

# Egypt

NOT FREE

**18**  
/100

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

## LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

**18 /100**      **Not Free**

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



## Overview

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

## Key Developments in 2022

- In August, at least 41 people, including 18 children, died when an electrical fire swept through a Coptic Christian church in Giza Governorate. Rights groups claimed that discriminatory government policies and restrictions on the construction and renovation of churches resulted in unsafe conditions in the church, which ultimately caused the fire.
- The Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), a prominent human rights group, suspended its Egyptian operations in January. Its founder, Gamal Eid, claimed he had experienced years of harassment from authorities, including the freezing of his assets, a travel ban, and physical assault.

## Political Rights

### A. Electoral Process

**A1** 0-4 pts

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

**0** / 4

President al-Sisi, who took power in a 2013 coup while serving as Egypt's defense minister and armed forces commander, has been elected only through unfair, noncompetitive contests. In the 2018 elections, Sisi received 97 percent of the votes after pressuring all opposition candidates to withdraw. The vote was marred by low turnout, the use of state resources and media to support Sisi's candidacy, voter intimidation, and vote buying.

Constitutional amendments adopted in 2019 added two years to Sisi's current term, extending it through 2024, at which point he will be allowed to seek an additional six-year term. Future presidents will be limited to two six-year terms.

**A2** 0-4 pts

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

**1** / 4

The 2019 amendments to the 2014 constitution reestablished the Egyptian parliament as a bicameral body in which members serve five-year terms. The upper house, the Senate, consists of 300 seats and has no significant legislative competencies. Two-thirds of senators are elected (half through closed party lists and half in individual seats) and one-third are appointed by the president. The House of Representatives consists of 568 members, half elected through closed party lists and half in individual seats. The president has the right to appoint 28 additional members to the House.

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

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

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

**A3** 0-4 pts

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

**1** / 4

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

## B. Political Pluralism and Participation

**B1** 0-4 pts

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?</b> | <b>0 / 4</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|

Political parties are legally allowed to form and operate, but in practice, activists, opposition parties, and political movements that criticize the regime face arrests, harsh prison terms, death sentences, extrajudicial violence, and other forms of pressure. In the Al-Amal (Hope) Coalition case, at least 15 individuals were detained in 2019 before launching a secular coalition to run in the 2020 parliamentary elections. In November 2021, an emergency court gave multiyear prison sentences without appeal to many of its leaders. While some members of this group were released in 2022, thousands of opposition members remained imprisoned and live in unsanitary conditions.

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

**B2** 0-4 pts

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

**0** / 4

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

**B3** 0-4 pts

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

**1** / 4

Since the 2013 coup, the military and intelligence agencies dominate the political system, with most power and patronage flowing from Sisi and his domestic allies in the armed forces and security agencies. Regional support from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia helped stabilize the regime domestically and globally. Most of Egypt's provincial governors are former military or police commanders. Vaguely worded 2019 constitutional amendments further strengthened the legal underpinnings of the military's political influence, calling on it to "protect the constitution and democracy" for the sake of citizens' rights that are not respected by Egyptian authorities.

**B4** 0-4 pts

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

**1** / 4

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

unstated red lines. The diminishing power of the legislature further undercuts avenues for meaningful representation.

Women generally do not see their interests represented in politics and held 27.5 percent of seats in the House of Representatives as of December 2021, in large part due to legal gender quotas.

## C. Functioning of Government

**C1** 0-4 pts

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

**0** / 4

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

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

**C2** 0-4 pts

**Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?**

**1** / 4

Corruption is pervasive at all levels of government. Official mechanisms for investigating and punishing corrupt activity remain weak and ineffective. President Sisi controls the Administrative Control Authority, the body responsible for most anticorruption initiatives. It lacks credibility, transparency, and impartiality and is not allowed to monitor the economic activities of the military.

**C3** 0-4 pts

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

The Sisi administration provides little transparency regarding government spending and operations and denies civil society groups and independent journalists opportunities to comment on, oversee, or influence state policies through intimidation and censorship.

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

## Civil Liberties

### D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

**D1** 0-4 pts

|                                       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Are there free and independent media? | 0 / 4 |
|---------------------------------------|-------|

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

Independent reporting is suppressed through restrictive laws and intimidation, and foreign journalists face obstruction by the state. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recorded that 12 journalists had been killed, 21 were imprisoned, and 1 went missing in 2022.

Multiple laws allow authorities to censor online content without judicial approval and block any website considered to be a threat to national security—a broad stipulation that is vulnerable to abuse. Since 2017, Egyptian authorities have banned hundreds of websites, and continued to do so in 2022. Penal-code amendments passed in 2021 tightened punishments for journalists who cover criminal trial sessions without prior approval and toughened penalties for disclosing classified information. The amendments also increased potential fines and allow for prison terms between six months and five years for these offenses.

**D2** 0-4 pts

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

**1** / 4

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

In August 2022, an electrical fire swept through a Coptic Christian church in Giza Governorate, killing at least 41 people, including 18 children. Rights groups claimed that discriminatory government policies and restrictions on the construction and renovation of churches resulted in the conditions that ultimately caused the fire. In January, security forces in al-Minya Governorate arrested nine Coptic Christians protesting authorities’ refusal to rebuild a church in their village, releasing them two months later.

**D3** 0-4 pts

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

**1** / 4

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

Since 2013, university students have been subjected to arrest, disciplinary sanctions such as expulsion, military trials, and extrajudicial killings for their political activism.

