



Freedom in the World 2017 - Egypt

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Freedom Status: Not Free

Aggregate Score: 26/100 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 5.5/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 6/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 5/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 93,500,000

Capital: Cairo

GDP/capita: \$3,615

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Net Freedom Status: Not Free

OVERVIEW

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who first took power in a July 2013 coup, continues to govern Egypt in an authoritarian manner, though the election of a new parliament in late 2015 ended a period of rule by executive decree. Serious political opposition is virtually nonexistent, as both liberal and Islamist activists face criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Terrorism persists unabated in the Sinai Peninsula and has also struck the Egyptian mainland, despite the government's use of aggressive and often abusive tactics to combat it.

Key Developments

- In April, the government cracked down on demonstrators protesting a deal to transfer the sovereignty of Egyptian islands to Saudi Arabia. Dozens of people were beaten and arrested.
- In February, an Italian doctoral student, Giulio Regeni, was found dead in Cairo, and his body showed evidence of torture. Security forces were suspected of involvement in his abduction and murder.
- In November, the parliament passed a highly restrictive bill on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that effectively criminalized any civil society activity in the absence of approval from a new regulatory body dominated by security agencies. The measure had yet to be signed by the president at year's end.
- Sectarian attacks against Christians continued during the year, including a December church bombing by the Islamic State (IS) militant group that killed 25 worshippers.

Executive Summary

The overwhelmingly progovernment parliament elected in 2015 generally rubber-stamped legislation during 2016 and did not provide an effective check on the government of President Sisi.

The authorities harshly restricted freedoms of speech and assembly for activists from across the political spectrum, and the new NGO legislation passed in November threatened to further curtail the operations of independent civil society groups. The media were also targeted, with law enforcement agencies harassing and sometimes jailing journalists who reported on political opposition of any kind. Arbitrary travel bans increasingly affected academics and others seeking to visit or leave Egypt.

An armed insurgency by an IS affiliate based in the Sinai Peninsula continued to grow in 2016. The government maintained a state of emergency in large sections of northeastern Sinai, but it failed to halt terrorist attacks there and in other parts of the country.

Corruption, mismanagement, political unrest, and terrorist violence all contributed to the country's severe economic problems, which included inflation and food shortages. The International Monetary Fund approved a three-year, \$12 billion loan in November, but the associated conditions, such as cuts to energy subsidies, were expected to impose further hardship on the population.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 9 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

A1. Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

A2. Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair?

In July 2013, following massive protests calling for the resignation of elected president Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the armed forces overthrew Morsi, suspended the constitution, and dissolved the upper house of parliament. The military – led by Sisi, then the armed forces commander and defense minister – installed a nominally civilian interim government but remained heavily involved in the political system. The courts had already dissolved the FJP-dominated lower house of parliament in 2012.

A new constitution was adopted by referendum under tightly controlled conditions in January 2014, and a presidential election was held in May 2014. Sisi resigned his post as head of the armed forces to stand as a candidate, and garnered more than 95 percent of the vote against a single opponent, leftist politician Hamdeen Sabbahi. However, no independent international monitors were able to verify the results. The vote was also marred by low turnout, the use of state resources to support Sisi's candidacy, voter intimidation, and arrests and assaults of poll monitors. With no legislature in place following his election, President Sisi ruled by decree.

Parliamentary elections took place in two stages from October to December 2015, and the unicameral House of Representatives was seated in January 2016. The elections featured low turnout, intimidation, and abuse of state resources. The progovernment coalition For the Love of Egypt, consisting of some 10 parties, won all 120 bloc-vote seats. Independents, a number of whom were aligned with the coalition, won 351 of the 448 constituency seats, and the coalition parties' candidates generally outpolled their rivals in the remaining districts. Just three parties outside For the Love of Egypt won more than 10 seats: Protectors of the Homeland (18), the Republican People's Party (13), and Al-Nour (11), a Salafist group that was the only major Islamist party to participate in the elections. In addition to the elected seats, 28 seats are reserved for presidential appointees. Many parties – including moderate Islamist parties and liberal and leftist factions – boycotted the elections and voiced serious reservations about their fairness, accusing security forces of harassment and intimidation. In January 2016, the parties associated with For the Love of Egypt formed a parliamentary bloc, In Support of Egypt, that controlled a majority of the chamber.

Egypt remained without elected local councils in 2016, as the parliament had yet to complete the necessary electoral legislation as required by the 2014 constitution. The last councils were elected in 2008 and

dissolved in 2011 after the ouster of longtime authoritarian president Hosni Mubarak. As of the end of 2016, the elections were not expected to take place until the second half of 2017.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16

B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

B2. Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?

