

NOW LIVE: Freedom in the World 2024



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2024

Egypt

NOT FREE

18
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	6 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	12 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

18 /100 **Not Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Overview

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who first took power in a 2013 coup, has governed Egypt in an authoritarian manner. Meaningful political opposition is virtually nonexistent, as expressions of dissent can draw criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Civil liberties, including press freedom and freedom of assembly, are tightly restricted. Security forces engage in human rights abuses with impunity. Discrimination against women, LGBT+ people, and other groups remains a serious problem, as do high rates of gender-based violence.

Key Developments in 2023

- In December, al-Sisi secured his third six-year term in an election that featured a campaign of arrests, intimidation, and strict conditions imposed on opposition candidates, actions that essentially eliminated any substantial competition.
- In May, regime representatives, opposition parties, union leaders, civil society actors, and other stakeholders opened a “national dialogue” that President Sisi had called for in 2021. The dialogue was greeted with skepticism by the opposition and civil society, and did not result any significant reforms before it was paused in advance of the presidential election.
- In August, the Justice Ministry announced the dismissal of criminal charges against 75 organizations involved in the “foreign funding” case that opened in 2011. However, over 20 human rights defenders and other dissidents affiliated with those organizations still face punitive measures, such as asset freezes and travel bans.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

President al-Sisi, who seized power in a 2013 coup while serving as Egypt’s Defense Minister and Commander of the Armed Forces, has remained in power via unfair

and noncompetitive processes. In December 2023's presidential election, the regime effectively barred any significant challengers from participating, and election authorities reported that Sisi won 89.6 percent of the vote. His victory came after a campaign marked by the arrest of opponents, intimidation, and stringent eligibility requirements for candidates, which collectively obstructed any meaningful competition. The election was originally scheduled for spring of 2024, but Sisi moved it up, with analysts speculating that he sought to hold the poll before implementing difficult economic reforms.

The election included three other candidates, none of whom were widely recognized. Ahmed Tantawi, the most prominent prospective opponent, suspended his campaign in October after failing to collect the number of signatures needed to qualify. His supporters faced targeted repression during the campaign: more than 10 of his family members and friends and more than 100 of his campaign staff were arrested before the election, with the intimidation campaign likely contributing to his difficulty collecting signatures. The Canada-based tech research group CitizenLab confirmed in September that Tantawi's mobile phone had been targeted with Predator spyware, adding that the circumstances surrounding the attack led them to attribute it "to the Egyptian government with high confidence."

Constitutional amendments adopted in 2019 added two years to Sisi's current term, extending it through 2024, though he secured a third term in the 2023 elections. Future presidents will be limited to two six-year terms.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

1/4

The 2019 amendments to the 2014 constitution reestablished the Egyptian parliament as a bicameral body in which members serve five-year terms. The upper house, the Senate, consists of 300 seats and has no significant legislative competencies. Two-thirds of senators are elected (half through closed party lists and half in individual seats) and one-third are appointed by the president. The House of Representatives comprises 568 members, half elected through closed

party lists and half in individual seats. The president has the right to appoint 28 additional members to the House.

The 2020 elections to both parliamentary bodies were marred by the widespread detention and intimidation of individuals who criticized the process; low turnout; claims of fraud; vote buying; and severe interference by security apparatuses. No credible groups were allowed to monitor the elections.

Without any competitor lists, the Unified National List, headed by the regime-allied Mostaqbal Watan (Nation's Future) Party, won all 100 party-list seats and 88 individual seats in the Senate; Mostaqbal Watan also won all 284 party-list seats and 31 individual seats in the House of Representatives. Another pro-regime party, independents, and small parties took the remaining seats in both houses. In October 2020, President Sisi appointed 100 mostly pro-regime members to the Senate.

Egypt has not held elections for local councils since 2008, and the last elected local councils were dissolved in 2011.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

1/4

While electoral laws provide an ostensible basis for credible elections, electoral authorities fail to ensure an open and competitive campaign environment. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) board consists of senior judges from some of Egypt's highest courts, serving six-year terms. The NEC's establishing legislation phases out direct judicial supervision of elections by 2024, which critics argue will further damage the integrity of elections and reduce public trust in the results.

