

Freedom on the Net 2022



header1 Overview

Internet freedom and the rights of internet users are severely constrained in Egypt. The Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) continued to manipulate the media landscape by blocking independent news sites and forcing publishers to remove online content deemed critical of the government. Criminal penalties, harassment, and surveillance have contributed to high levels of self-censorship among Egyptian internet users, particularly independent media outlets and government critics. Authorities continued their practice of “recycling” detainees, and some journalists, activists, and bloggers who were imprisoned on earlier charges were resented during the coverage period.

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 with impunity. Discrimination against women, LGBT+ people, and other groups remain serious problems, as does a high rate of domestic violence.

header2 Key Developments, June 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022

- News websites were permanently blocked by Egyptian authorities without explanation or due process during the coverage period, including the “180 investigation” website (see B1).
- In January 2022, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) announced that it would suspend its online campaigning activities following ongoing harassment from security forces (see B8).
- Though President Sisi ended the state of emergency in October 2021, many repressive laws that undermine freedom of speech online remained in effect (see C1 and C2).
- In December 2021, prominent activist and blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of “spreading false news undermining national security.”

He had been held in pretrial detention since 2019 (see C3).

- In December 2021, a member of the Egyptian political opposition and an Egyptian journalist were targeted by Cytrox's Predator Spyware. Reports indicate there is a high likelihood that the attacks came from the Egyptian government (see C5).
- Authorities continued to harass journalists, bloggers, and activists. At least two social media users were forcibly disappeared during the coverage period (see C7).

A Obstacles to Access

A1 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?	4.004 6.006
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The Egyptian government has made efforts to improve the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and increase the number of internet users, though internet connections continue to suffer from poor quality and low speeds. As of January 2022, internet penetration stood at 71.9 percent while the mobile phone penetration rate was 93.4 percent.

Mobile and broadband speeds remain relatively slow. According to Ookla data from June 2022, Egypt ranked 86th out of 138 countries for mobile internet speeds and 83rd out of 178 countries for fixed-line broadband speeds.¹ Egypt also ranked 77th out of 130 countries in the 2021 Network Readiness Index, receiving its highest score in the governance pillar (trust, regulation, and inclusion).² Such improvement is attributed to the 60 billion Egyptian pound (\$3.82 billion) investment that the government has made to promote digital transformation and development.³

The National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA) has led reforms to upgrade the telecommunications infrastructure and increase internet speeds by installing fiber-optic cables. In November 2021, the NTRA approved new frequencies for mobile operators with the goal of enhancing the quality of voice and data services.⁴ In November 2018, the NTRA announced that more advanced fifth-generation (5G) mobile networks were expected to be launched in Egypt by 2020.⁵ In February 2019, Telecom Egypt partnered with Nokia to deploy 5G technology and test it in the Egyptian market.⁶ In September 2021, the cabinet's Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC) announced an agreement between the government and Exxon and Nokia to upgrade the cloud core network and provide 5G networks.⁷ In February 2022, service provider Orange received new frequencies to be used for 4G and 5G service deployment.

In September 2021, Telecom Egypt announced that it would improve the ICT infrastructure and secure access to high-speed internet services by providing fiber-optic networks to approximately 1,413 rural villages and towns. This project will impact more than one million buildings including around three million housing units.⁸ In November 2021, the IDSC further reported that public investments in digital transformation had increased by 62.8 percent to reach 12.7 billion Egyptian pounds (\$806 million) in 2020 and 2021, a 4.9-billion-pound increase over the previous year. This includes the provision of internet services to 2,563 high schools at a cost of 1 billion Egyptian pounds (\$63 million) and will connect 18,000 governmental buildings to fiber-optic cables with a budget of 6 billion Egyptian pounds (\$380 million).⁹

A2 1.00-3.00 pts0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?	1.001 3.003
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Broadband internet connections are relatively affordable. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), while 90 percent of the population in Egypt can afford mobile broadband services, fixed broadband costs remain high at approximately 2 percent the monthly per

capita income.¹⁰ According to the World Bank, Egypt's GDP per capita is around 73,332 Egyptian pounds (\$4,652.21).¹¹

While state-owned internet service provider (ISP) Telecom Egypt continues to dominate the sector, increased competition among mobile providers has caused a decrease in broadband prices. According to Cable, a London-based broadband comparison website, Egypt ranked ninth out of 220 countries on consumer broadband prices as of January 2022. Cable also reported that Egypt was one of the cheapest countries in the world for broadband packages, with an average price of \$16.67.¹² A monthly 140 gigabyte (GB) mobile package costs 120 Egyptian pounds (\$7.61).¹³

The distribution of fixed-line internet access varies across different parts of the country. In December 2021, 36 percent of the country's Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) subscriptions were in greater Cairo, 34 percent were in the Nile Delta region, 15 percent were in Upper Egypt, 10 percent were in Alexandria and Matrouh, and 5 percent were in the Sinai, Red Sea, and Suez Canal areas.¹⁴ In addition to the urban-rural divide, factors such as gender, wealth, and education level significantly impact internet access in Egypt.¹⁵ According to regional digital rights organization SMEX, men have more access to communication and information technologies than women.¹⁶

Internet penetration is hindered by digital illiteracy, among other factors. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Inclusive Internet Index 2022 ranked Egypt 57th out of 120 countries due to high prices and low digital literacy.¹⁷

In 2015, Facebook zero-rating services were provided by Emirati telecommunications firm Etisalat for two months, during which time three million internet users gained free access to the internet. The service was suspended shortly before the fifth anniversary of the 2011 revolution, which had been driven in large part by organizing on social media.¹⁸ Reuters reported that the zero-rating services were suspended because Facebook had refused to comply with a government request to help conduct surveillance.¹⁹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, some ISPs offered discounts on internet packages.²⁰

A3 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?	4.004 6.006
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Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because no deliberate disruptions to the internet occurred during the coverage period, and Telegram, which experienced disruptions last year, was freely available.

The government has considerable control over internet infrastructure and has restricted connectivity.

Article 67 of the Telecommunication Regulation Law provides Egyptian authorities with the power to commandeer telecommunication services and networks of any operator or service provider. This means that the NTRA, alongside the military and national security agencies, is entitled by law to set the operational plan for the deployment of telecommunication networks during cases provided in Article 67, such as "natural or environmental disasters" or "any other cases concerning national security."²¹

The government has centralized the internet infrastructure and fiber-optic cables to create highly controllable choke points.²² In addition, virtually all of Egypt's telecommunications infrastructure is property of Telecom Egypt. Decree 242, issued in 2019, put the telecommunications infrastructure under the ownership of the National Service Projects Organization, which is run by the Ministry of Defense.²³

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services have been intermittently blocked on mobile networks. Disruptions to Facebook Messenger and Skype were reported during the September 2019 protests (see B1).²⁴ Interruptions of VoIP services were further reported amid the COVID-19 crisis.²⁵ In October 2020, Telegram was reportedly blocked for customers of mobile service providers We, Vodafone Egypt, and Orange Egypt after authorities blocked access to the service's IP addresses.²⁶ The NTRA provided no justification for these disruptions.

