



Freedom in the World 2015 - Egypt

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2015 Scores

Status: Not Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 5.5

Civil Liberties (1 = best, 7 = worst): 5

Political Rights (1 = best, 7 = worst): 6

Trend Arrow: ↓

Egypt received a downward trend arrow due to the complete marginalization of the opposition, state surveillance of electronic communications, public exhortations to report critics of the government to the authorities, and the mass trials and unjustified imprisonment of members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

OVERVIEW

The military effectively controlled Egypt at the beginning of 2014, with no elected president or legislature in place following the June 2013 coup against then president Mohamed Morsi. In January, the interim government heavily promoted a new constitution to replace one adopted under Morsi. Authorities prevented organized campaigning against the new charter, which passed a referendum that month amid low voter turnout.

A presidential election was held May 26 to 28 following a brief and tightly managed campaign period. Former army field marshal and defense minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi won a lopsided victory, credited with more than 95 percent of the vote. Observers noted major flaws in the process, however, and the sole opposition candidate, leftist politician Hamdeen Sabbahi, publicly questioned the official results.

The government harshly restricted dissent and assembly by activists from across the political spectrum during the year. The media were also targeted, with authorities harassing and sometimes jailing journalists who reported on political opposition of any kind.

An armed insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula continued to grow. In October, authorities began demolishing hundreds of homes along the border with the Gaza Strip in an effort to halt the flow of weapons and militants through the area.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 8 / 40 (-1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12 (+1)

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 installed a nominally civilian interim government, but remained heavily involved in the political system. The courts had already dissolved the FJP-dominated lower house in 2012.

A new constitution was passed in a referendum on January 14 and 15, 2014, after a campaign period in which authorities effectively banned all expression of opposition to the charter. According to official results, the constitution received 98.1 percent of the vote, amid 38.6 percent turnout. The referendum was held in a tense atmosphere, with more than 350,000 security personnel deployed throughout the country, sporadically clashing with Islamists and other government opponents. Most Islamist groups boycotted the vote, arguing that the process was an illegitimate product of the 2013 coup.

The new constitution nominally improved protections for women's rights, freedom of expression, and other civil liberties. However, these rights were not enforced in practice, and the charter suffered from significant flaws, including an expansion of police and military autonomy and a provision allowing military trials of civilians.

A presidential election was held in May after an uneventful 20-day campaign period. Sisi and Sabbahi were the only two candidates; a third dropped out just before the registration deadline, claiming he had received a divine signal that Sisi would win. Very low turnout on the first two days of voting prompted authorities to extend the process to a third day. Reports of other electoral irregularities included the use of state resources to support Sisi's candidacy, voter intimidation by government workers and Sisi supporters, and arrests or assaults of poll monitors. The Sabbahi campaign withdrew its monitors in response to such violations. Sisi officially received more than 95 percent of the vote amid nearly 48 percent turnout, though Sabbahi and others questioned those figures, and no independent verification of the results was available. Sisi was sworn in on June 8. Under the new constitution, he could serve up to two four-year terms.

The constitution called for the election of a unicameral Parliament, but no such elections were held during 2014. With no legislature in place, the executive branch ruled by decree throughout the year. A June decree on parliamentary elections, coupled with a December measure on electoral districts, assigned 420 of the 567 seats to nonpartisan independent candidates, 120 to party lists, and 27 to presidential appointees. The arrangement was widely believed to disadvantage opposition parties and favor local power brokers with ties to the government.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16 (-2)

Since the 2013 coup, the military has dominated the political system, and all opposition forces have been thoroughly marginalized. Large numbers of Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters, including nearly all of the organization's senior leadership and Morsi himself, were arrested at the time of the coup or in the subsequent months, and an estimated 16,000 people were behind bars for political reasons as of mid-2014. 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 a foundation for the complete political isolation of the Islamist opposition. The new constitution banned parties based on religion.

The government has also pursued non-Islamist critics, including prominent political scientists Emad Shahin, who was accused of espionage, and Amr Hamzawy, who was charged with insulting the judiciary, both in early 2014. Alaa Abdel Fattah, perhaps Egypt's best-known secular activist, was in detention at year's end, awaiting retrial and a possible sentence of 15 years in prison for violating a highly restrictive law on public protests. In another severe blow to liberal political activism, a court in

April banned the April 6 movement, one of the prodemocracy groups that catalyzed the January 2011 uprising against longtime authoritarian president Hosni Mubarak.

The military leadership publicly endorsed Sisi's presidential candidacy, calling it a "mandate and an obligation" to the masses. The interim president – whose own authority rested on a military decree – promoted Sisi to the rank of field marshal in January. Sisi resigned from the army when he formally announced his election bid, but he reportedly used military resources to fund his campaign and maintained a close relationship with the armed forces after taking office. The new constitution increased the military's independence from civilian oversight, including through the selection of the defense minister, who must be a military officer.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Corruption is pervasive at all levels of government. Egypt was ranked 94 out of 175 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. Official mechanisms for investigating and punishing corrupt behavior remain very weak, and the major revelations and prosecutions that emerged after Mubarak's ouster in 2011 have faltered since the 2013 coup. Mubarak himself was sentenced to three years in prison for embezzlement in May 2014, and his two sons received four years each. However, appeals were pending at year's end, and a number of other charges against the men were dropped in November.

As with its predecessors, the Sisi administration offered very little transparency regarding government operations and budget making. The military is notoriously opaque with respect to its own extensive business interests across several sectors of the Egyptian economy.

