillery shell from an unknown source struck their homes following an attack by an unidentified armed group on a security force checkpoint. There were reports in August that the Military Judicial Department called for investigation of two officers and four soldiers involved in stray-bullet incidents that resulted in three injuries and one death.

Human rights groups and media also reported authorities shot civilians for allegedly not adhering to security personnel instructions at checkpoints or for other, unknown reasons. HRW reported that in some instances during 2016-2018, emergency medical assistance could not be provided to victims because hospitals were afraid to send ambulances, fearing army personnel at the checkpoint would shoot at them.

Terrorist and other armed groups continued to target the armed forces and civilians, using gunfire, improvised explosive devices, and other tactics. On April 10, UNICEF reported that North Sinai attacks by armed groups killed two children, including a 15-year-old boy who was used to conduct the attack.

Abductions: Terrorist groups and other armed groups abducted civilians in North Sinai. According to human rights groups, terrorist groups and other armed groups rarely released abductees; they were more often shot or beheaded. According to human rights groups, terrorist groups and other armed groups abducted civilians rumored to cooperate with security forces. In July ISIS-Sinai claimed responsibility for kidnapping and beheading four civilians in Bir al-Abd. On September 6, the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy reported that an unidentified armed group kidnapped 10 men, all members of the Dawaghra tribe, near Bir al-Abd in North Sinai.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: In a May report, HRW reported allegations of torture in the period 2016 to 2018 at military detention facilities at Battalion 101 army base in al-Arish, at a converted youth and sports center in Sheikh Zuweid known as Camp Zohor, and by military intelligence personnel at al-Azoly military prison at al-Galaa Military base in Ismailiya.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: According to press reports, terrorist groups and other armed groups attacked health-care personnel and ambulances trying to reach security checkpoints or transfer injured soldiers to hospitals. State authorities forcibly displaced civilians from the Rafah border area in an attempt to curb smuggling operations, according to press reports and human rights organizations (see section 2.d.). On July 16, local media reported that army bulldozers destroyed four homes of suspected terrorists in southern Arish.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, but includes a clause stating, “It may be subject to limited censorship in times of war or public mobilization.” The government frequently did not respect this right.

Freedom of Expression: Citizens expressed their views on a wide range of political and social topics. Nonetheless, the government investigated and prosecuted critics for alleged incitement of violence, insults to religion, insults to public figures and institutions such as the judiciary and the military, or violation of public morals. Individuals also faced societal and official harassment for speech viewed as sympathetic to political protests in other countries, such as Mohamad Ramadan who remained in pretrial detention after his December 2018 arrest for “inciting social unrest” by posting a photo on Facebook of himself wearing a yellow vest akin to those worn by political protesters in France.

The law provides a broad definition of terrorism, to include “any act harming national unity or social peace.” Human rights observers expressed concern that authorities could use the ambiguous definition to stifle nonviolent speech and nonviolent opposition activity.

Between January and June, a local organization that tracks freedom of association and speech recorded 138 violations of the freedoms of media and artistic and digital expression. One example cited by The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) is the June 25 arrest of several political figures after they met to form a new political alliance (Alliance of Hope) to run in 2020 parliamentary elections. On August 6, the Cairo Criminal Court upheld a freeze on the assets of 83 defendants in the case (no. 930/2019). On September 3, board members of the Journalists’ Syndicate, journalists, and families of the detainees submitted three official complaints to NCHR claiming that the detainees were experiencing poor detention conditions and medical negligence. The next hearing on the renewal of the detention of the defendants was scheduled for January 8, 2020.

On September 24, authorities arrested Hazem Hosni and Hassan Nafaa, both political science professors at Cairo University who were outspoken critics of President Sisi. Hosny was also a spokesman for the 2018 presidential campaign of Sami Anan (see section 3). According to media, Nafaa’s arrest came minutes after a local channel aired a leaked conversation between Nafaa and an al-Jazeera producer in which Nafaa demanded LE 16,500 (\$1,000) for conducting an interview with al-Jazeera. On December 17, the State Security Prosecutor ordered the renewal of Hosni and Nafaa’s detention for 15 days pending investigations on charges of joining a banned group and spreading false news.

In a November 19 report, HRW claimed it had documented 28 cases from 2016 to 2019 in which authorities harassed or threatened one or more family members of journalists, media workers, and political and human rights activists who have criticized the government and now live abroad.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a variety of views but with significant restrictions. Independent media reported that entities wholly or partially owned by the intelligence services assumed control of several independent media companies throughout the year. The constitution, penal code, and media and publications law govern media issues. The government

regulated the licensing of newspapers and controlled the printing and distribution of a majority of newspapers, including private newspapers and those of opposition political parties. The law does not impose restrictions on newspaper ownership.

The more than 20 state-owned media outlets broadly supported official state policy. The National Press Authority holds the power to appoint and dismiss editorial leadership of state-owned print outlets. The governmental Egyptian Radio and Television Union appointed the heads of state-owned radio and television channels. Both state-owned and private media (including television and online journalism) occasionally broadcast and published mild criticism of government policies, but dominant media narratives supported the president and his policy initiatives.

The law considers websites and social media accounts with at least 5,000 subscribers as media outlets, requires them to pay a licensing fee of 50,000 Egyptian pounds (LE) (\$3,030), and grants the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) broad discretion to block their content. According to media reports, the SCMR fined the weekly newspaper *al-Mashhad* LE 50,000 (\$3,030) in March and blocked its website for six months for allegedly publishing sexually explicit material. *Al-Mashhad* claimed it did not publish illicit material and that the censorship was due to its reports claiming that a police station in Cairo extorted business owners to fund food to be given to voters in the April referendum. According to media reports, the SCMR also prevented *al-Mashhad* from sending 30 journalists to report from polling stations during the referendum.

As of December the Committee to Protect Journalists reported there were 26 imprisoned journalists in the country.

On June 23, the al-Tahrir news agency stated it was shutting down operations after authorities blocked its website on May 9. According to a June 25 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists, the SCMR issued a bylaw in March stating that websites in violation of Egypt’s media laws would be blocked.

On November 24, unidentified security officials raided the office of news site *Mada Masr*, seized documents and electronic equipment, and detained three staff members. Detained staff members were taken to a police station before being released several hours later. On November 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement saying that *Mada Masr* was investigated because it was operating without a permit. No additional information was available on the status of the investigation as of December 16.

On May 21, a court ordered the release of al-Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Hussein, who had been held for 880 days in pretrial detention for allegedly disseminating false news and receiving monetary funds from foreign authorities to defame the state’s reputation. Before processing his release, authorities rearrested Hussein, who remained in pretrial detention awaiting formal charges.

Violence and Harassment: According to media reports and local and international human rights groups, state actors arrested and imprisoned, harassed, and intimidated journalists. Foreign correspondents reported cases where the government denied them entry, deported them, and delayed or denied issuance of media credentials; some claimed these actions were part of a government campaign to intimidate foreign media.

According to media reports, on February 20, authorities detained David Kirkpatrick, a *New York Times* reporter, in the Cairo International Airport and prevented him from entering the country. Kirkpatrick was the Cairo bureau chief for *The New York Times* from 2011 to 2015 and is the author of a book on Egypt, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers*.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Official censorship occurred. The SOE empowered the president to monitor newspapers, publications, editorials, drawings, and all means of expression and to order the seizure, confiscation, and closure of publications and print houses.

According to media reports, authorities blocked 34,000 websites prior to the April referendum, including sites gathering signatures to oppose the amendments. On June 23, AFTE reported that authorities censored three issues of the leftist Al Tagammaa Party's weekly *Al Ahly* newspaper that discussed presidential pardons, corruption, and a planned government cabinet reshuffle. The AFTE report noted the government had previously censored *Al-Dostour*, *Al-Mesryoon*, *Sawt Al Ummah*, *Al-Sabah*, and *Al-Bawaba* newspapers.

Some activists and many journalists reported privately they self-censored criticism of the government or comments that could be perceived as sympathetic to the MB, due to the overall anti-MB and progovernment media environment. Publishers were also wary of publishing books that criticized religious institutions, such as al-Azhar, or challenged Islamic doctrine.