B4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

The government systematically persecutes opposition parties and political movements, disrupting their operations and constraining their ability to organize. Large numbers of Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters, including nearly all of the organization's senior leadership and Morsi himself, were arrested following the coup, and arrests continued through 2016. Some Brotherhood members have been killed under unclear circumstances, with police reporting gun battles during attempted arrests and the group claiming summary executions. Civil society organizations estimate that as many as 40,000 people were being detained for political reasons as of 2016, most of them for real or suspected links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Authorities declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization in December 2013, which allowed them to charge anyone participating in a pro-Morsi demonstration with terrorism and laid the foundation for the complete political isolation of the Islamist opposition.

The government has also persecuted non-Islamist critics and parties. For example, Alaa Abdel Fattah, perhaps Egypt's best-known secular activist, was sentenced to five years in prison in February 2015 for violating a highly restrictive law on public protests. The April 6 movement, one of the prodemocracy groups that catalyzed the January 2011 uprising against Mubarak, was banned in 2014. The group's general coordinator, Amr Ali, was sentenced to three years in prison on protest-related charges in February 2016; the sentence was reduced to two years on appeal in July.

Since the 2013 coup, the military has dominated the political system, with most power and patronage flowing from Sisi and his allies in the armed forces and security agencies. As of late 2016, more than two-thirds of Egypt's provincial governors were former military or police commanders.

The constitution bans parties based on religion, though a number of Islamist parties continue to operate in a precarious political and legal position. The Coptic Church leadership has allied itself with Sisi since the coup, apparently to ensure the security of its constituents. Coptic Christians, who account for some 10 percent of the population, are allocated 24 of the parliament's 120 party-list seats. Thirty-six Christians were elected in 2015, and an additional three were appointed by the president, for a total of 39 Christians in the parliament. The party-list quotas also set aside small numbers of seats for workers and farmers, people under 35, people with disabilities, and Egyptians living abroad.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

C2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption?

C3. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency?

Egypt is governed by officials who were not freely elected, and the parliament does not provide an effective check on executive power. The 2014 constitution increased the military's independence from civilian oversight, including through the selection process for the post of defense minister, who must be a military officer. Sisi has ruled in a style that entrenches military privilege and shields the armed forces from accountability for their actions.

Corruption is pervasive at all levels of government. Official mechanisms for investigating and punishing corrupt behavior remain very weak, and the major prosecutions that began after Mubarak's ouster in 2011 have faltered since the 2013 coup. In May 2015, Mubarak was deemed to have completed a three-year sentence for embezzlement, though he remained confined to a military hospital and still faced an ongoing retrial in another case at the end of 2016. In October 2015, a court ordered the release of Mubarak's two sons with time served for their own corruption sentences, but separate charges against them for insider trading remained pending.

The head of Egypt's Central Auditing Authority, Hisham Geneina, was abruptly dismissed and placed under house arrest in March 2016. Sisi had granted himself power to dismiss the heads of state auditing bodies in a 2015 decree. The government accused Geneina of spreading "false news" after he estimated that losses from corruption in Egypt from 2012 to 2015 amounted to \$76 billion. In July, he received a one-year suspended prison sentence and was ordered to pay a fine.

In August, a parliamentary committee tasked with investigating corruption in Egypt's system of food subsidies reported that government officials had embezzled more than \$70 million by inflating wheat procurement figures. At least 13 officials were arrested in connection with the report's findings, and the cabinet minister responsible for food supplies was forced to resign. However, under a 2015 amendment to the penal code, defendants in financial corruption cases can avoid imprisonment by paying restitution, meaning those accused in the wheat scandal were unlikely to serve jail time.

The Sisi administration has offered very little transparency regarding government spending and operations. The International Budget Partnership gave Egypt a score of 16 out of 100 for budget transparency in its most recent assessment. In its 2017 budget proposal, the government allocated the equivalent of 1.6 percent of gross domestic product for health care and 3.1 percent for education, well short of the 3 percent and 4 percent mandated by the constitution, respectively. The military is notoriously opaque with respect to its own extensive business interests, including in major projects like the "New Suez Canal," and regarding multibillion-dollar arms deals with foreign powers.

Civil Liberties: 17 / 60 (-1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16

- D1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression?
- D2. Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?
- D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination?
- D4. Is there open and free private discussion?

Military authorities shut down virtually all Islamist and opposition media outlets following the 2013 coup and pressured others if they carried any critical coverage of the new government. As a result, state media and most surviving private outlets strongly support Sisi and the military.