Periodic blockages of VoIP traffic over mobile networks were documented as early as 2010,²⁷ and in 2013, the NTRA announced the establishment of a committee to "monitor" communications on WhatsApp and Viber.²⁸ Making international calls over VoIP networks is technically illegal under Article 72 of the 2003 Telecommunication Regulation Law.²⁹

In December 2018, signal jamming was reported by international journalists visiting North Sinai,³⁰ and in April 2019, communications disruptions were reported on social media following attacks by the Islamic State (IS) militant group in the Sinai city of Sheikh Zuweid's central market.³¹ Security forces reportedly shut down the internet and other communications networks for several hours as a result of the attacks.³²

A4 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?

3.003
6.006

The Egyptian ICT market is dominated by a small number of companies, creating obstacles to competition and innovation.

Three companies largely control the mobile phone market. Vodafone Egypt enjoys the greatest market share, with 40.5 percent, while Orange Egypt has 33 percent. The latter, formerly known as Mobinil, underwent rebranding in 2016 and is now 99 percent owned by its French parent company.³³ Etisalat Misr, with a 24 percent market share, is 66 percent owned by Etisalat, which has strong ties to the United Arab Emirates.³⁴ In 2017, state-owned Telecom Egypt officially launched We,³⁵ the country's fourth mobile network. Telecom Egypt also owns about 45 percent of Vodafone Egypt.

Telecom Egypt, under the banner TE Data, controls 75 percent of the ADSL market. Egypt's other main ISPs are Etisalat Egypt, Noor, and Vodafone Data. These companies lease lines from TE Data and resell bandwidth to smaller ISPs.³⁶ In 2016, Etisalat Misr obtained a license to offer fixed-line services via Telecom Egypt's infrastructure. Shortly after, Orange Egypt and Vodafone announced that they would also provide fixed-line services; however, a 2020 report from the Oxford Business Group reported that none of the companies launched fixed-line services.³⁷

In November 2021, Vodafone International Group approved the transfer of 55 percent of its shares in Vodafone Egypt to Vodacom (its sub-Saharan African subsidiary) in exchange for cash and new shares in Vodacom. Vodacom announced that it will "sign (a) deed of adherence to the shareholders' agreement with Telecom Egypt,"³⁸ which owns 44.95 percent of Vodafone Egypt.³⁹ The transfer was expected to be finalized in March 2022, pending the approval of the NTRA, however it is unclear if the deal had been finalized at the end of the coverage period.

A5 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?

1.001
4.004

Telecommunications services and ISPs are regulated by the NTRA under the 2003 Telecommunication Regulation Law, which does not guarantee the NTRA's independence.⁴⁰

The authority is subordinated to the MCIT, and the members of its board are selected by the prime minister, who also determines their salaries.⁴¹ The NTRA board is chaired by the ICT minister and includes representatives from the Ministries of Defense, Finance, and Interior; the National Security Council; the presidency; and trade unions, among others.⁴² Officially, the NTRA is responsible for ensuring a competitive market environment, managing the frequency spectrum, setting industry standards, and overseeing interconnection agreements.⁴³ In addition, it aims to enhance and integrate advanced telecommunications and broadband technologies.⁴⁴

The NTRA played a significant role in the five-day shutdown of internet and mobile services during the 2011 revolution. According to a judgment by an administrative court, the authority participated in all stages of the shutdown and represented the MCIT in this operation. It also worked with telecommunications companies to follow the Interior Ministry's decree calling for the shutdown; in the same judgment, the decree was ruled an infringement on the right to communicate, among others.⁴⁵

B Limits on Content

B1 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	1.001 6.006
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The state continued to block news websites during the coverage period as part of a wider crackdown on freedom of expression. Through Article 7 of the Law on Combating Information Technology Crimes, the NTRA can order telecom companies to block websites.⁴⁶

In November 2021, the website Disclose, a nonprofit newsroom and investigative journalism organization, was blocked after it revealed that French companies had sold surveillance systems to Egypt (see C5).⁴⁷ In July 2021, the “180 investigation” website were blocked permanently by Egyptian authorities without reason or due process (see B3).⁴⁸ In July 2022, after the coverage period, authorities blocked access to three separate links for the Al-Manassa website.⁴⁹

In November 2020, IFEX reported that at least 600 websites had been blocked by the authorities since May 2017, including 394 virtual private network (VPN) and proxy providers and 116 news sites.⁵⁰ While some of these websites were blocked temporarily, others remained blocked throughout the coverage period.

In October 2020 it was reported that the Egyptian government had used Sandvine's technology to block hundreds of websites, including 100 independent news and media websites and the popular citizen news platform Al-Manassa (see C5).⁵¹

Many international and local news sites are blocked, some of which have been blocked since the beginning of 2017. Blocked sites include Huffington Post Arabic, financial newspaper *Al-Borsa*, and the entire online publishing platform Medium, where blocked news outlet *Mada Masr* had reposted its content. Websites run by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the April 6 Youth Movement (which was active in the 2011 revolution), and jailed democracy activist Alaa Abdel Fattah are also inaccessible.