On March 22, the Musicians' Syndicate banned famous singer Sherine Abdel Wahab from performing and summoned her for questioning for “insulting Egypt.” The syndicate lifted the ban in early June after she publicly apologized.

Libel/Slander Laws: Local and international rights groups reported several cases of authorities charging and convicting individuals with denigrating religion under the so-called blasphemy law, targeting primarily Christians but also Muslims.

On January 29, atheist video blogger Sherif Gaber launched a crowdfunding page called “Help Me Escape Egypt” to aid him in purchasing another nationality. On March 29, he posted on Twitter that there were two warrants for his arrest for treason and receiving funding from unknown sources. Gaber was arrested for denigration of Islam-related charges in 2018, 2015, and 2013. As of December 16, the government had not detained him.

National Security: The law allows government censors to block the publication of information related to intelligence and national security.

The law imposes a fine on any person who “intentionally publishes...or spreads false news.” The fine is many times the average annual salary of most local journalists. In March 2018 authorities established hotlines for members of the public to call or leave text messages reporting fake news in either traditional or social media that endangers state security.

Judges may issue restraint orders to prevent media from covering court cases considered sensitive on national security grounds. Rights groups stated authorities sometimes misused the orders to shield government, police, or military officials from public scrutiny. Citing safety and security, the government and military restricted media access to many parts of North Sinai.

Authorities have held blogger Islam al-Refai, known as Khorm, who ran a satirical Twitter account with 75,000 followers, in pretrial detention since 2017, according to his attorney. NGOs continued to claim that authorities used counterterrorism and state-of-emergency laws and courts unjustly to prosecute journalists, activists, lawyers, political party members, university professors, and critics for their peaceful criticism.

Internet Freedom

The constitution protects the right to privacy, including on the internet. The constitution provides for the confidentiality and “inviolability” of postal, telegraphic, and electronic correspondence; telephone calls; and other means of communication. They may not be confiscated, revealed, or monitored except with a judicial order, only for a definite period, and only in cases defined by law. The constitution prohibits the government from “arbitrarily” interrupting, disconnecting, or depriving citizens seeking to use all forms of internet communications.

Despite legal protections, the government restricted and disrupted access to the internet and censored online content. There were credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority including cyberattacks to gain access to devices and accounts belonging to critics of the government. Law enforcement agencies restricted or disrupted individuals’ access to the internet, and the government monitored social media accounts and internet usage, relying on a law that only allows targeted interception of communications under judicial oversight for a limited period and does not permit indiscriminate mass surveillance. The public prosecutor prosecuted individuals accused of posting “insulting” material.

The counterterrorism law criminalizes the use of the internet to “promote ideas or beliefs that call for terrorist acts” or to “broadcast what is intended to mislead security authorities or influence the course of justice in relation to any terrorist crime.” The law also authorizes the public prosecutor and investigators to monitor and record online communications among suspects in terrorism cases for a period of 30 days, renewable in 30-day increments. The law does not specify a maximum period.

The cybercrime law of August 2018 states, “the relevant investigating authority may, when the evidence indicates that a website is broadcasting phrases, numbers, pictures, videos, or any promotional material, that constitutes one of the crimes enshrined in this

law, and poses a threat to national security or endangers the security or economy of the country, order the blocking of the website.” The government had not issued implementing regulations for the law as of September.

There were reports the government temporarily blocked access to internet messaging applications. On March 5, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology denied reports that the government monitored social media sites. On March 14, there were reports that authorities blocked Facebook and other social media platforms.

The government attempted to disrupt the communications of terrorist groups operating in Sinai by cutting mobile services, internet, and sometimes landlines.

The law obliges internet service providers and mobile operators to allow government access to customer databases, allowing security forces to obtain information regarding activities of specific customers, which could lead to lack of online anonymity.

There were reports authorities monitored social media and internet dating sites to identify and arrest LGBTI individuals (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

A local news site reported in April that the government blocked its website and 500 more in Egypt. The blocked sites included international NGOs, local human rights NGOs, and numerous virtual private network services. Some blockages appeared intended to respond to critical coverage of the government or to disrupt antigovernment political activity or demonstrations. On April 15, NetBlocks.org reported that the government blocked 34,000 internet domains to stop an online campaign to gather signatures to oppose the April constitutional referendum. On May 22, a local organization that tracks freedom of association and speech reported the government blocked 26,175 websites to block the Batel “Void” Campaign launched on April 8 to petition against the April referendum. After September 20 street protests (see section 2.b.), internet users throughout the country reported difficulty accessing Facebook Messenger and the news websites of the BBC, al-Jazeera, and *al-Hurra*. A spokesperson for the Supreme Council for Media Regulation said the BBC and other news websites may have been blocked because of their “inaccurate” coverage of the protests.

In 2017 the news website *Mada Masr* sued the government seeking information on why it was blocked. In September 2018 the Court of Administrative Justice referred the case for technical review by the Justice Ministry’s Authority of Experts. This review was pending at year’s end. Defense lawyers claimed it could take years to examine the case.

There were reports of politically motivated cyberattacks. A March 6 report from AI documented a wave of digital attacks that likely originated from government-backed bodies, starting from early January and involving multiple attempts to gain access to the email accounts of prominent Egyptian human rights defenders, media, and civil society organization staff.

In October, *The New York Times* reported that a series of cyberattacks targeting journalists, opposition politicians, and human rights activists, in which attackers installed software on the targets' phones that enabled them to read the victims' files and emails and track their locations, was traced to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and that geographic coordinates embedded in one of the applications used to track the targeted individuals corresponded to the headquarters of the General Intelligence Service.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were reports of government restrictions on academic freedom and cultural events. The removal of references to the country's 2011 and 2013 revolutions from high school history class curricula continued after a 2017 decree from the Ministry of Education. According to media and local rights groups, a degree of self-censorship, similar to that reported by nonacademic commentators, existed when academics publicly commented on sensitive political and socioeconomic issues. Faculty members needed security agency approval to travel abroad for academic purposes. Faculty and officials at public universities and research centers also must obtain Ministry of Foreign Affairs permission to travel abroad for any reason.

On August 14, the Middle East Studies Association Committee on Academic Freedom requested the government to lift the travel ban on University of Washington doctoral student Walid Salem. Authorities arrested Salem in May 2018 while he was conducting political science dissertation research on the Egyptian judiciary and released him in December 2018 with a travel ban and probation pending trial.

According to a local human rights organization, authorities released Helwan University science professor Yehia al-Qazzaz from prison on May 23, following his 2018 arrest based on a complaint filed against him by the university's dean of the faculty of sciences for comments al-Qazzaz made on Facebook critical of President Sisi. According to the organization, after al-Qazzaz's release, the president of Helwan University continued to harass al-Qazzaz with investigations over his 2018 political comments and by referring him to university disciplinary procedures for being absent from work while he was in prison.

There was censorship of cultural events. A prime ministerial decree issued in June 2018 declares it unlawful to hold a special event or festival without “prior license from the Ministry of Culture and liaising with relevant state entities.” This requirement added to existing regulations, under which organizations must obtain a permit from the Ministry of Culture's Censorship Board, as well as permits from the Ministry of Interior and the relevant artists' union for concerts, performances, and other cultural events. The Ministry of Culture must approve all scripts and final productions of plays and films. The ministry censored foreign films to be shown in theaters but did not censor the same films sold as DVDs.

On May 26, after remaining in pretrial detention since his arrest in February 2018, authorities released film editor Ahmed Tarek on probationary measures pending trial. According to his lawyer, authorities held Tarek incommunicado at National State Sector

headquarters three days. Tarek faced charges of spreading false news and joining a group established contrary to the provisions of the law. The charges stemmed from his work on a documentary, *Minus 1,095 Days*, which sought to rebut claims in a state-produced film highlighting President Sisi’s accomplishments called *1,095 Days*.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly “according to notification regulated by law.” The demonstrations law includes an expansive list of prohibited activities, giving a judge the authority to prohibit or curtail planned demonstrations after submitting an official memorandum. Domestic and international human rights organizations asserted the law did not meet international standards regarding freedom of assembly. In 2017 a local human rights organization filed a lawsuit challenging the 1914 law, arguing that it was passed by an incompetent body and repealed in 1929. The court was expected to issue a ruling in the case on January 4, 2020. In 2017 the government imposed an exclusion zone of 2,600 feet (790 meters) around vital governmental institutions in which protests are prohibited.