To qualify for the presidential election, a potential candidate is legally required to obtain support from either 20 members of parliament or 25,000 voters spanning at least 15 governorates. In the 2023 presidential elections, the authorities exploited this requirement to disqualify potential competitors such as Ahmed Tantawi. His campaign, as it began to gather public support, faced intense suppression by security agencies, and he ultimately suspended it for failure to collect the necessary support.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

0/4

Political parties are legally allowed to form and operate, but in practice, activists, opposition parties, and political movements that criticize the regime face arrests, harsh prison terms, death sentences, extrajudicial violence, and other forms of pressure. Among recent cases, in September 2023, the well-known dissident and spokesperson of the Free Current Coalition Hesham Kassem was sentenced to six months in prison for defamation. His arrest in August came weeks after he had founded the coalition, which included liberal parties and independents. Also in September, political activist and former spokesperson for the April 6 Youth Movement, Mohamed Adel, was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of spreading false news on social media, after having already spent five years in pretrial detention; rights groups characterized his activity as peaceful expression. Former political prisoners have also been threatened with rearrest for their criticism of the regime. The Egypt-based families of exiled activists have faced persecution by state authorities.

Parties formed based on religion are forbidden. While some Islamist parties still operate in a precarious legal position, the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed in 2013 as a terrorist organization, and its political party was banned. Since then, authorities have systematically persecuted its members.

In May 2023, regime representatives, opposition parties, union leaders, civil society actors, and other stakeholders opened a “national dialogue” that President Sisi had called for in 2021. The dialogue, which excluded the Muslim Brotherhood, lasted for weeks, and was greeted with skepticism by the opposition and civil society. It ultimately did not result any significant reforms to Egypt’s legal, political,

and other structures. By September, the dialogue's board of trustees announced a temporary halt to its sessions, pending the conclusion of December's presidential election.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

0 / 4

By extending presidential term lengths and limits in 2019, controlling the electoral process, intimidating presidential and parliamentary candidates, and arresting and prosecuting those seeking to contest elections, the Sisi regime has made it nearly impossible for the opposition to gain power through elections.

Before the 2023 presidential election, Ahmed Tantawi, the most prominent potential challenger for Sisi, was systematically targeted by the Egyptian security apparatus, which arrested more than 10 of his family and friends, as well as dozens of his campaign staff; his phone was also infected with Predator spyware, likely also at the behest of the security services.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

1 / 4

Since the 2013 coup, the military and intelligence agencies dominate the political system, with most power and patronage flowing from Sisi and his domestic allies in the armed forces and security agencies. Regional support from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia has helped to stabilize the regime. Most of Egypt's provincial governors are former military or police commanders. Vaguely worded 2019 constitutional amendments further strengthened the legal underpinnings of the military's political influence, calling on it to "protect the constitution and democracy."

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

1/4

The constitution and Egyptian laws grant political rights to all citizens regardless of religion, gender, race, ethnicity, or any other such distinction. However, Christians, Shiite Muslims, people of color, and LGBT+ people face discrimination, which affects their ability to participate in political life. Sisi and the security apparatus's increasing control of elections and other aspects of society only permit these groups to represent their interests within the narrow scope of officially sanctioned politics, or risk harsh penalties for transgressing stated and unstated red lines. The diminishing power of the legislature further undercuts avenues for meaningful representation.

Gender quotas are meant to help elevate women to national office, and women held 27.5 percent of seats in the House of Representatives as of December 2021. In practice their interests are not prioritized in Egyptian politics.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0/4

President Sisi and the security apparatus dominate the policymaking process. The parliament has neither a significant role in forming and debating laws, nor the ability to provide a meaningful check on executive power. Laws originating in Sisi's cabinet receive parliamentary approval without meaningful contestation or deliberation.

The 2019 constitutional amendments further consolidated Sisi's authority and increased the military's constitutional role in civilian governance and already considerable independence from civilian oversight.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	1/4
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Corruption is pervasive at all levels of government. Official mechanisms for investigating and punishing corrupt activity remain weak and ineffective. President Sisi controls the Administrative Control Authority, the body responsible for most anticorruption initiatives. It lacks credibility, transparency, and impartiality, and cannot monitor the military's substantial economic activities.