After the endorsement of the media regulations law in 2018 (see B3), several websites were blocked by the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR). In April 2020, the SCMR blocked the electronic edition of privately-owned newspaper *Al-Masry al-Youm*. While the SCMR's decision did not refer to any legal provisions to justify its measures, it was reportedly prompted by a series of articles on Sinai published by newspaper owner Salah Diab under a pseudonym.⁵²

In March 2019, the SCMR fined newspaper *Al-Mashhad* 50,000 Egyptian pounds (\$3,200) and instituted a six-month website block after it allegedly defamed media figures by publishing inappropriate photographs,⁵³ representing the first case of enforcement of the 2018 media regulation law. In April 2019, after *Al-Mashhad* appealed, the SCMR reduced the blocking duration to one month, though the site remained blocked for longer.⁵⁴ In December 2018, five sites owned by MO4 were blocked for lacking licenses (see B6).⁵⁵

Monitoring group NetBlocks found that more than 34,000 websites were blocked ahead of the April 2019 constitutional referendum in an apparent bid to suppress opposition to the amendments, which were adopted in a deeply flawed vote.⁵⁶ Reports of 11 messaging apps, including Wickr, Signal, and Wire, being blocked or restricted by authorities surfaced in September 2019.⁵⁷ NetBlocks reported disruptions to Facebook Messenger, Twitter, Skype, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and other news sites in the wake of antigovernment protests the same month (see A3 and B8).⁵⁸ The SCMR's head stated that the blockings were "likely" due to "inaccurate" coverage of the protests.⁵⁹

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the SCMR blocked or limited access to several websites for disseminating purportedly false news about the coronavirus.⁶⁰ In March 2020, six social media accounts were blocked for "inciting violation of the preventive measures taken by the state" to fight the pandemic.⁶¹ In April 2020, Masaar reported that several websites covering the pandemic were blocked on several service providers.⁶²

Egyptian authorities also blocked alternative domains of websites that commented on the coronavirus in a way that did not conform to official information (see B5).⁶³ In April 2020, Darb, a news outlet run by the opposition Socialist Popular Movement Party, was blocked a month after its launch. Darb had published calls for the release of prisoners of conscience during the pandemic.⁶⁴

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	1.001
	4.004

In recent years, the government has removed objectionable content from certain outlets. In August 2019, an article on poverty in Egypt by professor Mostafa El-Said was banned in the *Al-Shorouk* newspaper. The reason for the ban was not clear; the article relied on income and expenditure data published by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. El-Said announced via his Facebook account that the outlet did not impose the ban.⁶⁵

During the coverage period, prominent journalism professor Ayman Mansour Nada shared a Facebook post criticizing the Egyptian media landscape and specifically a lieutenant in the Egyptian intelligence services who is known as "Egypt's editor in chief." The post was deleted a few hours after being posted, but was republished later by another Facebook user. Nada was later arrested after writing a series of articles that were critical of various media personalities with close ties to the government.⁶⁶

Other tactics have been used by nonstate actors to control the digital space. Private citizens can lodge legal complaints against the "violation of public morality" on social media, which allows authorities to censor online content, curtail freedom of expression online, and clamp down on internet users.⁶⁷

Social media content is removed following demands from the government. Recently authorities have launched a systematic crackdown on female TikTok content creators (see B8 and C3).⁶⁸ Progovernment lawyers have filed lawsuits against social media influencers, at times resulting in their content being deleted.⁶⁹ In 2021 the SCMR ordered 212 Facebook accounts, 10 Twitter accounts, and 5 Instagram accounts to be blocked, although it is unclear whether social media companies complied with the ruling.⁷⁰

News outlets regularly remove articles from their own websites. In May 2018, the Arabic website of Russian state broadcaster RT was pressured to remove an online poll it had posted regarding the disputed territories of Halayeb and Shalateen on the Egyptian-Sudanese border. The poll had drawn formal rebukes from the State Information Service (SIS) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and triggered the cancellation of an interview with the foreign minister.⁷¹

Shortly before the September 2019 protests, the SCMR published an article under the title “Blocking and fines are the penalty for spreading rumours in the media,” reiterating Article 17 of the SCMR’s Sanctions Regulations, which provides penalties for spreading false news or rumors or inciting violation of the law. The sanctions vary from a penalty of up to 250,000 Egyptian pounds (\$15,900) to “preventing the publication or the broadcast or blocking the page or the program or the website for a specific period or permanently.”⁷²

B3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?	1.001 4.004
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The legal framework that regulates the digital space includes restrictions that are neither necessary nor proportionate, and largely lack transparency.

A May 2018 Supreme Administrative Court decision limited the ability of administrative courts to restrict executive orders for online censorship and facilitated new legislation granting judicial and executive bodies, including the NTRA,⁷³ the right to block websites on national security grounds.⁷⁴

In August 2018, a few months after the ruling, President Sisi signed a law to combat cybercrime and a law on media regulation.⁷⁵ The cybercrime law, Law No. 175 of 2018 (see C2), allows state authorities to block websites without a judicial order on national security or economic grounds, which are vaguely defined. Personnel at service providers that do not respond swiftly to blocking decisions could face prison and fines.⁷⁶ The government claimed that the law was meant to combat online theft and hacking.⁷⁷ The media regulations law, Law No. 180 of 2018 (see B6 and C2), requires that news sites obtain an SCMR license. However, whether blocked websites are able to apply for one, and whether they would remain blocked after obtaining one, is unclear.⁷⁸

In March 2019, officials published the SCMR’s list of sanctions, which included potential penalties for violations of the media-regulation law such as suspensions, fines, and other disciplinary actions.⁷⁹ Furthermore, according to the law, the SCMR has leverage not only over news websites but also over personal accounts that have more than 5,000 followers (see B6).⁸⁰ Additionally, the criminal code includes provisions regarding the dissemination of “blasphemous or defamatory material” which could be used to legally compel service providers to block such materials.⁸¹ The broadly worded 2015 antiterrorism law allows authorities to block content or websites that promote terrorism.⁸²

In December 2019, the parliament approved the establishment of a State Ministry of Information, which Sisi approved in January 2020. The ministry will coordinate efforts with media regulatory bodies and state authorities. The constitution does not refer to this new entity, however, and its establishment is at odds with constitutional provisions on the media regulator’s independence.⁸³

B4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?	1.001 4.004
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Repressive criminal laws and the rising number of arrests for social media posts has had a chilling effect on online speech (see C2 and C3). Advanced censorship and surveillance also incentivize users to self-censor and curtail political opposition on digital platforms.⁸⁴ Online journalists are often reluctant to publish on sensitive topics, including sectarian tensions, sexuality, the Muslim

Brotherhood, political detainees, military operations in the Sinai, and the military's outsized role in the national economy.