There were protests throughout the year, mostly small, and some occurred without government interference. In most cases the government rigorously enforced the law restricting demonstrations, in some cases using force, including in cases of small groups of protesters demonstrating peacefully.

In September local NGOs reported police arrested more than 4,000 individuals after small protests erupted in several cities over accusations of corruption against President Sisi. Many of the individuals detained reportedly had no connection to the protests and happened simply to be in the vicinity of the protests. Police and prosecutors subsequently released more than 2,500 of those detained. Local human rights organizations claimed that, in some instances, detainees were tortured or subjected to other abuses.

The cumulative number of persons arrested under the protest law was not publicly available. On May 13, authorities arrested political activist Haytham Mohamadeen, who police had surveilled since his October 2018 release following five months in pretrial detention. On May 14, authorities arrested political activist Mostafa Maher, the brother of political activist Ahmed Maher, who co-founded the April 6 movement. On December 25, Mostafa Maher received a release order that was immediately appealed by the prosecutor. Both remained in pretrial detention pending charges of “colluding with a terrorist group.”

On April 22, the final day of voting for the referendum, authorities arrested Ahmed Badawi, an engineer and member of the liberal Dostour Party, after he raised a sign saying “No to the constitutional changes” outside a polling station in Cairo. According to local media, authorities arrested four members of the Dostour Party in February after they reportedly voiced objection to the proposed constitutional amendments.

According to a local human rights organization, thousands of persons whom authorities arrested during 2013 and 2014 due to their participation in demonstrations (some of which were peaceful) remained imprisoned; however, authorities released others who had completed their sentences and some through presidential pardons. Authorities reportedly held such individuals under charges of attending an unauthorized protest, incitement to violence, or “blocking roads.”

Human rights groups claimed authorities inflated or used these charges solely to target individuals suspected of being members of groups in opposition to the government or those who sought to exercise the rights to free assembly or association.

On March 29, authorities conditionally released prominent activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, whom a court convicted of participating in a protest in 2013. The conditions of a Court of Cassation sentence in 2017 require Abdel Fattah to report to the Dokki police station from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. each day for the next five years, but he may report at 7:30 p.m. during Ramadan. Abdel Fattah was appealing the nightly sentence and requesting that he be allowed to fulfill its terms from home. On September 29, police detained Abdel Fattah as he prepared to leave after spending the night in the police station and charged him with belonging to a terrorist organization, funding a terrorist group, spreading false news to undermine national security, and using social media to commit a publishing offense. Local NGOs reported he was tortured or subjected to other abuses while in custody in Tora Prison. As of year’s end, Abdel Fattah, along with his attorney Mohamed Elbakr, remained in detention on charges of “joining a banned group” and “spreading false news.”

Since their release from prison in 2017 after completing three-year sentences for violating the protest law, activists Ahmed Maher and Mohamed Adel remained on probation with terms requiring them to reside in the local police station from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. each day. In May authorities rearrested Maher and released him a few days later on charges of beating a citizen and damaging his car outside a police station. Authorities also rearrested Adel in another case. On December 16, an administrative court ruled that the order to compel Adel to spend every night inside a police station as part of his probation was invalid. The court ruled that Adel could spend the daily probationary period from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. inside his home, according to a lawyer.

On May 21, authorities arrested several high school boys who protested in front of the Ministry of Education building regarding the repeated failures of new electronic systems in their schools; they were released the following day.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association. The law governing associations,

however, significantly restricts this right.

President Sisi signed a new NGO law on August 19. The law replaced a 2017 law which local and international NGOs stated could make it impossible for them to operate independently; the 2017 law was never implemented. According to International Center for Not-Profit Law (ICNL), the new law includes noteworthy improvements from the 2017 law in several respects, such as by eliminating individual prison sentences for violations and by removing the previous formal oversight role for security and intelligence authorities over foreign funding and foreign organizations. However, ICNL also assessed that the new law preserves the former law’s overall restrictive regulatory approach and continues to impose significant barriers to civil society activity.

Pending the promulgation of implementing regulations for the new law, the Ministry of Social Solidarity continued to apply the previous NGO law on international and domestic organizations receiving international funding. Rights groups reported fewer incidents of security services ordering cancellation of planned training programs or other events. On February 2, the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled unconstitutional several articles of the previous NGO law, which gives the minister of social solidarity the right to dissolve NGOs.

The penal code criminalizes the request for or acceptance of foreign funds, materiel, weapons, ammunition, or “other things” from states or NGOs “with the intent to harm the national interest.” Those convicted may be sentenced to life in prison (or the death penalty in the case of public officials) for crimes committed during times of war or with “terrorist purpose.”

On October 16, a local NGO announced that authorities arrested lawyer Amr Emam after he announced on October 14 that he intended to go on a hunger strike and begin a sit-in to protest the arrests and alleged abuse of journalist Esraa Abdel Fattah, activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, and his attorney Mohamed Elbahr. As of year’s end, Emam remained in detention pending investigations in case no. 488 of 2019 on charges of “colluding with a terrorist organization,” “publishing fake news,” and “misusing social media to spread false information.”

On May 2, Cairo Criminal Court renewed the pretrial detention of Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy, founder of the Association of the Families of the Disappeared. Authorities arrested him in 2017 at the Cairo International Airport and initially held him incommunicado. Hegazy was traveling to Geneva to participate in the WGEID. The charges against him included “communicating with a foreign body to harm the Egyptian national interest.” On May 20, the WGEID stated that it “remains concerned” that the measures against Hegazy “constitute acts of reprisals against him for cooperating with the Working Group.” On October 15, the Cairo Criminal Court ordered Hegazy’s release. On November 5, Hegazy appeared in front of the State Security Prosecution accused in a new case of “belonging to a terrorist group” and “funding a terrorist group.” On November 20, UN human rights rapporteurs criticized Hegazy’s continued detention.

Following the December 2018 acquittal of 41 mostly foreign NGO workers sentenced in 2013 for operating unlicensed organizations and receiving foreign funding without government permission, a court acquitted the remaining two defendants in May.

The MB, the MB-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party, and its NGO remained illegal, and the MB was listed as a designated terrorist organization.

Authorities continued investigations of local NGOs that received foreign funding under a case originally brought in 2011. The Cairo Criminal Court postponed until February 15, 2020, a motion to lift the travel bans imposed on eight defendants in the case, including Nazra for Feminist Studies founder Mozn Hassan, accused of receiving foreign funding to harm national security in connection with her NGO.

A court case brought by el-Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (also registered under the name el-Nadeem for Psychological Rehabilitation) challenging a 2016 closure order remained pending an expert report ordered by the court. The organization asserted the closure was politically motivated, targeting el-Nadeem because of its work investigating torture, deaths in detention, and impunity for these crimes. The organization continued to operate in a limited capacity.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/> (<https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some exceptions, including the handling of potential refugees and asylum seekers. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern. Authorities maintained a “no-fly” list that prevented some defendants in court cases from fleeing the country.

In-country Movement: Citizens and foreigners may not travel freely in areas of the country designated as military zones. The government sought to prevent private individuals, journalists, civil society figures, and international organizations from entering North Sinai, stating it was to protect their safety, although it began organizing some supervised visits for journalists to North Sinai in July.

Foreign Travel: The constitution states, “No citizen may be prevented from leaving the State territory.”

Nonetheless, men who have not completed compulsory military service and have not obtained an exemption may not travel abroad or emigrate. National identification cards indicated completion of military service.

Authorities required citizens between ages 18 and 40 to obtain permission from the Interior Ministry to travel to 16 countries: Georgia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Qatar, South Africa, South Korea, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, , and Yemen. Enforcement of these regulations was sporadic. The government stated it intended these regulations to make it more difficult for citizens to join terrorist groups and to stop flight of criminals. These regulations also affected the ability of other individuals to travel outside the country.

