

Document #2068728

Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2022 - Egypt

Not Free

18

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 6 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 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 increasingly 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 and extrajudicial killing with impunity. Discrimination against women, LGBT+ people, and other groups remain serious problems, as does a high rate of domestic violence.

Key Developments in 2021

- In December, an emergency court sentenced activists and human rights defenders Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed al-Baqer to five and four years in prison, respectively, after being convicted of spreading false news and undermining state security. Egyptian authorities had held both activists in prison since 2019.
- In October, President Sisi suspended the state of emergency that was imposed in 2017. The suspension should end the use of emergency courts, which do not satisfy the minimum standards of fair trials. However, the decision does not preclude hearing cases that were already referred to those courts, nor does it invalidate repressive legislation that was integrated into criminal law.
- According to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, in the first two months of 2021 alone, seven prisoners were executed by Egyptian authorities, 67 new defendants were sentenced to death, and 48 new defendants received provisional death penalty sentences. In April, at least seven convicted prisoners were executed.

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

The president is elected by popular vote for up to two terms. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who first took power in a 2013 coup while serving as Egypt's defense minister and armed forces commander, has been elected only through unfair, noncompetitive contests. In the 2018 elections, Sisi received 97 percent of the votes after pressuring all opposition candidates to withdraw, leaving only Mousa Mostafa Mousa, head of the Al-Ghad Party who had campaigned for Sisi, in the race. Voting in 2018 was marred by low turnout, the use of state resources and media to support Sisi's candidacy, voter intimidation, and vote buying.

Constitutional amendments adopted in 2019 added two years to Sisi's current term, extending it through 2024, at which point he will be allowed to seek an additional six-year term. Beyond this, 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 Senate members are elected (half through closed party lists and half through individual seats) and one-third are appointed by the president. The House of Representatives consists of 568 members, half elected through closed party lists and half through individual seats. The president has the right to appoint 28 additional members to the House.

The 2020 elections to both bodies of the parliament were neither free nor fair and 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 proregime party, the Republican People’s Party, won 6 individual Senate seats and 50 individual House seats. Independents and small parties took the remaining seats in the Senate and House. In October 2020, President Sisi appointed 100 mostly proregime members to the Senate.

Egypt has not held elections for local councils since 2008. The last elected local councils were dissolved in 2011; since then, government-appointed officials, mostly consisting of former police and military officers, have dominated local governance and politics.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant 1 / election management bodies? 4

While electoral laws provide some basis for credible elections, electoral authorities largely fail in practice to ensure an open and competitive campaign environment. The board of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) consists of senior judges drawn from some of Egypt’s highest courts, who serve 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. In November 2021, Hossam Bahgat, director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights was fined 10,000 pounds for insulting NEC.

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 0 / competing parties or groupings? 4

Political parties are legally allowed to form and operate, but in practice there are no political parties that offer meaningful opposition to the incumbent leadership.

Activists, parties, and political movements that criticize the regime face arrests, harsh prison terms, death sentences, extrajudicial violence, and other forms of pressure. Known as the Al-Amal (Hope) Coalition case, at least 15 individuals were detained in 2019 before launching a secular coalition to run in the 2020 parliamentary elections. In November 2021, an emergency court sentenced without appeal coalition leaders Zyad el-Elaimy Hossam Monis, Hisham Fouad, and three others to multi-year prison terms for posting critical content on social media. Some members of this group were reportedly subjected to torture while in detention. Thousands of other opposition figures remain in prison, where they live in unsanitary conditions.

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.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through 0 / elections? 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 makes it nearly impossible for the opposition to gain power through elections.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political 1 / sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 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 help in stabilizing the regime domestically and globally. 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” for the sake of citizens’ rights that are not respected by Egyptian authorities.

In July 2021, President Sisi approved amendments to some provisions of Law No. 10 of 1972 that would allow the dismissal of public servants if they were found to undermine state security or be on a terrorism list. The amendments enable authorities to further target opposition supporters working in the civil service.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other 1 / relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 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 and are denied access to rights, which in turn 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.

Though President Sisi has approved laws tightening punishments on female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual harassment, women generally struggle to see their interests represented in politics. Women held 27.7 percent of seats in the House of Representatives as of mid-2021, in large part due to legal gender quotas.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies 0 / of the government? 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. Many laws originate in Sisi’s cabinet.

The 2019 constitutional amendments further consolidated Sisi’s authority and increased the military’s already considerable independence from civilian oversight and its constitutional role in civilian governance. The amendments allow the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to permanently control the appointment of the defense minister, who is also the commander in chief.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption is pervasive at all levels of government. Official mechanisms for investigating and punishing corrupt activity remain weak and ineffective. The Administrative Control Authority (ACA), the body responsible for most anticorruption initiatives, is under the control of Sisi. It lacks credibility, transparency, and impartiality and is not allowed to monitor the economic activities of the military. Thus, the ACA is believed to be an instrument for Sisi to control bureaucracy, manage key patronage networks, and serve the regime’s propaganda.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

The Sisi administration has provided very little transparency regarding government spending and operations and denies civil society groups and independent journalists opportunities to comment on or influence state policies. The military is notoriously opaque with its budget and its extensive business interests.