Harassment also leads people to self-censor. In July 2020, a gay man was harassed on Facebook for his sexual orientation and was later assaulted offline. He temporarily closed his account after receiving intimidating messages and death threats (see C7).⁸⁵

A study published by the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) in June 2020 found that, news outlets refrain from publishing content critical of the government for fear of website blocks, or of further retaliation if they are already blocked.⁸⁶

B5 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?	1.001 4.004
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State officials actively manipulate information online, and the media landscape is dominated by the online versions of state-owned newspapers or outlets that are backed by government-connected businessmen.⁸⁷ Journalists and bloggers face intimidation and smear campaigns from progovernment outlets. During the coverage period, pro-Sisi influencers promoted government actions and policies on social media.⁸⁸

During the coverage period, online commentators attempted to manipulate the narrative around Tunisia's political crisis. Media outlets, commentators, and social media influencers praised Tunisian president Saied's "triumph" over Ennahda—a political party in Tunisia that its opponents have linked to the Muslim Brotherhood despite objections from Ennahda members. In Egypt, these commentators used the opportunity to launch unfounded accusations against the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸⁹

Inauthentic online behavior is an issue in Egypt. A report by Just Security identified examples of both progovernment and antigovernment online content manipulation in September 2020. According to the report, thousands of users called for the downfall of the Sisi regime and others countered with pro-Sisi support. Hashtags from both sides demonstrated signs of coordinated inauthentic behavior. Despite this, it was confirmed that the Egyptian state is the "largest and most sophisticated" deployer of content manipulation. While small-scale demonstrations did occur in September 2020, Egyptian state media framed the antiregime social media trend as "a hashtag war against the Egyptian people."⁹⁰

Twitter and Facebook have reported multiple incidents of coordinated inauthentic behavior in Egypt. In November 2020, Facebook removed 14 accounts, pages, and groups belonging to a network that targeted Egyptian and other audiences. Some accounts associated with the Muslim Brotherhood were also removed.⁹¹ Twitter disclosed "state-backed actors" were inauthentically disrupting conversations between January and June 2020. Twitter reported actions taken against 52,000 accounts ascribed to information operations in Egypt and several other countries.⁹² In April 2020, Twitter reported the removal of 2,541 government-linked accounts.

Government agencies have sought to improve their public opinion in the media by recruiting young Instagram influencers to their new media ambassadors program. While it is unclear whether the government is paying the influencers, they have been told that the program will help boost their platforms and increase their follower count.⁹³ Most of these influencers are appointed directly by the Ministry of Defense or indirectly as "state cheerleaders" to promote state narratives on social media.⁹⁴

The authorities have created two WhatsApp groups to convey instructions to media outlets on what to report and what the redlines are. The group "Editors" is administered by the General Intelligence Service (GIS) and the second is administered by the Interior Ministry. In May 2019, media outlets were provided instructions through messages on the groups to abide by the ministry's statement

regarding the explosion near Cairo's Grand Egyptian Museum.⁹⁵ In January 2020, directions were broadcasted to refrain from covering former US president Donald Trump's Middle East plan and to not touch upon its "violations of Egyptian and Arab principles regarding the Palestinian issue."⁹⁶

In June 2020, the SCMR banned print and online media outlets from covering the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, COVID-19, and conflicts in Libya and the Sinai Peninsula. The SCMR confirmed the measures, stating that social and online media must only publish official data when covering these issues.⁹⁷

B6 1.00-3.00 pts0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?	0.000 3.003
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The economic viability of independent news sites is constantly under threat. Many such outlets have closed, and others face financial troubles. Those subjected to blocking have suffered revenue losses, leading some to suspend their operations.⁹⁸

In June 2019, the board of *Al-Tahrir*, whose website had been blocked since that May, announced that the newspaper would be bankrupt within two months if the website was not unblocked. The newspaper, though offered in print, secured 80 percent of its revenues via online advertisements. *Al-Tahrir* staff had sought all possible means to investigate the reasons behind the website's blocking. It contacted the SCMR, NTRA, MCIT, and ISPs, but no explanation was given.⁹⁹

In June 2018, the parliament approved three laws regulating the media.¹⁰⁰ The laws, which replaced existing legislation and were all signed by the president in August 2018, govern three official bodies: the National Press Authority, which mainly oversees state-owned print outlets; the National Media Authority, which is primarily responsible for state-owned broadcast outlets; and the SCMR, which supervises the media more broadly, including online media. The legislation regarding the SCMR, Law No. 180 of 2018, contained a number of new restrictions, stipulating that no media outlets could be established or managed in Egypt without an SCMR license. Moreover, the law defines media outlets to include blogs and personal social media accounts with at least 5,000 followers, subjecting the individuals behind them to account removal, fines, and imprisonment if they are found to be spreading purportedly false news (see B3 and B6).¹⁰¹ In addition, the law requires media outlets to pay a fee of 50,000 Egyptian pounds (\$3,200) to obtain a license from the SCMR and gain legal status.¹⁰² Outlets must also have at least 100,000 Egyptian pounds (\$6,400) in capital. The law allows sites to be blocked on several grounds, including spreading purportedly false news (see B3).¹⁰³

As of September 2021, social media influencers who earn over 500,000 Egyptian pounds (\$32,000) annually will be required to pay a tax to the Egyptian government. Authorities have begun reaching out to social media platforms like YouTube and Meta to get information on bloggers, influencers, and content creators who fall within this bracket.¹⁰⁴

Registering a web address using Egypt's .eg domain requires the submission of personal data and copies of the applicant's national identification document (see C4), which may inhibit local sites from publishing criticism of the government.

In May 2020, the SCMR banned journalists and writers working for newspapers and websites from using pseudonyms without prior written consent. Those seeking to write under a pseudonym are required to identify their reason in their requests.¹⁰⁵

B7 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?	2.002 4.004
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Online media have struggled to maintain their independence and diversity of views given the arduous conditions of, and sweeping restrictions imposed by, new regulations and local practices. Egyptians resort to social media as the main source of information despite it also being monitored and censored (see B3 and C7).

In 2022, the most widely read news outlets, according to Alexa rankings, were primarily tabloids, news portals aligned with the government, and sports websites.¹⁰⁶

The blocking of hundreds of websites has negatively affected the diversity of media, and consequently of critical opinions (see B1). According to a 2018 survey conducted by Northwestern University in Qatar, only 3 percent of internet users in Egypt used VPNs, which can be employed to bypass blocking and reach obstructed sites.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, 54 percent of 2019 respondents said that they feel comfortable speaking about politics, compared to 79 percent reported in 2018. Only 42 percent of respondents believed that Egyptians should be able to express ideas online even if they are unpopular.¹⁰⁸

The dissemination of fake news and misinformation adversely impacts internet users' trust of online content. During the COVID-19 crisis, fake news and false information regarding the pandemic was rampant, making it difficult for online users to access evidence-based information.¹⁰⁹

B8 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?	3.003
	6.006

Digital activism and political organizing have been less prevalent in recent years due to widespread arrests, harsh prison sentences for dissidents and protesters, and the use of deadly force to suppress demonstrations.¹¹⁰ A law passed in 2013 effectively banned protests and gave police broad powers to crack down on unauthorized assemblies.¹¹¹

Authorities frequently disrupt the work of organizations or individuals who campaign on human rights issues online. In January 2022, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) revealed that it will suspend its activities after its staff experienced "thefts, violent physical assaults, and illegal summons" following the hostile campaign by the security forces to hinder the operation of the network and its staff.¹¹² The ANHRI led multiple online campaigns on issues such as police reform and free expression.