The government-imposed travel bans on human rights defenders and political activists under investigation or formally charged. Local human rights groups maintained that authorities used travel bans to intimidate and silence human rights defenders, including individuals connected with NGOs facing investigation as part of the reopened NGO foreign-funding case. A September 2018 court ruling stated a travel ban “does not require the investigation of certain facts and their certainty,” but there must be “serious evidence that there are reasons for it and that the decision to prevent travel is due to security reasons and the interests of the state.”

Democracy activist Esraa Abdel Fattah remained unable to depart the country as a result of a travel ban (see section 1.c. regarding her arrest).

Exile: There was no government-imposed exile, and the constitution prohibits the government from expelling citizens or banning citizens from returning to the country. Some Mubarak- and Morsi-era politicians lived outside the country by choice and stated they faced government threats of prosecution.

e. Internally Displaced Persons

Not Applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: From April to June, 413 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were reported to UNHCR and CARE International, which provided SGBV prevention activities and counseling to 1,750 refugee and asylum seekers.

Media, NGOs, and UNHCR staff reported multiple cases of attacks against refugees, particularly women and children. According to UNHCR, refugees sometimes reported harassment, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Refugee women and girls, particularly sub-Saharan Africans, faced the greatest risk of societal, sexual, and gender-based violence.

According to UNHCR and press reports, police security sweeps increased in neighborhoods known to house Syrian, Sudanese, and other African refugees, as well as migrants, resulting in increased detentions. Detainees reported authorities subjected them to verbal abuse and poor detention conditions.

Refoulement: Although the government often contacted UNHCR upon detaining unregistered migrants and asylum seekers, authorities reportedly sometimes encouraged unregistered detainees to choose to return to their countries of origin or a neighboring country to avoid continued detention, even in cases where the individuals expressed a fear of return. The number of these cases was unknown.

Compared with previous years, fewer Palestinian refugees from Syria entered the country illegally, intending to travel to Europe. In a number of cases, in the absence of valid travel documents or inability to confirm their identities they faced more difficulties, including higher chances of detention or deportation.

Access to Asylum: The constitution provides for the protection of political refugees, but the laws do not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a comprehensive legal regime for providing protection to refugees. The government granted UNHCR authority to make refugee status determinations. UNHCR does not register Libyan citizens; neither does it register or assist Palestinian refugees in the country.

According to UNHCR as of June 30, asylum seekers in the country came mainly from Syria, as well as from Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen. The number of African refugees increased during the year, according to UNHCR, particularly those from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

Since 2013 the government has applied a system of visa and security clearance requirements for Syrian nationals and Palestinian refugees from Syria, thus assuring no direct entries from Syria since Egypt lacked consular services there. Following the UNHCR high commissioner’s visit in 2017, the country relaxed its visa requirements for Syrians seeking family reunification.

Reports of irregular movements of individuals, including asylum seekers, and detention of foreign nationals attempting to depart the country irregularly via the Mediterranean remained low during the year, according to UNHCR, following parliament’s passage and enforcement of a law that dramatically increased patrols on the country’s Mediterranean coast in 2016.

UNHCR and its partners usually had regular access, by request, to detained registered refugees and asylum seekers along the north coast. Local rights groups faced continued resistance from the government when trying to interview detainees at Qanater men’s and women’s prisons outside Cairo, which housed the majority of detained refugees and asylum seekers. Authorities generally granted UNHCR access to asylum seekers at all prison and detention facilities. Authorities generally released asylum seekers registered with UNHCR, although frequently did not do so for detained migrants, many of whom were Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, and Sudanese (who may have had a basis for

asylum claims). Detained migrants—as unregistered asylum seekers—did not have access to UNHCR. Authorities often held them in in police stations until UNHCR or other aid agencies assisted them, although sometimes authorities sent them to regular prisons alongside convicted criminals or deported them.

The government has never recognized UNHCR's mandate to offer services to Palestinians outside of the fields of operations of the UN Relief and Works Agency, reportedly due to a belief that allowing UNHCR registration would negate Palestinian refugees' alleged right of return. Approximately 2,900 Palestinian refugees from Syria were also present in the country, the majority reportedly in Cairo. The Palestinian Authority mission in the country provided limited assistance to this population. The Swiss Red Cross also provided some humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees from Syria.

Employment: No law grants or prohibits refugees the right to work. Those seeking unauthorized employment were challenged by lack of jobs and societal discrimination, particularly against sub-Saharan Africans. Refugees who found work took low-paying jobs in the informal market, such as domestic servants, and were vulnerable to financial and sexual exploitation by employers.

Access to Basic Services: Refugees, in particular non-Arabic-speaking refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, received limited access to some services, including health care and public education. According to UNHCR, refugees can fully access public-health services, although many did not have the resources to do so, and prices were often higher for refugees due to discrimination. The Interior Ministry restricted access for some international organizations seeking to assist migrants and refugees in Sinai. UNHCR was unaware of any migrants detained in Sinai since 2016. UNHCR provided some refugees with modest support for education and health care, as well as small monthly financial assistance grants for particularly vulnerable refugees. The International Organization for Migration provided additional assistance to particularly vulnerable migrants and individual asylum cases either rejected or being processed by UNHCR.

Refugee children not enrolled in public schools mainly attended refugee-run schools, private schools, or were home schooled. The law requires government hospitals to provide free emergency medical care to refugees, but many hospitals did not have adequate resources to do so. In some cases hospitals insisted that refugees provide payment in advance of receiving services or refused to provide services to refugees. One local refugee agency reported some refugees died due to the lack of medical care. As of March 19, UNHCR reported 10 protests and two suicides committed by refugees in response to the lack of adequate services. In response to the influx of Syrians, the government allowed Syrian refugees and asylum seekers access to public education and health services. The Ministry of Education estimated that 35,000 school-age Syrian children (approximately 90 percent) enrolled successfully in the public-school system.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Constraints on freedom of expression, association, and assembly, however, limited citizens’ ability to do so.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The country held a presidential election in March 2018 resulting in the re-election of President Sisi with 92 percent of the vote. President Sisi’s sole opponent, Moussa Moustapha Moussa, received 3 percent of the vote, less than the number of spoiled ballots. Moussa registered his candidacy on January 29, the last possible day to register, and until the day before he registered his candidacy, he was a member of a campaign supporting President Sisi for a second term. Prior to the elections, authorities arrested some potential candidates for allegedly violating military prohibitions for public office and reportedly pressured others against running in the elections; some candidates remained in detention as do journalists arrested based on their coverage of the elections. Authorities were still holding chief editor of the now-blocked *Masr al-Arabiya* news site Adel Sabri, satirist Shady Abu Zeid, and former Constitution Party leader Shady al-Ghazaly Harb in pretrial detention. Authorities arrested them with other bloggers, researchers, and students between February 4 and May 23, 2018, in cases no. 621/2018 and 441/2018 on charges including spreading false news and joining a banned group. According to Front Line Defenders, authorities arrested Sabri in April 2018 after *Masr al-Arabiya* published a translation of a *New York Times* article that claimed authorities gave bribes to citizens to vote during the presidential elections. According to local media, authorities arrested Harb in May 2018 after he made statements about the presidential elections. Domestic and international organizations expressed concern that government limitations on association, assembly, and expression severely constrained broad participation in the political process.

International news media alleged that, in some instances, voters were paid to vote. The Supreme Media Regulatory Council fined some news outlets publishing critical coverage of the presidential election and also referred several journalists to the Journalists Syndicate for investigation (see section 2.a.).

Parliamentary elections were held in 2015. Domestic and international observers concluded that government authorities professionally administered these elections, while also expressing concern about restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly, association, and expression and their negative effect on the political climate surrounding the elections.

In April a national referendum approved constitutional amendments extending President Sisi’s current term from four years to six years (ending in 2024) and allowing the president to run for a third six-year term in 2024. The amendments expand the role of the armed forces to include “safeguarding the constitution and democracy” and the role of the president to include appointing the heads of judicial bodies and chairing the Supreme Council for Judicial Bodies and Entities. They also limit the State Council’s authority to review laws. The amendments also add a second chamber (Senate) to the parliament and allow the president to appoint one or more vice presidents.