In August, international news outlets reported the seizure of a private plane in Zambia that had originated from Egypt and was found carrying \$5.7 million in cash. Among the Egyptian citizens apprehended were defense contractors and former and current security officials.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	1/4
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The Sisi administration provides little transparency regarding government spending and operations and denies civil society groups and independent journalists opportunities to comment on, oversee, or influence state policies, including through intimidation and censorship.

Although the government makes its budget documents, including debt obligations, accessible to the public, data on debt held by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) remains inaccessible. Moreover, state budget documents do not include allocations to military SOEs, and audits for large SOEs are never public. The military is notoriously opaque with its budget and extensive business interests.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

0/4

The Egyptian media sector is dominated by progovernment outlets; most critical or opposition-oriented outlets were shut down in the wake of the 2013 coup. Private media are generally owned by businesspeople linked to the military and intelligence services. Intelligence apparatuses limit the availability of credible information while shaping citizen attitudes by promoting conspiracy theories, disinformation, and animosity toward the political opposition.

Independent reporting is suppressed through restrictive laws and intimidation, and foreign journalists face obstruction by the state. In August, Matsadaash journalist Karim Asaad was arrested at his home by agents who reportedly assaulted his wife and threatened his child. He was held for more than a week; Matsadaash had been involved in exposing the Zambia airplane incident. During Sisi's rule, Egypt has been consistently ranked by press freedom organizations as having the largest number of incarcerated journalists. In August 2023, the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate reported that there were 24 journalists in prison, including nine of its syndicate members.

Multiple laws allow authorities to censor online content without judicial approval and block any website considered to be a threat to national security—a broad stipulation that is vulnerable to abuse. To date, the total number of blocked websites and links has risen to 562, which includes at least 132 links to journalistic websites. Human rights websites have also been blocked. Penal code amendments passed in 2021 tightened punishments for journalists who cover criminal trial sessions without prior approval and toughened penalties for disclosing classified information. The amendments increased potential fines and allow for prison terms of up to five years.

Separately, in December, the Supreme Administrative Court upheld the rejection of a licensing request from independent media outlet Mada Masr.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

1/4

While Article 2 of the 2014 constitution declares Islam to be the official religion, Article 64 states that “freedom of belief is absolute.” Most Egyptians are Sunni Muslims. Coptic Christians form a substantial minority, and there are smaller numbers of Shiite Muslims, non-Coptic Christian denominations, and other groups. Religious minorities and atheists have faced persecution and violence, with Coptic Christians in particular suffering numerous cases of forced displacement, physical assaults, bomb and arson attacks, and blocking of church construction in recent years. Informal reconciliation sessions following instances of sectarian conflict have denied Coptic Christians justice for acts of violence against them. Religious minority groups are often persecuted for expressing their beliefs publicly and are sometimes charged with blasphemy by the authorities.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

1/4

The state controls education and curriculums in public schools and to a lesser degree in some private institutions. Faculty members and departments have some autonomy in shaping specific courses, though many scholars self-censor to avoid punitive measures. University professors can be dismissed for on-campus political activity, and several prominent academics are in prison for expressing political views. The government imposes strict requirements for academics to obtain approval from security officials for travel abroad. Authorities have significant control over the appointment of university presidents and can expel students for political reasons.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

1/4

Individuals who express personal views contrary to preferred state narratives are subject to reprisals. Criticism of the president online or in public can result in imprisonment. Security agencies extensively surveil and tightly regulate social media companies and users, as well as mobile phone applications. Arrests of activists over social media posts and other activities are common and send a clear message to ordinary citizens that voicing dissent is intolerable. Overall suppression of dissent by Al-Sisi's government has sparked a wave of outward migration.