In April 2022, a group of antigovernment expatriates created an online petition calling for the suspension of the Egyptian parliament and expressing a lack of confidence in President Sisi. The petition garnered major attention on social media, and authorities responded by launching a "state of high cyber security alert." According to a government source, authorities debated hacking the online accounts of those sharing the petition (see C8), reporting them to social media platforms, or sending online trolls loyal to Sisi to target those sharing the petition.¹¹³

Despite these challenges, internet users are still able to organize around social and political issues. In June 2021, an online campaign to raise awareness of marital rape emerged after Egyptian actress Nada Adel, who had recently accused her husband of marital rape, took to social media to discuss the issue. This encouraged other women to speak up and publish their stories on a "SpeakUp Initiative" Facebook page.¹¹⁴

Since April 2020, the authorities have cracked down on female TikTok users for allegedly "violating family values and principles" under Articles 25 and 26 of the cybercrime law (see B3 and C3). In solidarity with the convicted women on TikTok, an online female-led campaign called for the women's release, condemned the arbitrary charges they received, and posited a petition with the hashtag "with permission from the Egyptian family."¹¹⁵ In August 2020, Masaar disclosed that

it filed a memorandum to the Cairo Misdemeanors Economic Court of Appeal in response to the TikTok crackdown, arguing that Article 25 of the cybercrime law was unconstitutional.¹¹⁶

In September 2019, social media users called for protests against President Sisi after corruption allegations involving the president surfaced.¹¹⁷ Thousands of citizens demonstrated across Egypt and security agents responded violently and arrested almost 2,000 people (see C3).¹¹⁸ Most of the arrested political activists, human rights advocates, and internet users were detained for being highly critical of the government online and offline.¹¹⁹ Following the protests, many dissenting voices and social media platforms were blocked online (see B1).¹²⁰ During the demonstrations, police and plainclothes security forces seized and searched the mobile devices of citizens who were forced to unlock their devices and social media accounts, which were checked for evidence of antigovernment sentiment.¹²¹

C Violations of User Rights

C1 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?	0.000 6.006
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The constitution contains language that nominally guarantees freedom of the media, stating that Egyptians “have the right to own and issue newspapers and establish visual, audio, and digital media outlets.”¹²² Under Article 34, the government is given the role of preserving online security, while under Article 70, the government is responsible for regulating online newspapers and visual and radio broadcast stations. Article 71 forbids censorship and states that no individuals should be jailed for crimes committed through publication. However, exceptions are made for censorship in “times of war or general mobilization,” and penalties for “incitement to violence” and “discrimination amongst citizens or impugning the honor of individuals” are to be specified by law. Article 211 outlines the establishment of a national media council tasked with regulating “the affairs of radio, television, and printed and digital press” and ensuring that the press maintains a commitment to “professional and ethical standards, as well as national security needs.”¹²³

In April 2019, the parliament approved amendments to the constitution that would allow Sisi to stay in power until 2030, extending his current four-year term to six years and permitting him to seek an additional six-year term in 2024. Among other changes, the amendments granted the president greater control over the judiciary and expanded the political and judicial authority of the military.¹²⁴

In October 2021, President Sisi terminated the state of emergency,¹²⁵ which was first introduced in April 2017 and renewed 11 times.¹²⁶ That said, numerous laws that threaten freedom of expression, such as the 2015 antiterrorism law (see C2), remain in effect.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the government passed a number of amendments to existing legislation that codify many of the provisions from the emergency law.¹²⁸

In November 2019, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson declared that freedom of expression is protected in Egypt, except when it targets state institutions, transcends the constitution or law, or violates international obligations. Finally, he asserted that only the judiciary can investigate these cases and that defendants have the rights and necessary safeguards to defend themselves.¹²⁹

The SCMR was created in 2016, with the power to fine and suspend media organizations.¹³⁰ The constitution permits the trial of civilians who break these laws in military courts, despite objections from political activists.¹³¹

C2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	0.000
	4.004

The legal framework that governs online activity restricts freedom of expression in a variety of ways. Defamation is considered a criminal offense and included in the penal code.¹³²

The 2015 antiterrorism law broadened the scope of crimes that are considered terrorism and prescribed harsh penalties for nonviolent acts.¹³³ Article 27 establishes a minimum five-year prison sentence for creating a website that incites violence, hosts content that misleads authorities on terrorism cases, or communicates with or organizes terrorist groups.¹³⁴ Activists argued that the broad language of the law could apply to any peaceful political party or advocacy group.¹³⁵ Finally, journalists face heavy fines for disputing official accounts of militant attacks. In March 2019, a parliamentary committee proposed amendments that prescribe severe penalties for expressing opinions online. Ostensibly promoting extremist ideology could carry a 10-year prison sentence, while promoting terrorist acts, extremist ideology, or ideas and beliefs that advocate violence could result in imprisonment of 15 years.¹³⁶

In 2015, President Sisi issued a separate law broadening the definition of “terrorist entities” to include anyone who threatens public order “by any means,” allowing the state to draw up lists of alleged terrorists or terrorist organizations.¹³⁷ The law was met with skepticism from legal experts and human rights activists, who said that its vague wording could allow the state to designate political parties, student unions, or human rights organizations as terrorist groups.¹³⁸ In February 2020, the parliament approved amendments to the definition of “a terrorist entity” and removed satellite channels, radio stations, and social media from the list of alleged terrorist groups in response to internal government backlash.¹³⁹

Amendments to the law on states of emergency, the antiterrorism law, and the criminal code were rushed through in 2017 after terrorist attacks on three Coptic Christian churches. The amendments allowed for the indefinite detention of individuals suspected of threatening national security through the use of special emergency courts. The right to appeal the decisions of such courts and obtain a fair trial were curtailed. Police may also detain individuals for seven days without bringing them before a judge or prosecutor.¹⁴⁰

In August 2018, the president signed the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law, or Law No. 175 of 2018.¹⁴¹ It authorizes the blocking of websites that are deemed a threat to national security and punishes individuals who visit banned websites with up to one year in prison. Creators or managers of websites that are later banned could face up to two years in prison.¹⁴²

During the coverage period, the Egyptian parliament approved a bill that would criminalize the publication of fake news during a health crisis. The law, presumably a result of the spread of disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, would include a yearlong prison sentence and a fine of 10,000 Egyptian pounds (\$635) for “anyone who deliberately publishes or spreads false news or tendentious rumors related to the situation of an epidemic.” As the bill stands, only journalists would be exempt from prosecution.¹⁴³