Multiple domestic and international organizations and press reported interference by the government in the referendum process: arrests of independent and partisan individuals who opposed the constitutional amendments publicly on social media accounts; distribution of food packages and cash as incentives to vote yes; a large presence of banners and media promoting the amendments and a lack of opposition banners and media; a government ban on websites opposing the amendments, including those gathering “no vote” signatures; the lack in some polling stations of a list of the proposed amendments; progovernment supporters to mobilize near and in polling stations; and allowing out-of-district voters to vote in all polling stations, which allowed for the possibility of casting multiple votes.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution grants citizens the ability to form, register, and operate political parties. The law requires new parties to have a minimum of 5,000 members from each of at least 10 governorates. The constitution also states, “No political activity may be practiced and no political parties may be formed on the basis of religion or discrimination based on gender, origin, or sectarian basis or geographic location. No activity that is hostile to democratic principles, secretive, or of military or quasi-military nature may be practiced. Political parties may not be dissolved except by virtue of a court judgment.”

The Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the MB, remained banned. Authorities did not ban other Islamist parties, including the Strong Egypt Party and the Building and Development Party. Separate military courts sentenced former chief of staff of the armed forces Sami Anan to six years in prison for violating military discipline by announcing his intention to run for president in 2018 and to four years in prison for forgery. On December 22, Anan was released from detention by military prosecution order.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit participation of women or, members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. Social and cultural barriers, however, limited women’s political participation and leadership in most political parties and some government institutions. Voters elected a record number of 75 women, 36 Christians, and nine persons with disabilities to parliament during the 2015 parliamentary elections, a substantial increase compared with the 2012 parliament. The House of Representatives law outlines the criteria for the electoral lists, which provides that the House of Representatives must include at least 56 women, 24 Christians, and nine persons with disabilities. The April constitutional amendments introduced a 25 percent quota in the House of Representatives for women and a requirement to better represent workers, farmers, youth, Christians, Egyptians abroad, and individuals with disabilities. In 2015 the president appointed 28 additional members of parliament, including 14 women and two Christians. The House of Representatives law grants the president the authority to appoint House of Representatives members, not to surpass 5 percent of the total number of elected members. If the president opts to use this authority, one-half of his appointments must be women, according to the law. Parliament included 89 women and 38 Christians.

Eight women led cabinet ministries. There were two Christians among the appointed governors of the 27 governorates. In 2018 authorities appointed Manal Awad Michael, a Coptic woman, governor of Damietta, making her the country's second female governor. No women were on the Supreme Constitutional Court. In 2018 the Supreme Judiciary Council promoted 16 female judges to higher courts, including the Qena Appeals Court. Legal experts stated there were approximately 66 female judges serving in family, criminal, economic, appeals, and misdemeanor courts; that total was less than 1 percent of judges. Several senior judges were Christian.

On November 6, member of parliament Ahmed Tantawi told press that parliament has referred him to an ethics committee for posting a video criticizing President Sisi.

g. Stateless Persons

Of the eight stateless persons known to UNHCR, most were Armenians displaced for more than 50 years. According to a local civil society organization, the number of stateless persons in the country was likely higher than the number recorded by UNHCR. The government and UNHCR lacked a mechanism for identifying stateless persons, including those of disputed Sudanese/South Sudanese nationality and those of disputed Ethiopian/Eritrean nationality. A majority of the approximately 70,000 Palestinian refugees were stateless.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not consistently implement the law effectively, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Corruption: The Central Agency for Auditing and Accounting was the government's internal anticorruption body and submitted reports to the president and prime minister that were not available to the public. The auditing and accounting agency stationed monitors at state-owned companies to report corrupt practices. The Administrative Control Authority (ACA), another state institution with technical, financial, and administrative independence, had jurisdiction over state administrative bodies, state-owned enterprises, public associations and institutions, private companies undertaking public work, and organizations to which the state contributes in any form. The ACA is a civilian agency led by personnel seconded from the military and intelligence services. The ACA has no oversight role for allegations of corruption involving the military. In addition to anticorruption, it also has jurisdiction for criminal violations to include human trafficking and financial crimes.

On April 3, the World Bank offered a positive assessment of the country's anticorruption efforts. The ACA raised more than 400 corruption-related cases and took legal action against more than 1,400 employees January to August. For example, on August 20, the ACA arrested the secretary general of the SCMR, Ahmed Selim, for bribery and corruption.

In another case, on September 15, the Illicit Gains Authority referred Souad al-Khouli, the former deputy governor of Alexandria, to the criminal court based on charges of illegally obtaining more than LE 907,500 (\$55,000) by exploiting her public positions. On April 4, the Port Said Felonies court sentenced Gamal Abdel Azim, the former head of the Customs Authority, to 10 years in prison and a fine of LE 769,000 (\$46,600) on charges of corruption and bribery. A February report by the Project on Middle East Democracy criticized the lack of transparency in ACA investigations and alleged the organization may selectively target individuals for investigation at the behest of the Presidency.

In August Mohamed Ali, a disgruntled former contractor whose contracting company formerly carried out civilian projects for the army, posted a series of videos accusing President Sisi of wasting public funds on prestige projects. President Sisi stated the allegations were “lies and slander” and that the projects were necessary to build a new state.

Financial Disclosure: There are no financial disclosure laws for public officials. A 2013 conflict-of-interest law forbids government officials from maintaining any pecuniary interest in matters over which they exercise authority.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

International and local human rights organizations stated the government continued to be uncooperative. On April 16, the local development minister said the government had established human rights units in 25 governorates and planned to establish units in Cairo and North Sinai as well. Government officials publicly asserted they shared the civil society organizations’ goals, but they rarely cooperated with or responded to the organizations’ inquiries, according to local NGOs. Some units were in the formative stage, staffed by personnel from the governor’s complaints office who receive basic human rights training. The cabinet established a committee on human rights chaired by the minister of foreign affairs to prepare UN reports and respond to human rights allegations raised against the country. Domestic civil society organizations criticized the government’s consultations with civil society as insufficient.

Extended delays in gaining government approvals and an unclear legal environment continued to limit the ability of domestic and international NGOs to operate. State-owned and independent media frequently depicted NGOs, particularly international NGOs and domestic NGOs that received funding from international sources, as undertaking subversive activities. Some NGOs reported receiving visits or calls to staff, both at work and at home, from security service officers and tax officials monitoring their activities, as well as societal harassment.

Human rights defenders and political activists were also subjected to governmental and societal harassment and intimidation, including through travel bans (see section 2.d.). On October 31, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information released a statement

saying that security forces vandalized the car of a lawyer working for the organization and that several days prior security forces had physically beaten the organization's director and stolen his car.

Well-established, independent domestic human rights NGOs struggled to operate amid increasing pressure from security forces throughout the country. Online censorship (see section 2.a.) diminished the roles of internet activists and bloggers in publicizing information concerning human rights abuses. Authorities sometimes allowed civil society organizations not registered as NGOs to operate, but such organizations often reported harassment, along with threats of government interference, investigation, asset freezes, or closure.

The government continued investigations into the receipt of foreign funding by several human rights organizations (see section 2.b.).

Major international human rights organizations, such as HRW and AI, have not had offices in the country since closing them in 2014 due to “concerns about the deteriorating security and political environment in the country.”

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: In October 2018 the UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing visited the country, the first rapporteur to visit since 2010. In a December 2018 statement, the rapporteur claimed that individuals she met during her trip faced retaliation in the form of forced evictions, housing demolitions, arbitrary arrest, intimidation, and other reprisals.

Nine other UN special rapporteurs had pending visit requests; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated it was committed to facilitating their visits by the end of 2019. Authorities did not allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to prisoners and detainees. The Interior Ministry provided some international organizations informal access to some detention centers where authorities detained asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants to provide humanitarian assistance (see section 2.d.).