Official censorship and self-censorship remained widespread in 2016. The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE), an Egyptian rights organization, documented 303 press freedom violations in the first half of the year, including censorship and physical abuse. Arrests of journalists on dubious charges continued, and it was increasingly difficult for media workers to access or report on the Sinai. The Committee to Protect Journalists found that 25 journalists remained behind bars as of December 2016, placing Egypt behind only Turkey and China for the number of reporters detained. The most serious violation occurred in May, when police took the unprecedented step of storming the headquarters of the Journalists' Syndicate to detain two wanted journalists who were seeking refuge in the building. The government then prosecuted the head of the syndicate and two of its board members for allegedly harboring the journalists. All three were sentenced to two years in prison in November, though they remained free at year's end pending an appeal.

Islam is the state religion, and most Egyptians are Sunni Muslims. Coptic Christians form a substantial minority, and there are very small numbers of Jews, Shiite Muslims, atheists, and Baha'is. The 2014 constitution made the right to freedom of religion "absolute" and was well received by religious minorities,

though little has changed in practice since the document's adoption. Abuses against Copts continued in 2016, adding to numerous cases of forced displacement, physical assaults, bomb and arson attacks, and blocking of church construction in recent years. One of the worst incidents occurred in May, when a mob of Muslim men in Minya looted and burned the homes of several Christian families and stripped a Christian woman whose son they accused of having an affair with a Muslim woman. IS claimed responsibility for a December church bombing in Cairo that killed 25 people. Separately, in November, a Shiite man was allegedly abducted by security forces after he submitted a request to travel to Iraq for a religious pilgrimage.

Academic freedom has suffered since the 2013 coup. Despite a ban on political protests, universities have been a center of antigovernment demonstrations and the target of government crackdowns. A 2015 decree allows for the dismissal of university professors who engage in on-campus political activity, and in 2016 the government reportedly began imposing more systematic requirements for academics to obtain approval from security officials for travel abroad. In February, Italian doctoral student Giulio Regeni was found dead in Cairo with signs of severe torture, highlighting the dangers faced by foreign researchers, who are often under surveillance, informed on by citizens, and harassed by the government. Regeni's apparent torture and the fact that he was previously investigated and possibly detained at the time of his disappearance led many observers to conclude that security agencies were involved in his death.

Private discussion has become more guarded in the face of vigilantism and increased state monitoring of social media for critical content. Media personalities have called on the public to inform on anyone they suspect of undermining the state, and some arrests have reportedly stemmed from overheard conversations in public places. Social media users have faced arrest or prosecution for alleged offenses ranging from blasphemy to inciting protests or opposing the government online.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations?

E3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?

Freedoms of assembly and association are tightly restricted. A November 2013 decree gave police great leeway to ban and forcibly disperse gatherings of 10 or more people. The law also prohibits all protests at places of worship and requires protest organizers to inform police at least three days in advance. In the period from the law's enactment to September 2016, some 37,000 legal or security measures were taken to implement it, including more than 19,000 arrests and 3,000 cases of detention and interrogation, according to local human rights activists.

Protests against the government were mounted throughout 2016, but they often ended in violent clashes with police and local residents, and police repeatedly used excessive force. In January, during the weeks leading up to planned demonstrations to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the 2011 revolution, police searched at least 5,000 homes in downtown Cairo. According to AFTE, at least 181 individuals were questioned or detained nationwide surrounding the anniversary. Activists protesting the government's transfer of sovereignty over two Egyptian islands to Saudi Arabia in April 2016 were also aggressively pursued, with at least 150 people arrested. Some of those detained were charged with a number of crimes and sentenced to jail. While a few remained behind bars at year's end, most were later released or given reduced sentences. The most prominent case was that of rights activist Malek Adly, who was detained in an undisclosed location for nearly four months before being released in August, though his trial was still pending.

In November 2016, the parliament passed even harsher legislation to replace the already strict Law on Associations, which governed the operations of NGOs. The new law, if signed by the president, would establish a new regulatory body dominated by security agencies. The measure also bans NGOs from engaging in what the government deems to be political work, and requires the regulator's approval for any field research or polling and any type of cooperation with foreign NGOs. NGO activities in border provinces require approval from the governor. Violators face prison terms of up to five years. Under a 2014 decree, members of NGOs who use foreign funding to commit acts that "harm the national interest" face life imprisonment and fines of 500,000 Egyptian pounds (\$50,000). If an offender is a public servant or committed the violation for the purposes of terrorism, he or she could face the death penalty.

Egyptian NGOs faced harassment in the form of office raids, arrests of members, and restrictions on travel in 2016. In March, authorities revived a crackdown on organizations it accused of accepting foreign funding in defiance of Egyptian law, imposing travel bans and asset freezes on several prominent NGO leaders. They included Hossam Bahgat, former head of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, and Gamal Eid, head of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information. Such actions effectively shut down the operations of the targeted NGOs. Aya Hegazy, a dual American and Egyptian citizen who ran an NGO to help street children remained in pretrial detention for a second year. She had been arrested in 2014 on charges of exploiting street children for political protests and was demonized in the media, indicating that even NGOs focused on apolitical humanitarian issues faced persecution by the government.