The government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by opacity and lack of transparency on the numbers of cases and deaths. Regime-allied outlets that dominate the media sector spread misinformation about the illness. Many doctors were arrested for publicly criticizing the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and coronavirus tests.

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 owned by businesspeople and individuals tied to the military and intelligence services. Independent reporting is suppressed through restrictive laws and intimidation, while foreign journalists face obstruction by the state. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) noted that Egypt detained the third-most journalists in the world in 2021, with 25 in detention at the end of the year.

Intelligence apparatuses seek to shape citizen attitudes by promoting conspiracy theories, disinformation, and hatred toward opposition and critics through media outlets they own or control. Moreover, authorities block news websites and target independent journalists, limiting citizens’ access to credible information.

In July 2021, Abdel Nasser Salama, former editor in chief of state-run newspaper *Al-Ahram*, was detained on

terrorism and false news charges after writing an article calling for President Sisi to resign.

Two laws ratified in 2018 pose additional threats to press freedom. The Media Regulation Law prescribes prison sentences for journalists who “incite violence” and permits censorship without judicial approval, among other provisions. The 2018 Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law allows authorities to block any website considered to be a threat to national security, a broad stipulation that is vulnerable to abuse. Websites of independent news and information entities are regularly blocked. In June 2021, the president approved amendments to the penal code tightening punishments for journalists who cover criminal trial sessions without prior approval. In November, President Sisi further toughened penalties for disclosing state classified information, increasing potential fines and allowing for prison terms between six months and 5 years.

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 Copts 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 Copts justice for acts of violence against them. In November 2021, Ahmed Abdo Maher, a lawyer and Islamic thinker, was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of defaming Islam and “stirring up sectarian strife.”

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 of the country’s private institutions. Faculty members and departments have some autonomy in shaping specific courses, though many scholars self-censor to avoid any 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, and many have been subject to prosecution by emergency courts.

Since 2013, university students have been arrested, faced disciplinary sanctions such as expulsion, military trials, and extrajudicial killings for their political activism. In June 2021, an emergency court in Egypt sentenced researcher and graduate student Ahmed Samir Santawy to four years in prison for publishing false news.

D4 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of 1 /
surveillance or retribution? 4**

Individuals who express personal views contrary to preferred state narratives are subject to reprisals. Arrests of activists over social media posts and other activities are common and send a clear message that voicing dissent is intolerable, which contributes to self-censorship among ordinary Egyptians. In recent years, authorities have targeted content creators on social media platforms, most notably TikTok, for various spurious charges. Progovernment media figures and state officials regularly call for national unity and suggest that only enemies of the state would criticize authorities.

In December 2021, an emergency court in Cairo sentenced activist and blogger Mohamed Ibrahim, also known as Mohamed Oxygen, to four years in prison. He was convicted of spreading false news and undermining state security.

Security agencies use surveillance equipment and techniques to monitor social media platforms and mobile phone applications. The Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law requires telecommunications companies to store users’ data for 180 days, further enabling widespread government surveillance. The law also broadly criminalizes online expression that “threatens national security.” The 2018 Media Regulation Law subjects any social media user with more than 5,000 followers to government monitoring and regulation.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 0 / 4

According to the constitution, freedom of assembly should not be restricted. However, the Interior Ministry can legally ban, postpone, or relocate protests with a court’s approval. Unauthorized gatherings of 10 or more people can be subject to forced dispersal. Protest organizers must inform police of their plans at least three days in advance. Thousands of protesters have been arrested since 2013 (when these strict laws were introduced), and some jailed protesters have received death sentences. Because of this government crackdown on assembly rights, protests are extremely rare.

E2 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human 0 /
rights- and governance-related work? 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 restrictive 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 2021, authorities arrested and imprisoned activists and dissidents on spurious charges, including undermining state security.

In December 2021, an emergency court sentenced activists and human rights defenders Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed al-Baqer to five and four years in prison, respectively, after being convicted of spreading false news and undermining state security. Authorities had held both activists in prison since 2019.

Political dissidents abroad are targeted by espionage operations, and their families in Egypt have increasingly faced persecution by state authorities. In February, authorities raided the homes of six members of the extended family of Mohamed Soltan, a US-based human rights advocate, after Soltan sued a former Egyptian prime minister in June 2020 over his arrest and torture.

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. Authorities failed to protect striking workers in July and August 2021, allowing the large manufacturing company LORD International to unfairly dismiss and punish workers on strike.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

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 powers over the judiciary and undermined its independence. The changes allow the president to appoint the heads of judicial bodies and authorities, choosing from among several candidates nominated by their governing councils. The president also serves as the veto-wielding head of the Supreme Council for Judicial Bodies and Authorities, which controls appointments and disciplinary matters for the judiciary. The chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court is chosen by the president from among its most senior members.