Following backlash from domestic and international human rights organizations, the United Nations postponed plans for an international conference on torture in Cairo in September.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The quasi-governmental NCHR monitored government abuses of human rights submitted in the form of citizen complaints to the government. The NCHR continues to function with its existing membership, even though under the law the terms of existing NCHR members ended in 2016. A number of well-known human rights activists served on the organization's board, although some observers alleged the board's effectiveness was sometimes limited because it lacked sufficient resources and the government rarely acted on its findings. The council at times challenged and criticized government policies and practices, calling for steps to improve its human rights record. In early October the NCHR criticized police procedures during the September arrests of citizens, including not informing arrestees of the charges against them and forcing citizens to display the contents of their mobile phones. In response the Interior Ministry stated that all arrests were legal. The NCHR

also held a conference in September to discuss the NGO law and Egypt’s preparations for the Universal Periodic Review with local human rights organizations, and in October to discuss torture.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, prescribing penalties of 15 to 25 years’ imprisonment, or life imprisonment for cases of rape involving armed abduction. Spousal rape is not illegal. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Civil society organizations reported police pressure not to pursue charges.

In July police arrested a 15-year-old girl who confessed that she had killed a bus driver who she alleged had kidnapped her in a deserted rural area near Cairo and sought to sexually assault her at knife point. The case was pending pretrial detention as of October 2. On November 12, the prosecutor general said in a statement that there were no grounds to prosecute her.

Domestic violence was a significant problem. The law does not prohibit domestic violence or spousal abuse, but authorities may apply provisions relating to assault with accompanying penalties. The law requires that an assault victim produce multiple eyewitnesses, a difficult condition for domestic abuse victims. Police often treated domestic violence as a social rather than criminal matter.

The Interior Ministry includes a unit responsible for combating sexual and gender-based violence. The NCW, a quasi-governmental body, was responsible for coordinating government and civil society efforts to empower women. In 2015 the NCW launched a five-year *National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women* with four strategic objectives: Prevention, protection, intervention, and prosecution. An NCW study found that approximately 1.5 million women reported domestic violence each year.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C is illegal, but it remained a serious problem. According to international and local observers, the government did not effectively enforce the FGM/C law. In May the government formed a national task force to end FGM/C, led by the NCW and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM). The latest research conducted by the National Population Council shows that the number of girls ages 13-17 subjected to the procedure dropped to 72 percent in 2018.

In July the “Protecting Her from FGM” campaign was launched by the National Commission for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and included a door-to-door campaign in all governorates to raise awareness among local communities about the harmful effects of FGM/C, in cooperation with the committees of child protection and rural leaders.

In July Dar al-Iftaa, responsible for issuing Islamic fatwas, said that female circumcision in its current form in Egypt is considered an attack on the body of women and therefore is prohibited and not permissible under Islamic law.

A 2016 amendment to the law designated FGM/C a felony, as opposed to a misdemeanor as it was previously, and assigned penalties for conviction of five to seven years' imprisonment for practitioners who perform the procedure or 15 years if the practice led to death or "permanent deformity." The law granted exceptions in cases of "medical necessity," which rights groups and subject matter experts identified as a problematic loophole that allowed the practice to continue.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The law does not specifically address "honor" crimes, which authorities treated as any other crime. There were no reliable statistics regarding the incidence of killings and assaults motivated by "honor," but local observers stated such killings occurred, particularly in rural areas. Local media occasionally reported on incidents where fathers or brothers killed their daughters and sisters in alleged "honor killings" after they discovered they had premarital or extramarital relationships, especially in Upper Egypt.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment remained a serious problem. The government claimed it prioritized efforts to address sexual harassment. The penal code defines sexual harassment as a crime, with penalties including fines and sentences of six months' to five years' imprisonment if convicted. Media and NGOs reported sexual harassment by police was also a problem, and the potential for further harassment further discouraged women from filing complaints.

A criminal court sentenced a man to 10 years in prison in March for cyber sexual harassment, after hacking a social media account of a university female student and using her personal photos to create fake accounts to send obscene messages.

The state-affiliated Egyptian Football Association's decision to overturn its initial decision to expel national soccer team player Amr Warda from the country's Africa Cup of Nations squad for online sexual harassment of several women sparked anger among women activists and local NGOs. In July the Disciplinary Board at Cairo University dismissed Professor Yaseen Lasheen following allegations of sexual harassment and blackmail of a female student. Cairo University president Mohamed al-Khosht referred Lasheen to the Public Prosecution on allegations of sexual harassment and blackmail dating back to 2017.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: The constitution provides for equal rights for male and female citizens. Women did not enjoy the same legal rights and opportunities as men, and discrimination was widespread. Aspects of the law and traditional societal practices disadvantaged women in family, social, and economic life.

Women faced widespread societal discrimination, threats to their physical security, and

workplace bias in favor of men that hindered their social and economic advancement.

Laws affecting marriage and personal status generally corresponded to an individual's religious group. A female Muslim citizen cannot legally marry a non-Muslim man. If she were to do so, authorities could charge her with adultery and consider her children illegitimate. Under the government's interpretation of Islamic law, any children from such a marriage could be placed in the custody of a male Muslim guardian. *Khula* divorce allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided she forgoes all her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in rare circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion. Other Christian churches sometimes permitted divorce on a case-by-case basis.

The law follows sharia in matters of inheritance; therefore, a Muslim female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir's inheritance, and Christian widows of Muslims have no inheritance rights. A sole Muslim female heir receives one-half her parents' estate, and the balance goes to the siblings of the parents or the children of the siblings if the siblings are deceased. A sole male heir inherits his parents' entire estate.

On November 26, a court ruled that Huda Nasrallah, a Coptic woman, was entitled to a share of her father's estate equal to those of her brothers. Nasrallah had challenged a lower court ruling that granted each of her brothers double her share. Nasrallah's appeal reportedly cited Article 245 of the Orthodox personal status bylaws, issued in 1938, which grants Coptic Christian women equal inheritance to men, and argued that sharia does not apply to her as a Copt.

In marriage and divorce cases, a woman's testimony must be judged credible to be admissible. Usually the woman accomplishes credibility by conveying her testimony through an adult male relative or representative. The law assumes a man's testimony is credible unless proven otherwise.

Labor laws provide for equal rates of pay for equal work for men and women in the public but not the private sector. Educated women had employment opportunities, but social pressure against women pursuing a career was strong. Large sectors of the economy controlled by the military excluded women from high-level positions.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship through their parents. The mother or the father transmits citizenship and nationality. The government attempted to register all births soon after birth, but some citizens in remote and tribal areas such as the Sinai Peninsula resisted registration or could not document their citizenship. In some cases failure to register resulted in denial of public services, particularly in urban areas where most services required presentation of a national identification card.

Education: Education is compulsory, free, and universal until the ninth grade. The law provides this benefit to stateless persons and refugees. Public schools enrolled Syrian refugees, but they largely excluded refugees of other nationalities.

Child Abuse: The constitution stipulates the government shall protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, mistreatment, and commercial and sexual exploitation. According to a local rights group, authorities recorded hundreds of cases of alleged child abuse each month. The quasi-governmental NCCM works on child abuse issues, and several civil society organizations assisted runaway and abandoned children.

Rights organizations reported children faced mistreatment in detention, including torture, sharing cells with adults, denial of their right to counsel, and authorities’ failure to notify their families. In a November 2018 report, AI alleged it had documented six instances of torture and 12 instances of enforced disappearances involving children since 2015. The State Information Service released a response denying the report.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal age of marriage is 18. On September 3, the NCCM announced it had received 432 complaints about child marriage cases on its hotline from 18 governorates since the beginning of the year. Families reportedly sometimes forced adolescent girls to marry wealthy foreign men in what were known locally as “tourism” or “summer” marriages for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution, or forced labor. According to the law, a foreign man who wants to marry an Egyptian woman more than 25 years younger than he is must pay a fine of LE 50,000 (\$3,030). Women’s rights organizations argued that allowing foreign men to pay a fine to marry much younger women represented a form of trafficking and encouraged child marriage. They called on the government to eliminate the system altogether. The Antitrafficking Unit at the NCCM is responsible for raising awareness of the problem.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law provides for sentences of not less than five years’ imprisonment and fines of up to LE 200,000 (\$12,120) for conviction of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The government did not adequately enforce the law. The minimum age for consensual sex is age 18.