Authorities have targeted content creators on social media platforms, most notably TikTok. Many cases are against women, in which they are accused of spurious crimes including "inciting debauchery." In March 2023, the Court of Appeal dismissed Mawaddah al-Adham's appeal against her sentence of six years in prison, in one of a series of cases popularly known in the media as involving "the TikTok girls." Her case involves women influencers accused, without sufficient evidence, of human trafficking in relation to their video content. The ruling is conclusive and cannot be further appealed.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	0 /4
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Though the constitution guarantees the right to free assembly, the Interior Ministry can legally ban, postpone, or relocate protests with a court's approval. Unauthorized gatherings of 10 or more people can be dispersed forcefully. Thousands of protesters have been arrested since these strict laws were introduced in 2013, and some jailed protesters have received death sentences. Because of this crackdown, protests are rare.

From early 2023 through mid-September, security forces arrested more than 2,000 people for peaceful expression or assembly, according to according to the

independent human rights campaign Until the Last Prisoner. In October, at least 100 individuals were arrested for participating in pro-Palestinian protests following the Israeli military campaign in Gaza.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

0 / 4

In recent years, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have faced mass closures as well as harassment in the form of office raids, arrests of members, lengthy legal cases, and restrictions on travel. A 2019 law constrains the activities of NGOs deemed to threaten national security, public morals, and public order, and imposes onerous reporting requirements and intrusive monitoring systems. Punishments for violations of the law are severe.

In August 2023, the Egyptian Ministry of Justice (MoJ) announced the dismissal of criminal charges against 75 organizations involved in the “foreign funding” case that opened in 2011. However, over 20 human rights defenders and other dissidents affiliated with those organizations still face punitive measures, such as asset freezes and travel bans.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

1 / 4

The government only recognizes unions affiliated with the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation. While Article 15 of the constitution provides for the right to organize peaceful strikes, they are not tolerated in practice, and the law on protests prohibits gatherings that impede labor and production. Striking workers have in the past been arrested and prosecuted. Workers at military-owned businesses are subject to trials by military courts.

On May 30, 2023, prior to the announcement of the voting results for Tarek El-Nabrawi’s reelection as head of the Engineers Syndicate, assailants reportedly linked to four lawmakers from the pro-regime party Mostaqbal Watan stormed the syndicate’s headquarters. They proceeded to damage ballot boxes and destroy

ballots. El-Nabrawi is known for his independent stances and connections to the political opposition. In a development reflecting a degree of independence among unions, Khaled el-Balshy, a prominent government critic, was elected head of the 12,000-member journalists' syndicate in March.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	1/4
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The executive branch exerts influence over the courts, which typically protect the interests of the government, military, and security apparatus and have often disregarded due process and other basic safeguards in cases against the government's political opponents and all forms of independent expression. The 2019 constitutional amendments further strengthened the president's supervisory and appointment powers over the judiciary and undermined its independence.

In July 2022, President Sisi appointed a military general to be the Supreme Constitutional Court's first deputy justice, which further placed the country's institutions under Sisi's control.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	0/4
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Since 2013, Egyptian authorities have increasingly imposed months-long or even years-long pretrial detentions on opposition members, journalists, and activists as retribution for their activities. These due process violations have effectively normalized the use of the justice system for political purposes. Egyptian courts hold remote pretrial detention renewal sessions via video conference, with detainees participating from prisons under police supervision. This practice increases the risk of abuse for political prisoners, who are hesitant to report mistreatment in front of prison officials who control their daily lives.

Although the constitution limits military trials of civilians, a 2014 presidential decree placed all “public and vital facilities” under military jurisdiction, referring thousands of civilian defendants to military courts. That change was made permanent in November 2021. Charges brought in military courts are often vague or fabricated, defendants are denied due process, and basic evidentiary standards are routinely disregarded.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0/4

Security forces continue to wield illegitimate force with impunity. Counterterrorism laws provide a vague definition of terrorism and grant law enforcement personnel sweeping powers and immunity in enforcement.

Prison conditions are very poor. Inmates are subject to physical abuse, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and denial of medical care. Under President Sisi’s rule, dozens have died in custody amid reports of torture, food and water deprivation, and physical punishment for those protesting or demanding better treatment or denial of timely and adequate health care. The prison system is rife with extortion, bribery, and corruption, including the lucrative smuggling of drugs and mobile phones by supervisors with immunity.