C3 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	0.000
	6.006

Internet users in Egypt operate in a highly repressive environment. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), there was a decline in the total number of imprisoned journalists throughout 2021,¹⁴⁴ however, Egypt remains one of the world’s worst jailers of journalists.¹⁴⁵ In many cases, the government justifies these arrests under the guise of “counterterrorism.”¹⁴⁶ In addition to fines, arrests, and prison sentences, some civil society leaders have faced travel bans and asset freezes.¹⁴⁷

Between July and September 2021, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) documented 13 violations against internet users including arrests for political or “moral” reasons and charging 3 already-detained activists for previous online posts. Such practices are meant to coerce online users into self-censorship and prevent them from publishing content that is critical of the government.¹⁴⁸

Since the state of emergency was lifted (see C1), the Emergency State Security Courts no longer examine criminal cases, however, the courts continued proceedings against a number of human rights defenders and journalists.¹⁴⁹ Rights groups heavily criticized some of these trials, during which the defendants were not allowed to mount a defense or deliberate with their lawyers.¹⁵⁰

The following were some of the more notable new criminal cases involving online posts and commentary during the coverage period:

- In January 2022, prominent women’s rights activist Amal Fathy was sentenced to a year in prison after she criticized authorities for their “failure to protect women from sexual harassment” in a Facebook video.¹⁵¹
- In January 2022, Adel Morsi Ahmed, a journalist with Al-Manar, was arrested after criticizing security officials in Assiut Governorate on his Facebook account. He was charged with joining a terrorist group and spreading false news.¹⁵² It is unclear if he is still being detained.
- In November 2021, Hossam Bahgat, the executive director and founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), was charged with “insulting the elections authority,” “spreading false news,” and “using a social media account to commit these crimes.”¹⁵³ Bahgat had been arrested in December 2020 after he published a Twitter post that condemned alleged corruption during the country’s 2020 parliamentary elections. He was fined 10,000 Egyptian pounds (\$635).
- Upon his arrival in Egypt in February 2021, Ahmed Samir Santawy, an Egyptian researcher and anthropology student at a university in Vienna, was forcibly disappeared for five days and interrogated about his research on women’s sexual and reproductive rights. He was also reportedly tortured by National Security Agency officials (see C7). In June 2021, Santawy was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of publishing “false news” on social media that condemned human rights violations in Egypt and the state’s mishandling of the pandemic.¹⁵⁴
- In July 2021, content creator Nancy Ayman, known on social media as Moka Hegazy, was arrested and later charged with “promoting immorality and debauchery and infringing on public morals by publishing immoral videos on social media.” The prosecution also ordered the arrest of an otherwise unidentified person named Moaz, for allegedly helping Hegazy film and publish videos of her dancing.¹⁵⁵ In February 2022, Hegazy was sentenced to three years in prison.¹⁵⁶
- In July 2021, journalist Abdel Nasser Salama was arrested after publishing a Facebook post that called upon President Sisi to resign because of the way he handled the water management dispute with Ethiopia. He was charged with spreading false news and funding and joining a terrorist group and put in pretrial detention for 15 days.¹⁵⁷
- In July 2021, TikTok influencer Yasmine Abdel Razek El-Fouly (known as Hohos girl) and her videographer were detained after posting videos that allegedly violated “public morals and values.”¹⁵⁸ In September 2021, a court in Alexandria sentenced El-Fouly and her videographer to three years in prison and ordered each to pay a fine of 200,000 Egyptian pounds (\$10,552), on charges of “inciting immorality” and debauchery by broadcasting videos on TikTok.¹⁵⁹
- In July 2021, after posting a video on Facebook calling on officials to send his son back to work at the Ministry of Interior’s traffic department, Fawzy Belal was arrested at his workplace in Alexandria. In August 2021, the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) charged him with joining a terrorist group and detained him for 15 days pending investigation.¹⁶⁰
- In September 2021, after posting a video that satirically addressed the poor living conditions and high prices in Egypt, Nagy Fawzy Ali Moawad and his nephew Taha

Hamd were charged with joining a terrorist group, spreading false news, and misusing social media. They were detained for 15 days pending investigation.¹⁶¹

- In March 2021, human rights activist Sanaa Seif was sentenced to 18 months in prison for “broadcasting fake news and rumors” regarding the spread of COVID-19 and health conditions in Egypt.¹⁶² Seif, who had been held in pretrial detention since June 2020, was released in December 2021 after completing her sentence.¹⁶³
- In April 2020, university student Haneen Hossam was detained for allegedly “inciting debauchery” and “promoting human trafficking” among Egyptian women on TikTok by publishing a video explaining how to use the app for financial gain.¹⁶⁴ That July, the Cairo Economic Misdemeanor Court sentenced her to two years in prison and a fine of 300,000 Egyptian pounds (\$19,000).¹⁶⁵ In June 2021, she faced charges carrying a 10 year prison sentence and a fine of 200,000 Egyptian pounds (\$10,552).¹⁶⁶ Her trial was postponed, and in April 2022 she was sentenced to three years in prison.¹⁶⁷
- In May 2020, social media influencer and director of the Likee app, Mawada Eladhm, was detained for “violating family principles and values in Egyptian society” and “establishing, managing, and using [websites and social media accounts] with the aim of committing those crimes.” In July, Eladhm and three Likee staff members were each sentenced to two years in prison and fined 300,000 Egyptian pounds (\$19,100). Eladhm was charged with posting “indecent” dance videos and “violating the values and principles of the Egyptian family,” along with other charges.¹⁶⁸ In June 2021, she was sentenced 6 years in prison and fined 200,000 Egyptian pounds (\$10,552).¹⁶⁹

In an effort to bypass the Criminal Procedures Law, which outlaws the extension of pretrial detention for more than four years, authorities have embarked on a practice of “recycling defendants.”¹⁷⁰ Many human rights activists received renewed detentions on old or new cases.¹⁷¹

The following are examples from the coverage period of the Egyptian authorities’ practice of recycling detainees. These people were charged before the coverage period, then received new sentences during this coverage period:

- In September 2019, blogger Mohamed Ibrahim ‘Oxygen’ was arrested on new charges after being released on probation in July 2019. In October 2019, a Cairo criminal court ordered his detention on charges related to “membership of a terrorist organization,” “defamation,” and “misuse of social media.”¹⁷² In February 2020, his detention was renewed for 15 days.¹⁷³ Shortly before his expected November 2020 release date, he received an additional charge for membership of a terrorist organization and was detained pending an investigation.¹⁷⁴ In December 2021, the Misdemeanors Emergency State Security Court in Cairo sentenced Oxygen to four years in prison on charges of “spreading false news undermining national security.”¹⁷⁵
- In September 2019, prominent activist and lawyer Mahienour El-Masry was arrested and held in pretrial detention.¹⁷⁶ Her detention was renewed for 45 days in December 2020 and again in January 2021.¹⁷⁷ In July 2021, El-Masry was released pending investigation into charges of publishing false news.¹⁷⁸
- In September 2019, Alaa Abdel Fattah, a prominent activist and blogger, who was jailed for five years and released on probation in March 2019, was arrested. It was reported that Abdel Fattah was beaten during his detention in Tora.¹⁷⁹ In July 2020, Abdel Fattah’s detention was renewed for the third time.¹⁸⁰ In December 2021, the Misdemeanors Emergency State Security Court in Cairo sentenced Alaa Abdel Fattah to five years in prison on charges of “spreading false news undermining national security.”¹⁸¹ In April 2022, Abdel Fattah started a hunger strike protesting his detention.¹⁸²
- In October 2019, reporter, blogger, and Tahrir News social media coordinator Esraa Abdel Fattah, was arrested by security officers and was reportedly beaten and forced to surrender her mobile phone password.¹⁸³ Her detention was further renewed several times pending an ongoing investigation.¹⁸⁴ Abdel Fattah was released in July 2021.¹⁸⁵
- In November 2019, freelance reporter Solafa Magdy, blogger and freelance journalist Mohamed Salah, and freelance photojournalist Hossam El-Sayyad were arrested by plainclothes security officers. They were charged with membership in a banned group,

and Magdy and Salah were further charged with disseminating false news.¹⁸⁶ In August 2020, the state prosecutor's office issued the three defendants new charges for actions they allegedly committed while in prison, accused them of membership in a terrorist group and of spreading false news, and extended their pretrial detention.¹⁸⁷ In April 2021, Magdy and El-Sayyad were released.¹⁸⁸ However, Salah's detention has been renewed.¹⁸⁹

C4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?

1.001

4.004

Certain laws undermine the anonymity of communication in Egypt. In 2010, the NTRA issued a regulation that requires distributors of SIM cards to collect the personal data from users before the cards can be activated.¹⁹⁰ In recent years, the NTRA has sought to remove dormant and unregistered SIMs to promote the credibility of the Egyptian market.¹⁹¹

Individuals seeking to register a web address using Egypt's .eg domain must submit their personal data and copies of their national identification document.

Encryption remains restricted. Article 64 of the Telecommunication Regulation Law outlaws the use of any encryption equipment by telecommunications companies, their employees, or their customers without written consent from the NTRA and security agencies.¹⁹² In a November 2018 report, freedom-of-expression group Article 19 criticized Article 72 of Law No. 180 for granting the SCMR exclusive control over the establishment of encrypted platforms and requiring government approval for any other usage of such platforms.¹⁹³

C5 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?

1.001 6.006

Surveillance is a significant concern for internet users in Egypt. Article 57 of the constitution states that private communications may be monitored or confiscated by judicial order. In practice, surveillance operations lack transparency, potentially violating the constitution's privacy protections. Additionally, Article 95 of the criminal code provides legal authority to law enforcement agencies to request the disclosure of communications data.¹⁹⁴

Egypt's cybercrime law (see C2) provides national security agencies access to the electronic data of internet and communication platform users without judicial oversight or clear regulation. Additionally, it does not include any substantial means to mitigate privacy violations or any compensation for those affected by these violations.¹⁹⁵

A provision of the antiterrorism law allows the police to monitor internet traffic and social media activity to "prevent their use for terrorist purposes."¹⁹⁶ A committee established by the NTRA tracks communications over VoIP services (see A3). The 2018 cybercrime law also facilitates surveillance by state authorities (see C6).

Egyptian authorities have access to spyware technology. In December 2021, Citizen Lab, a Canadian internet watchdog, reported that while living in exile, both opposition politician Ayman Nour and a well-known Egyptian journalist who wishes to remain anonymous were targeted by Cytrox's Predator Spyware. According to Citizen Lab, there is medium-high confidence that the hack was done by the Egyptian government, which is a confirmed Cytrox Predator customer.¹⁹⁷

In November 2021, investigative website Disclose reported that French companies Nexa Technologies, Ercom-Suneris, and Dassault Systèmes supplied the Egyptian government with a cyber surveillance system that was deployed to monitor the electronic devices of human rights organizations and activists.¹⁹⁸

Other reported instances of government-linked spyware use in recent years have included the use of Sandvine devices to block websites and monitor, prevent, or tamper with connections;¹⁹⁹ FinSpy attacks against human rights activists;²⁰⁰ and the use of other sophisticated spyware that enabled attackers to read emails, log contacts, and record locations of citizens (see C8).²⁰¹

As early as 2013, Egyptian authorities were reported to be using software that allows service providers to monitor the behaviors of internet users as well as a wide range of communications, including voice calls, text messages, emails, instant messages, social media platforms, and search engines.²⁰²

At times, police and plainclothes security agents have searched and seized mobile devices.²⁰³ During the September 2019 protests, people were asked to unlock their mobile phones and provide access to their social media accounts, which were checked for any expression of antigovernment sentiment. These actions were reported to be legal, as the public prosecutor had issued an order to inspect the social media accounts of allegedly illegal protesters.²⁰⁴ In January 2022, police officers near Tahrir Square stopped Imad Al-Sayed Ali Radwan to search his mobile phone. Radwan was arrested because of his antigovernment social media posts and convicted of promoting a terrorist group on social media. He was released the following month.²⁰⁵

In 2019, the Public Prosecution established the Communication, Guidance and Social Media Department (CGSMD), which has a Monitoring and Analysis Unit (MAU) dedicated to monitoring social media users. The MAU has filed several lawsuits against social media users, such as Haneen Hossam, for committing vague crimes related to threatening “national security” and the “values of the Egyptian family” (see C3).²⁰⁶

C6 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users’ right to privacy?