Displaced Children: The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics and the NCCM estimated the number of street children to be 16,000, while civil society organizations estimated the number to be in the millions. The ministry offered shelters to street children, but many chose not to use them because staff treated the children as if they were criminals, according to local rights groups. According to rights groups, the incidence of violence, prostitution, and drug dealing in these shelters was high. Religious institutions and NGOs provided services for street children, including meals, clothing, and literacy classes. The Ministry of Health and Population provided mobile health clinics staffed by nurses and social workers. The Ministry of Social Solidarity also provided 17 mobile units in 10 governorates, offering emergency services, including food and health care, to street children.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>
(<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>).

Anti-Semitism

The country's Jewish community reportedly numbered fewer than eight individuals. There were a few reports of imams, who are appointed and paid by the government, using anti-Semitic rhetoric in their sermons.

Journalists and academics made statements on state-owned television endorsing conspiracy theories about Jewish domination of world media and economy. Responding to a play by Ain Shams University in Cairo that portrayed the Holocaust, a political science professor at Cairo University said it promotes “Israeli myths.”

In May Egyptian-born Canadian actor Mena Massoud received heavy criticism in the press and on various social media platforms over his interview with a prominent Israeli newspaper website.

In August media commentators and local anti-Zionist organizations strongly criticized a theater performance on the Holocaust performed by university students in the National Theater Festival, accusing members of the cast of glorifying Zionism and insulting Muslims.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/> (<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>).

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution states persons with disabilities are equal without discrimination before the law. The law prohibits discrimination in education, employment, health, political activity, rehabilitation, training, and legal protection.

The law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment. Government policy sets a quota for employing persons with disabilities of 5 percent of workers with disabilities for companies with more than 50 employees. Authorities did not enforce the quota requirement, and companies often had persons with disabilities on their payroll to meet the quota without actually employing them. Government-operated treatment centers for persons with disabilities, especially children, were of poor quality.

During the year the parliament approved, and the president signed, a law to establish the National Council for People with Disabilities (NCPD), an independent body that aims to promote, develop, and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and their constitutional dignity. The council subsequently signed a cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Justice to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities and to train employees in the government on how to help those with hearing impairments.

Persons with disabilities rode government-owned mass transit buses without charge, but the buses were not wheelchair accessible. Persons with disabilities received subsidies to purchase household products, wheelchairs, and prosthetic devices. Some children with disabilities attended schools with their nondisabled peers while others attended segregated schools. Some of the segregated institutions were informal schools run by NGOs. Some parents of children with disabilities often complained on social media of the lack of experience of teacher assistants assigned to help their children.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination on any grounds. Nevertheless, dark-skinned Egyptians and sub-Saharan Africans faced discrimination and harassment, as did Nubians from Upper Egypt.

According to the constitution, the state should make efforts to return Nubians to their original territories and develop such territories within 10 years of the constitution's 2014 ratification.

In April the State Security Emergency Court in Aswan fined 25 members of the indigenous Nubian minority LE 50,000 (\$3,030) each, and cleared eight defendants over charges of organizing an unsanctioned protest in 2017, disrupting public order, and halting traffic in the southern city of Aswan, to pressure the government to return to ancestral lands.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

While the law does not explicitly criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, it allows police to arrest LGBTI persons on charges such as “debauchery,” “prostitution,” and “violating the teachings of religion” and provides for prison sentences if convicted of up to 10 years. According to a local rights group, there were more than 250 reports of such arrests since 2013. Authorities did not use antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBTI individuals. Legal discrimination and social stigma impeded LGBTI persons from organizing or advocating publicly in defense of their rights. Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation and gender identity. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination. A Supreme Media Council (a semigovernmental body) ban on media supporting LGBTI persons and their rights continued. On January 21, a court in Giza sentenced television host Mohamed al-Ghiety to one year of hard labor for interviewing a gay man and also

fined him LE 3,000 (\$182) for “promoting homosexuality” on his privately owned LTC television channel. The gay man, whose identity was hidden, had talked about life as a sex worker.

There were reports of arrests and harassment of LGBTI individuals. Intimidation and the risk of arrest greatly restricted open reporting and contributed to self-censorship. Rights groups and activists reported harassment by police, including physical assault and forced payment of bribes to provide information concerning other LGBTI individuals or to avoid arrest. The government has the authority to deport or bar entry to the country of LGBTI foreigners.

There were reports that authorities used social media, dating websites, and cell phone apps to entrap persons they suspected of being gay or transgender, a method LGBTI advocates described as especially effective as LGBTI-friendly public spaces had largely closed during the past few years.

On March 6, authorities arrested a transgender woman for her alleged involvement in antigovernment demonstrations after a February 27 train crash in Cairo’s Ramses Station. According to local press, authorities sexually assaulted al-Kashef, subjected her to a public anal examination, and placed her in solitary confinement in a male prison. Authorities added her to an existing case which includes at least 35 persons, including transgender male Hossam Ahmed, who authorities also subjected to invasive physical exams and who remained in pretrial detention in a female prison as of December 16, despite a December 4 court order for his release. On July 18, al-Kashef was released from prison pending trial.

Rights groups reported that authorities, including the Forensic Medical Authority, conducted forced anal examinations. The law allows for conducting forced anal exams in cases of debauchery.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

HIV-positive individuals faced significant social stigma and discrimination in society and the workplace. The health-care system provided anonymous counseling and testing for HIV, free adult and pediatric antiretroviral therapy, and support groups.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

There were incidents of mob violence and vigilantism, particularly sectarian violence against Coptic Christian Egyptians. On July 1, the Court of Cassation upheld a death sentence issued against a suspect convicted of killing two Copts, terrorizing the Christian community of Shamiya village in Assiut, and imposing taxes on the village in 2013-14.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and strike, with significant restrictions. The constitution provides for freedom of association. The law prescribes union elections every four years and imposes a strict hierarchy for union formation consisting of a company-level trade union committee, a profession, or industry-level general union, and a national-level union. In June the International Labor Organization (ILO) Committee on the Application of Standards discussed the country's failure to meet the terms of Convention 87 concerning the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize. Specifically, the committee considered the minimum threshold of workers required to form an enterprise union appeared to restrict workers' freedom of association, since 90 percent of all economic activity in the country is conducted in small and medium enterprises with fewer than 50 employees. The committee also noted that the high threshold requirements for general unions and confederations guaranteed the government-sponsored confederation a de facto monopoly.

In July parliament amended the 2017 trade unions law. The amendments reduced the minimum number of workers required to form a trade union committee from 150 to 50, the number of trade union committees required to form a general union from 15 to 10, and the number of workers required to form a general union from 20,000 to 15,000. The new amendments also decreased the number of unions necessary to establish a trade union federation from 10 to seven and the number of workers in a trade union federation from 200,000 to 150,000. Furthermore, the amendments replaced prison penalties for violations of labor laws with financial penalties.

While the law provides for collective bargaining, it imposes significant restrictions. For example, the government sets wages and benefits for all public-sector employees. The law does not provide for enterprise-level collective bargaining in the private sector and requires centralized tripartite negotiations that include workers, represented by a union affiliated with the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), business owners, and the Ministry of Manpower overseeing and monitoring negotiations and agreements.

The constitution provides for the right to “peaceful” strikes. The Unified Labor Law permits peaceful strikes as well, but it imposes significant restrictions, including prior approval by a general trade union affiliated with ETUF. In May workers at the Mahala Egypt Spinning and Weaving Company went on strike over unpaid salaries and bonuses, which they ended when the company's administration promised to pay the delayed wages.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Labor laws do not cover some categories of workers, including agricultural and domestic workers, and other sectors of the informal economy.

The Ministry of Manpower and affiliated directorates did not allow trade unions to adopt any bylaws other than those provided in the law. This position, according to local workers' rights organizations, was contrary to the law, which states that unions can use the statutory bylaws as guidance to develop their own.

Government enforcement of applicable laws was inconsistent. The government also occasionally arrested striking workers and rarely reversed arbitrary dismissals. The government seldom followed the requirement for tripartite negotiations in collective disputes, leaving workers to negotiate directly with employers, typically after resorting to a strike.

Independent unions continued to face pressure to dissolve. In some cases the Ministry of Manpower delayed responding to unions’ applications for legal status, leaving many in legal limbo. In other instances the Ministry of Manpower refused to legalize proposed unions if an ETUF-affiliated counterpart existed. Independent labor activists claimed that the government placed obstacles on independent unions’ ability to participate in 2018 union elections by delaying or rejecting union registration.