Strikes played a significant role in the 2011 uprising, and workers formed two independent union federations in 2011 and 2013, ending the long-standing monopoly of a state-allied federation. Strikes continued amid the country's ongoing economic problems in 2016, with 493 labor protests reported in the first quarter of the year alone, a 25 percent increase over the same period in 2015. Authorities responded to the actions with raids, arrests, and intimidation.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary?

F2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control?

F3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

The Supreme Judicial Council, a supervisory body of senior judges, nominates most members of the judiciary. However, the Justice Ministry plays a key role in assignments and transfers, giving it undue influence over the courts. Judges led the drafting of the 2014 constitution, which significantly enhanced the judiciary's autonomy, including by allowing each major judicial entity to receive its budget as a single line item and permitting the Supreme Constitutional Court to appoint its own chairman.

Although the constitution limits military trials of civilians to crimes directly involving the military, its personnel, or its property, an October 2014 presidential decree placed all "public and vital facilities" under military jurisdiction, resulting in the referral of thousands of civilian defendants to military courts. Charges brought in military courts are often vague or fabricated, defendants are denied due process, and basic evidentiary standards are routinely disregarded.

A number of cases in 2016 demonstrated a high degree of politicization in the court system, typically resulting in harsh punishments for perceived enemies of the government. A military court sentenced eight civilians to death in May, allegedly relying on confessions obtained through torture. Their charges included belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood. Another 116 people were sentenced to life in prison in February for protest-related violence, but most were tried in absentia, including one who was just three years old; the authorities later admitted that the child's prosecution was a case of mistaken identity.

Police brutality and impunity for abuses by security forces were catalysts for the 2011 uprising, but no reforms have been enacted. Reports of alleged extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances continued throughout 2016, with estimates among various NGOs ranging from dozens to several hundred cases. Prison conditions are very poor; inmates are subject to torture, overcrowding, and a lack of sanitation and medical care. A highly controversial August 2015 antiterrorism law provided a vague definition for terrorism and granted law enforcement personnel sweeping powers and immunity while carrying out their duties.

Egypt was under a state of emergency from 1981 until May 2012, and for three months following the 2013 coup. The Emergency Law grants the government extensive powers of surveillance and detention. A state of emergency and nighttime curfew have been in place since October 2014 in Northern Sinai, with repeated three-month extensions. Nevertheless, fighting there continued throughout 2016, reportedly killing hundreds of civilians, security personnel, and militants.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face severe persecution, and conditions have grown worse under the Sisi regime. While same-sex sexual activity is not explicitly banned, LGBT people have

been charged with prostitution or "debauchery." In April 2016, a court sentenced 11 men to between 3 and 12 years in prison on charges of debauchery. New raids and arrests were reported over the course of 2016.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16 (-1)

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education?

G2. Do individuals have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, political parties/organizations, or organized crime?

G3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?

G4. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?

Freedom of movement and property rights have been severely affected by the government's counterinsurgency efforts in the Sinai. In addition to the curfew, checkpoints, and other travel restrictions, the military has summarily demolished buildings in the town of Rafah to create a buffer zone along the border with the Gaza strip.

A growing list of rights activists, journalists, political party members, bloggers, and academics have been subjected to arbitrary travel bans in recent years, and the practice appeared to intensify during 2016. In addition to orders preventing Egyptians from traveling abroad, many foreign researchers or activists have been expelled or denied entry to the country.

The 2014 constitution clearly affirms the equality of the sexes, but this has not resulted in practical improvements for women. Thanks in large part to quotas, women won 75 seats in the 596-seat parliament in 2015, and another 14 were appointed by the president. Some laws and traditional practices discriminate against women, job discrimination is common, and Muslim women are disadvantaged by personal status laws. Domestic violence is widespread, and spousal rape is not illegal. Other problems include forced marriages and high rates of female genital mutilation or cutting. In August 2016, the parliament approved harsher penalties for female genital mutilation or cutting, but the ban on the practice has long been poorly enforced.

Violence against women has surfaced in new ways since 2011, particularly as women have participated in demonstrations and faced increased levels of sexual violence in public. A 2014 decree criminalized sexual harassment, with prison terms of up to five years, as part of a national strategy to combat violence against women. Critics argued that the law was inadequate and the strategy was failing, citing a lack of protection for witnesses, continued cases of group sexual harassment in public, and harassment by police officers, which deters women from reporting crimes.

Egyptian women and children, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and increasingly Syrian refugees are vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking in Egypt. The Egyptian authorities routinely punish individuals for offenses that stemmed directly from their circumstances as trafficking victims.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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