**D4** 0-4 pts

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

**1/4**

Individuals who express personal views contrary to preferred state narratives are subject to reprisals. Security agencies extensively surveil and tightly regulate social media companies and users, as well as other mobile phone applications, allowing them to control public discourse.

Arrests of activists over social media posts and other activities are common and send a clear message that voicing dissent is intolerable, which contributes to self-censorship among ordinary Egyptians. Dozens of Egyptian activists, rights defenders, and journalists have been targeted by digital phishing attacks as part of an apparent campaign to intimidate and silence critics of the government. Moreover, authorities have targeted content creators on social media platforms, most notably TikTok, charging them with various spurious crimes. Progovernment media figures and state officials regularly call for national unity and suggest that only enemies of the state would criticize authorities.

## **E. Associational and Organizational Rights**

**E1** 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom of assembly?**

**0** / 4

Though the constitution guarantees the right to free assembly, the Interior Ministry can legally ban, postpone, or relocate protests with a court's approval. Unauthorized gatherings of 10 or more people can be dispersed forcefully. Protest organizers must inform police of their plans at least three days in advance. Thousands of protesters have been arrested since these strict laws were introduced in 2013, and some jailed protesters have received death sentences. Because of this crackdown, protests are extremely rare.

In November 2022, during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27), Egyptian authorities arrested and charged at least 138 protesters with joining a terrorist group, spreading false news, inciting terrorist crimes, and misusing social media.

**E2** 0-4 pts

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

**0** / 4

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

The Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) suspended its Egyptian operations in January 2022, claiming its founder had experienced years of harassment from authorities, including freezing of his assets, a travel ban, and physical assault.

Political dissidents and human rights defenders abroad experience transnational repression, while their families in Egypt have increasingly faced persecution by state authorities.

**E3** 0-4 pts

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

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|-------|
| 1 / 4 |
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The government only recognizes unions affiliated with the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation. While Article 15 of the constitution provides for the right to organize peaceful strikes, they are not tolerated in practice, and the law on protests prohibits gatherings that impede labor and production. Striking workers have in the past been arrested and prosecuted. Workers at military-owned businesses are subject to trials by military courts. Authorities failed to protect striking workers in 2021, allowing the large manufacturing company LORD International to unfairly dismiss and punish workers on strike.

## F. Rule of Law

**F1** 0-4 pts

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|------------------------------------|
| Is there an independent judiciary? |
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|-------|
| 1 / 4 |
|-------|

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

In July 2022, President Sisi appointed a military general to be the Supreme Constitutional Court's first deputy justice, which further placed the country's institutions under Sisi's control. The emergency courts that Sisi used to prosecute government critics and opposition figures were in effect until October 2021, when the state of emergency was suspended.

**F2** 0-4 pts

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|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? |
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| 0 / 4 |
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Since 2013, Egyptian authorities have increasingly imposed months- or even years-long pretrial detentions on opposition members, journalists, and activists as retribution for their activities. These due process violations have normalized the use of the justice system for political purposes.

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

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

In April 2022, President Sisi reactivated so-called pardon committees to review the status of political prisoners; while 332 people were reportedly pardoned as of August, authorities arbitrarily detained far more people during the same period.

**F3** 0-4 pts

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

**0** / 4

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

Since President Sisi effectively came to power, dozens of people have died in custody amid credible reports of torture or denial of timely and adequate health care. In 2021 alone, at least 52 detainees died in custody following medical complications and at least 4 following reports of torture. Prominent economist and government critic Ayman Hadhoud, who had been researching the military's role in the economy, disappeared in February 2022 and died in March, likely due to physical assault and torture he experienced while in custody. Use of the death penalty has increased dramatically since Sisi took power, despite serious concerns about due process violations and politicized prosecutions.

Conflict continues between security forces and adherents of the Islamic State (IS) militant group based in the North Sinai region. Terrorist attacks and military operations have resulted in civilian casualties. For years, Egyptian security forces have carried out extrajudicial executions while claiming that the victims had been killed in shootouts.

**F4** 0-4 pts

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

**1/4**

Though the constitution stipulates equality for women, women face extensive discrimination, particularly in employment and in the justice system. Coptic Christians, other religious minorities such as Baha'i people, people with dark skin from southern Egypt, people with disabilities, LGBT+ people, and migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa also face various forms of discrimination and harassment. In March 2022, Amnesty International called on the government to halt the deportations of Eritrean nationals, accusing it of engaging in refoulement.

There are different personal status laws governing Muslims and Christians, which commonly results in discrimination against Christians.

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

# G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

**G1** 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?**

**1** / 4

The constitution guarantees freedom of movement, but internal travel and access are restricted tightly in North Sinai and to a lesser extent in other governorates along Egypt's borders. Sinai residents are subject to curfews, checkpoints, and other obstacles to travel.

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

**G2** 0-4 pts

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

**2** / 4

Under Sisi, the military is woven into many aspects of Egypt's economy. It runs businesses, produces goods, and manages megaprojects and infrastructure that benefit from tax and customs exemptions, free labor through the use of conscripted soldiers, lack of public budget oversight, and allocation of land through presidential decrees. Opportunities for private businesses are limited. Prominent businessmen faced political harassment, arrest, travel bans, and defamation in state-owned media.

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

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

**G3** 0-4 pts

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

**2/4**

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

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

**G4** 0-4 pts

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

**1/4**

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

In March 2022, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that authorities forced least 30 Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers who had been arrested in late 2021 to provide labor.





### On Egypt

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### Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

**18/100**    Not Free

Internet Freedom Score

**27/100**    Not Free

### Other Years

2022

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