Authorities arrested several labor organizers and subjected others to legal sanctions following the dispersal of a labor strike.

Workers sometimes staged sit-ins on government and private property, often without obtaining the necessary permits. Rights groups claimed authorities sometimes arrested those seeking to obtain protest permits. In January the engineers and workers in al-Nasr Contracting Company organized a strike at the New Administrative Capital to demand their late salaries. The security services reportedly arrested seven workers, including trade unionist Talal Atef. In April Sharabiya Appellant Misdemeanor Court sentenced the seven workers to 30 days in prison on charges of participating in an illegal gathering and refusing to perform their duties at work in order to harm the company. In March the Court of Cassation upheld a court ruling sentencing 27 police officers in South Sinai to three years in prison and cancelled a LE 6,000 fine over charges of protesting and going on strike. The incident dates back to January when 50 police officers in different sectors of South Sinai protested the Interior Ministry’s decision to reduce vacation days to 10 days a month instead of 15 days.

On September 16, security personnel in plain clothes arrested 19 workers who participated in a sit-in to demand payment of annual salary increases for the past two years and unpaid bonuses in a factory in Ismailia. The sit-in began on September 14 in front of the General Investment Authority and blocked the Cairo-Ismailia road. The prosecutor released 13 of the workers the same day without charges and detained six of them, including two women, for 15 days pending formal charges. On September 22, an Ismailia court released them on bail.

On October 7, thousands of Universal Company for Engineering Industries workers protested delayed salaries of three months and other unpaid benefits. Media reported that the protest continued for eight days and included 5,000 workers from different departments of the company.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution states no work may be compulsory except by virtue of a law. The government did not effectively enforce the prohibition but conducted awareness raising activities such as distributing antitrafficking informational booklets to migrant laborers, and the NCW conducted a media campaign about the treatment of domestic workers, a population vulnerable to trafficking, and worked with NGOs to provide some assistance to victims of human trafficking, including forced labor. Penalties were insufficient to deter violations.

Also see the Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/> (<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law does not prohibit all of the worst forms of child labor. The law sets the minimum age for regular employment at age 15 and at age 13 for seasonal employment. The constitution defines a child as anyone younger than 18. A Ministry of Manpower decree bars children younger than 18 from 44 specific hazardous occupations, while the law prohibits employment of children younger than 18 from work that “puts the health, safety, or morals of the child into danger.” Provincial governors, with the approval of the minister of education, may authorize seasonal work (often agricultural) for children age 13 and older, provided duties are not hazardous and do not interfere with schooling. The labor code and law limit children’s work hours and mandate breaks.

Overall, authorities did not enforce child labor laws effectively. The Ministry of Manpower, in coordination with the NCCM and the Interior Ministry, enforced child labor laws in state-owned enterprises and private sector establishments through inspections and supervision of factory management. Labor inspectors generally operated without adequate training on child labor issues, although the Ministry of Manpower offered some child labor-specific training. The government did not inspect noncommercial farms for child labor, and there were very limited monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for children in domestic service. When authorities imposed penalties for violations, fines were insufficient to deter violations.

Although the government often did not effectively enforce relevant laws, authorities implemented a number of social, educational, and poverty reduction programs to reduce children’s vulnerability to exploitive labor. The NCCM, working with the Ministries of Education and Social Solidarity, sought to provide working children with social security safeguards and to reduce school dropout rates by providing families with alternative sources of income.

Child labor occurred, although estimates on the number of child laborers varied. According to the 2012 joint ILO and Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics child labor survey, of the 1.8 million children working, 1.6 million were engaged in child labor, primarily in the agricultural sector in rural areas but also in domestic work and factories in urban areas, often under hazardous conditions. Children also worked in light industry, the aluminum industry, construction sites, brick production, and service

businesses such as auto repair. According to government, NGO, and media reports, the number of street children in Cairo continued to increase in the face of deteriorating economic conditions. Such children were at greater risk of sexual exploitation or forced begging. In some cases employers abused or overworked children. Children also worked in the production of limestone.

Also see the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings> (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>).

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution states all citizens “are equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on religion, belief, gender, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation, or any other reason.” It does not specify age, citizenship, sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases. In April the Ministry of Justice started its first training course for 22 employees working at the state’s real estate departments in Giza and Cairo to use sign language to help persons with disabilities fill out documents. The training comes as part of a cooperation protocol signed in January between the Justice Ministry and the newly established NCPD. While the law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment, the government did not effectively enforce prohibitions against such discrimination. Discrimination also occurred against women and migrant workers (see sections 2.d. and 6), as well as workers based on their political views.

An employee facing discrimination can file a report with the local government labor office. If the employee and the employer are unable to reach an amicable settlement, they can file their claim in administrative court, which may order the employer to redress the complaint or to pay damages or legal fees. According to local rights groups, implementation of the law was inadequate. Additionally, the lengthy and expensive litigation process could deter employees from filing claims.

Local rights groups reported several cases of employers dismissing workers or depriving them from work for expressing antigovernment opinions. In March the actors’ professional syndicate revoked the memberships of well-known actors Khaled Abul Naga and Amr Waked, describing their actions as amounting to “high treason” against the homeland and the Egyptian people. The syndicate’s decision came after the two actors participated in a congressional briefing in Washington regarding the human rights situation in Egypt.

In June the Ministry of Religious Endowments warned it would terminate the employment of imams in Sharqiyah Governorate who violated the ministry’s instructions not to hold funeral prayers for the late president Morsi, who died on June 17.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Challenges to improving working conditions in both the private sector and informal sector include uneven application or lack of regulations and restrictions on engaging in peaceful protests as a means of negotiating resolutions to workplace disparities. For example, there is no national minimum wage in the private sector, but the government sets a monthly minimum wage for government employees and public-sector workers, which is above the poverty line. According to labor rights organizations, the government implemented the minimum wage for public-sector workers but applied it only to direct government employees and included benefits and bonuses in calculating total salaries. For government employees and public business-sector workers, the government also set a maximum wage limit per month. The law does not require equal pay for equal work.

The law stipulates a maximum 48-hour workweek for the public and private sectors and provides for premium pay for overtime and work on rest days and national holidays. The law prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. The government sets worker health and safety standards, for example, prohibiting employers from maintaining hazardous working conditions. The law excludes agricultural, fisheries, and domestic workers from regulations concerning wages, hours, and working conditions.

The Ministry of Manpower is responsible for enforcing labor laws and standards for working conditions. The government did not effectively enforce the law. The ministry did not attempt to apply labor standards to the informal sector. Penalties, especially as they were often unenforced, were not sufficient to deter violations.

By law workers can remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to employment, although authorities did not reliably enforce this right. In March at least 10 workers were killed and 15 more were injured in an explosion at a military-owned phosphates and fertilizer production facility in Ain Sokhna, a port city east of Cairo. Workers blamed the factory's administration for failing to comply with the health and safety measures at the site. In May, three workers were killed when a fire broke out in a plastic factory in Sadat city in Menofia Governorate.

According to media reports, laborers in some remote areas worked in extremely dangerous environments. In North Sinai, workers' movements were restricted by local government-established curfews and checkpoints run by both the military and non-state armed groups. In June terrorists killed four civilian workers who were building a fence around the El Arish airport.

The government provided services, such as free health care, to all citizens, but the quality of services was often poor. Other benefits, such as social insurance, were available only to employees in the formal sector.

Many persons throughout the country faced poor working conditions, especially in the informal economy, which employed up to 40 percent of workers, according to some estimates. Domestic workers, agricultural workers, workers in rock quarries, and other parts of the informal sector were most likely to face hazardous or exploitive conditions.

There were reports of employer abuse of citizen and undocumented foreign workers, especially domestic workers. Little information was available on workplace fatalities and accidents.

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Annual report on human rights in 2019



Country:

Egypt

Source:

USDOS – US Department of State [\(/en/source/11558.html\)](/en/source/11558.html)

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/egypt/>
[\(https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/egypt/\)](https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/egypt/)

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

11 March 2020

Document ID:

2026355

Austrian Red Cross

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research
and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583

F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