A number of detained government critics and opposition figures have been prosecuted in the emergency courts created when President Sisi declared a state of emergency in 2017, which remained in effect until October 2021. Decisions in these courts are subject to approval by Sisi, who can reverse or commute sentences without right to appeal.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 0 / 4

Since 2013, Egyptian authorities have increasingly used months- or even years-long pretrial detentions as retribution for opposition members, journalists, and activists. These severe violations of due process rights and legal standards has normalized the use of the Egyptian justice system for political purposes.

Although the constitution limits military trials of civilians, a 2014 presidential decree placed all “public and vital facilities” under military jurisdiction, resulting in the referral of thousands of civilian defendants to military courts. That expansion of jurisdiction 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.

In October 2021, President Sisi suspended the state of emergency that was imposed in 2017. The suspension should end the use of emergency courts, which do not satisfy the minimum standards of fair trials. However, the decision does not preclude hearing cases that were already referred to those courts, nor does it invalidate repressive legislation that was integrated into criminal law.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

Police brutality and impunity for abuses by security forces were catalysts for the 2011 uprising against former president Hosni Mubarak, but no reforms have since been enacted and security forces continue to wield illegitimate force with impunity. Antiterrorism laws provide a vague definition of terrorism and grant law enforcement personnel sweeping powers and immunity in enforcement. Prison conditions are very poor, and prisons were grossly unequipped during the COVID-19 pandemic to treat the illness or prevent its spread. Inmates are subject to physical abuse, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and denial of medical care.

Use of the death penalty has increased dramatically since Sisi took power, despite serious concerns about due process violations and politicized prosecutions. According to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, in the first two months of 2021 alone, seven prisoners were executed by Egyptian authorities, 67 new defendants were sentenced to death, and 48 new defendants received provisional death penalty sentences. In April, at least 7 convicted prisoners were executed. In June, the Court of Cassation upheld death sentences for 12 prisoners based on their involvement in protests related to the ouster of former president Mohamed Morsi from power in July 2013.

Conflict continues between security forces and adherents of the Islamic State (IS) militant group based in the North Sinai region. Both terrorist attacks and military operations have resulted in civilian casualties. For years, Egyptian security forces have carried out extrajudicial executions, claiming that the victims had been killed in shootouts. In August 2021, a video released by the spokesperson of the Egyptian armed forces praising the success of military operations in North Sinai and the killing of 89 militants, appeared to show the killing of two unarmed people who clearly posed no threat to the security forces present.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 1 / 4

Though the constitution stipulates equality for women, their court testimony is not equal to that of men in cases involving personal status matters and they are disproportionately marginalized. In practice, women face extensive discrimination in employment, among other disadvantages. Other segments of the population that are subject to various forms of harassment and discrimination include Coptic Christians and other religious minorities, people of color from southern Egypt, migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, people with disabilities, and LGBT+ people.

While same-sex sexual conduct is not explicitly banned, people suspected of such activity can be charged with prostitution or “debauchery.” The police have carried out dozens of such arrests in recent years. An October 2020 Human Rights Watch (HRW) review of the cases of 13 LGBT+ individuals prosecuted between 2017 and 2020, found that many of the 13 were tortured or sexually assaulted by police officers.

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, 1 / employment, or education? 4

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.

Individuals seeking to change their place of employment or education can encounter bureaucratic barriers and scrutiny from security officials. In addition, a growing list of rights activists, journalists, political party members, bloggers, and academics have been subjected to arbitrary bans on international travel in recent years. Foreign researchers or activists have been expelled or denied entry to the country.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without 2 / undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4

Under Sisi, the military is woven into many aspects of Egypt’s economy. It runs businesses, produces goods, and manages megaprojects and infrastructure that benefit from tax and customs exemptions, free labor (conscripted soldiers), lack of public budget oversight, and allocation of lands through presidential decrees. Opportunities for private businesses are limited. In December 2020 and February 2021, the authorities arrested Safwan Thabet, the founder and majority shareholder of Egypt’s largest dairy products and juice producer Juhayna, and his 40-year-old son, Seif; detained them in inhumane conditions; and charged them with funding terrorism after they refused to release control of Juhayna’s assets.

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 that gave the Egyptian military the authority to secure vital facilities (including gas stations, gas lines, oil fields, railways, road networks, bridges, and other public facilities and properties). According to the amendments, crimes against public and vital facilities and properties are subject to the jurisdiction of the military judiciary.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, 2 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4

Domestic violence, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation (FGM) are still among the most acute problems in Egyptian society, though in April 2021, the government toughened penalties for FGM. However, the effectiveness of such laws is hindered by societal resistance, poor enforcement, abuses by the police themselves, and lack of adequate protection for witnesses, all of which deter victims from contacting authorities. Spousal rape is not a crime.

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 stemmed directly from their circumstances as trafficking victims. Military conscripts are exploited as cheap labor to work on military- or state-affiliated development projects.

ecoi.net summary:

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