0.000
6.006

The government can obtain user information from companies without due process. Article 64 of the Telecommunication Regulation Law allows service providers, as well as their marketing agents, to collect personal data from users. It also compels providers to give security agencies access to their “equipment, systems, software, and communication.”²⁰⁷

According to Privacy International, the 2018 cybercrime law requires telecommunications providers to assist law enforcement with surveillance operations. The law also compels providers to collect personal data and store them for 180 days.²⁰⁸ Failure to retain data for this amount of time could result in a fine of up to 10 million Egyptian pounds (\$634,000); a second violation can lead to a fine of 20 million pounds (\$1.3 million) and revocation of the company’s license.²⁰⁹ State agencies can request stored data without a judicial order,²¹⁰ an apparent violation of Article 57 of the constitution.²¹¹ Vodafone International does not include Egypt in its transparency report and refrains from disclosing information about its assistance to local Egyptian authorities since, “the disclosure of national security-related material and other matters related to law enforcement” are legally prohibited in Egypt.²¹²

A data protection law approved by the parliament in June 2019 and ratified by the president in July 2020 is the first legal safeguard for individual data privacy, and contains some data protection principles.²¹³ However, the law stipulated that service providers should retain users’ data for 180 days and provide access to state authorities upon request. ²¹⁴ Furthermore, it exempts national security authorities from user-data protection obligations. It also does not include guarantees to the independence of the Personal Data Protection Center, which will be the regulatory authority.²¹⁵ In March 2021, there was a stakeholder discussion on the application of the law.²¹⁶

In May 2018, the parliament passed a law to regulate ride-sharing apps,²¹⁷ which includes requiring companies retain user data for 180 days and share it with authorities “on request” and “according to the law.”²¹⁸ Requests for data do not need to be accompanied by a warrant, though a

decree from the prime minister is required.²¹⁹ In January 2019, following the law's ratification in June 2018, negotiations between Uber and the government on implementing regulations were reportedly suspended due to controversy over whether the legislation can require user data to be stored in Egypt and whether security agencies can access it.²²⁰

C7 1.00-5.00 pts0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?

1.001
5.005

Imprisoned activists, bloggers, and journalists frequently experience abuse and torture while in detention. Enforced disappearances and kidnappings of online activists and journalists are not uncommon.

During the coverage period, at least two people were forcibly disappeared by security forces, reportedly due to their social media content. In January 2022, Constitution Party member (El-Dostour) Haitham el-Banna was arrested and disappeared. According to his family, his forced disappearance was related to a Facebook post that commemorated the anniversary of the 2011 revolution. In February 2022, he appeared before the SSSP, after which he was imprisoned for 15 days and convicted of joining a terrorist group, spreading false news, and misusing social media platforms.²²¹ Similarly, in January 2022, Ihab Saeed Ahmed Saafan, an accountant, was forcibly disappeared for around three weeks. Saafan, who was accused of "joining and financing a terrorist group" and "spreading false news," reported being beaten and subjected to electric shocks while security forces interrogated him about his Facebook and Twitter posts.²²²

Torture in prisons is not uncommon. In February 2020, Patrick George Zaki was detained and held for 24 hours by Egyptian authorities and was subjected to torture, including with electric shocks, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW). Zaki, a researcher and activist, was accused of "calling for protests without permission" and for "spreading false news and inciting violence and terrorism" after posting to his Facebook page.²²³ His Facebook posts were the focal point of his interrogation.

According to HRW, the LGBT+ community has been targeted by security forces on social networking sites and dating apps.²²⁴ In March 2019, a transgender woman was arrested and accused of involvement with a terrorist group and using social media to disrupt public order. She reportedly suffered sexual harassment and a forced anal examination while in custody (see C3).²²⁵ In July 2020, a Facebook user was harassed on the platform for being perceived as gay and was later harassed and assaulted offline. The user had posted a TikTok video in front of a rainbow flag, which was uploaded on Facebook without his permission. After receiving intimidating messages and a death threat, he temporarily closed his account (see B4).²²⁶ A recent study has found that prosecutions and imprisonment of LGBT+ people have increased due to the intensification of digital surveillance and the use of search and seizures of mobile devices by police (see C5).²²⁷ Online harassment and doxxing of LGBT+ people is also common.²²⁸

In November 2019, after *Mada Masr* published an article on Sisi's eldest son, who had been sidelined from his government position, nine plainclothes security officers raided the outlet's office. They confiscated laptops and phones and took three staff members for interrogation; all three individuals were later released.²²⁹ A Foreign Ministry spokesperson noted that the *Mada Masr* raid had been conducted legally, and that the outlet did not have the required license to operate. He further denied detaining any staff and claimed that security agents did nothing beyond inspection, interrogation, and investigation.²³⁰

In July 2020, an anonymous Instagram account that published testimonies about alleged sexual assaults became the target of online harassment and intimidation. The threats began after the account posted about "the Fairmont incident," a high-profile rape case in which several men from "wealthy, powerful, and well-connected families" were accused of sexually assaulting an 18-year-old woman.²³¹ The account was later hacked, and the witnesses' private information was leaked

on social media and progovernment websites in a reportedly state-sanctioned disinformation campaign meant to discredit them (see C8).²³²

C8 1.00-3.00 pts0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?	1.001 3.003
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Internet users in Egypt have been subject to several internal and external cyberattacks in recent years.

Private companies and individuals were targeted with malware during the coverage period. In early 2022, reports emerged that thousands of Egyptian internet users had been infected with RedLine Stealer malware. The malware is used to steal passwords, credit card information, and other sensitive data.²³³

The country was struck by several cyberattacks that used ransomware and affected companies worldwide in 2017.²³⁴ In addition, a 2018 Citizen Lab report found that Telecom Egypt had been redirecting Egyptian internet users to malware that mines cryptocurrency or displays advertisements, apparently to generate revenue using Sandvine equipment.²³⁵

In March 2019, Amnesty International reported “OAuth” phishing attacks using third-party applications against journalists and human rights activists that were most probably conducted by or on behalf of the Egyptian authorities and linked to the NilePhish attacker group.²³⁶

In October 2019, Check Point published a report revealing that 33 Egyptian citizens—including journalists, politicians, activists, and lawyers—were targeted through spyware that allowed attackers to read emails, log contacts, and record locations through downloaded mobile-phone apps. Some of the apps include Secure Mail, iCloud200%, and IndexY. Check Point suggested that such operations were linked to the Egyptian government given the groups that were targeted, the government’s investment of human and financial resources, the structures and data downloaded, the use of a registered server belonging to the MCIT, and geographic coordinates corresponding to GIS headquarters.²³⁷

In July 2020, an Instagram account containing statements regarding the Fairmont incident was hacked by an unknown party (see C7).²³⁸

In April 2022, following an online antigovernment campaign (see B8), authorities placed the country on “high cyber security alert.” While it is unclear if any cyberattacks occurred, a government source noted that authorities debated hacking the online accounts of users who shared the petition.²³⁹

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