Use of the death penalty has increased dramatically since Sisi took power, despite serious concerns about due process violations and politicized prosecutions. Over the past decade, according to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), an advocacy group, 4,202 death sentences have been handed out by Egyptian courts, of which 448 have been implemented. Of those implemented, the group said many cases involved “trials largely reliant on torture-tainted ‘confessions.’”

As 2023 marked the 10th anniversary of the Rabaa Massacre in Cairo, authorities have not undertaken any prosecutions related to the killing of hundreds of protesters by military and security personnel that day.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various

1/4

Though the constitution stipulates equality for women, women face extensive discrimination, particularly in employment and in the justice system. Coptic Christians, other religious minorities such as Baha'i people, people with dark skin from southern Egypt, people with disabilities, LGBT+ people, and migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa also face various forms of discrimination and harassment.

Different personal status laws govern Muslims and Christians, which commonly results in discrimination against Christians.

While same-sex sexual conduct is not explicitly banned, people suspected of such activity can be charged with prostitution or "debauchery." The police regularly arrest people on such charges.

Although Egypt hosts 280,000 Sudanese refugees, the Egyptian government's June 2023 decision mandating visas for all Sudanese entering Egypt has restricted the accessibility to safety for women, children, and elderly individuals seeking refuge from the ongoing Sudanese conflict. During the Israeli campaign in Gaza, Egypt provided humanitarian aid across its border with the Gaza Strip, but opposed the creation of safe corridors for refugees fleeing the conflict.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?	1/4
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The constitution guarantees freedom of movement, but internal travel and access are restricted tightly in North Sinai and to a lesser extent in other governorates along Egypt's borders. Sinai residents are subject to curfews, checkpoints, and other obstacles to travel. In recent years, tens of thousands of people have fled abroad, seeking refuge from domestic repression, and consulates have frequently

refused to issue or renew the identity documents of perceived dissidents in exile. A growing list of rights activists, journalists, political party members, bloggers, and academics have been subjected to arbitrary international travel bans in recent years. Foreign researchers and activists have been expelled or denied entry to the country.

Individuals seeking to change their place of employment or education can encounter bureaucratic barriers and scrutiny from security officials.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

2 / 4

Under Sisi, military authority is woven into many aspects of Egypt's economy. The military runs businesses, produces goods, and manages megaprojects and infrastructure that benefit from tax and customs exemptions, free labor through conscripted soldiers, lack of public budget oversight, and land allocation through presidential decrees. Opportunities for private businesses are limited. Prominent businessmen have faced political harassment, arrest, travel bans, and defamation in state-owned media. In December 2023, facing pressure from international lenders and a deteriorating Egyptian economy, President Sisi approved a plan to privatize several state-owned companies, including by selling them to strategic investors. Most of these companies are not owned by the military, which maintains a dominant role in the economy.

Property rights in Sinai and other border areas are affected by the activities of security forces. Women are at a legal disadvantage in property and inheritance matters, typically receiving half the inheritance due to a man. Societal biases also discourage women's ownership of land.

In November 2021, President Sisi approved legal amendments allowing the Egyptian military to secure vital facilities, including gas stations, gas lines, oil fields, railways, road networks, and bridges. According to the amendments, crimes against public and vital facilities and properties are subject to the military judiciary's jurisdiction.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

2 / 4

Domestic violence, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation (FGM) are still among the most acute problems in Egyptian society. While the penalties for FGM were toughened in 2021, the laws' implementation is hindered by societal resistance, poor enforcement, police abuses, and lack of adequate protection for witnesses, all of which deter victims from contacting authorities. Spousal rape is not a crime. A series of violent crimes against women in 2022 and 2023 drew popular attention, highlighting the pervasiveness of gender-based violence.

Personal status rules based on religious affiliation put women at a disadvantage in marriage, divorce, and custody matters. Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men, for example, and the Coptic Church rarely permits divorce.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

1 / 4

Women and children, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and Syrian refugees are vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking in Egypt. Authorities routinely punish individuals for offenses that stem directly from their circumstances as trafficking victims. Military conscripts are exploited as cheap labor for military- or state-affiliated development projects.



On Egypt

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

18/100 Not Free

Internet Freedom Score

28/100 Not Free

Other Years

2023

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