There was a civil society consultation process for the new constitution, though civic and opposition groups did not have a significant impact on the final document, and the drafting committee itself was not representative of the general population.

Civil Liberties: 18 / 60 (-4)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16 (-1)

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 are openly pro-military and pro-Sisi.

Official censorship and self-censorship remained widespread in 2014. In October, the government seized an entire press run of Egypt's largest private newspaper, *Al-Masry al-Youm*, because it included a sensitive interview with a former intelligence officer. Security forces later detained the paper's editor in chief and a reporter to question them about their investigation of fraud in the 2012 presidential election. Separately, political comedian Bassem Youssef suspended his satirical television show in June, citing extensive pressure to refrain from criticizing the government; the show had already moved to a Dubai-based broadcaster after an Egyptian station pulled it in late 2013.

The government has conducted an ongoing offensive against Qatar's Al-Jazeera television network, which is considered sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood. In late June 2014, a court sentenced three Al-Jazeera journalists to at least seven years in prison each on charges of conspiring with the Brotherhood to publish false news. The convictions followed a farcical trial in which prosecutors presented no credible evidence of the alleged crimes. An appeal was pending at year's end. Arrests of other journalists on dubious charges continued during 2014, and media workers had increasing difficulty accessing or reporting on the Sinai.

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, 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. Some Morsi supporters considered the Coptic community to be partly responsible for his overthrow and attacked Copts and their property in retaliation. Only an estimated 10 percent of the dozens of churches and businesses damaged in such attacks in 2013 had been rebuilt by late 2014.

Anyone whose appearance or dress suggests adherence to a conservative form of Islam continues to be at risk of arrest or harassment. An atmosphere of insecurity and repression prevailed throughout 2014, with the government dictating weekly sermon themes at mosques and closely monitoring political speech at religious institutions. Authorities also stepped up pressure on perceived atheists, enforcing laws against blasphemy and raiding supposed gathering places for atheists in November and December.

Academic freedom has suffered since the 2013 coup. Despite a ban on political activity, universities have been a center of antigovernment demonstrations and the target of a government crackdown. Sisi appoints university presidents and has empowered university officials to expel and further marginalize antigovernment students. Hundreds of students were arrested for demonstrating against the government over the course of 2014.

Private discussion has become more guarded in the face of vigilantism and increased monitoring of social media for opposition-oriented content. Media personalities have called on the public to inform on anyone they suspect of undermining the state, and some arrests have been reported stemming from overheard conversations in public places.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

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. Protests against the government continued throughout 2014, but they often ended in violent clashes with police and local residents, and police repeatedly used excessive force. On the third anniversary of the 2011 uprising in January, authorities responded to secularist and Islamist demonstrations with tear gas and live ammunition, resulting in at least 49 deaths and more than 1,000 arrests.

The 2002 Law on Associations grants the government sweeping powers over nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the ability to shut down the groups, confiscate their funding, and block nominations to their governing boards. Individuals working with unregistered groups face prison terms for engaging in "unauthorized activities." The government has in the past permitted NGOs to operate without registration, enforcing the law when it becomes politically expedient. Under a decree issued in September 2014, members of NGOs that use foreign funding to commit acts that "harm the national interest" face life imprisonment and fines of nearly \$70,000. If an offender is a public servant or committed the violation for the purposes of terrorism, he or she could face the death penalty.

Strikes played a significant role in the 2011 uprising, and workers subsequently formed an independent union federation, ending the long-standing monopoly of the state-allied federation. The labor movement was dampened somewhat after Morsi's ouster, as authorities clamped down on strikes and accused those involved of sympathizing with the Muslim Brotherhood. Strikes began to increase again in early 2014, particularly around demands for the nationwide expansion of a new minimum wage that had been granted to some public-sector workers. Authorities responded with raids, arrests, and intimidation.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16 (-2)

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. The judiciary was at the center of the political process following the 2013 coup. Supreme Constitutional Court chairman Adli Mansour served as interim president, and judges played a leading role in the drafting of the constitution. The new charter significantly enhances 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.

A number of criminal cases in 2014 featured severe violations of due process and demonstrated a high degree of politicization in the court system, which typically resulted in harsh punishments for perceived enemies of the government. Three deeply flawed mass trials in March, April, and December led to death sentences for 1,400 suspected Islamists, though most were later reduced to life in prison.

The new constitution allows for trials of civilians by military courts, which have traditionally been used to target government critics. Charges brought in military courts are often vague or fabricated, defendants are denied due process, and basic evidentiary standards are routinely disregarded.

Police brutality and impunity for abuses by security forces were catalysts for the 2011 uprising, but there has been no security-sector reform in the subsequent four years. Prison conditions are very poor; inmates are subject to torture, overcrowding, and a lack of sanitation and medical care. In December 2014 a local human rights group accused the police of holding hundreds of minors in harsh conditions after they were arrested for protesting and related offenses.

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. In October 2014, after coordinated attacks by militants killed more than 30 soldiers, authorities declared a three-month state of emergency in large areas of the Sinai and instituted a nightly curfew. In November, the region's most prominent militant faction, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, declared its loyalty to the Islamic State, the extremist group based in Syria and Iraq.

The authorities in 2014 appeared to step up enforcement of laws against "debauchery," particularly targeting men perceived as gay. In an increasingly common occurrence, six men were sentenced to two years in prison in September after they were arrested in a raid on an apartment that the authorities claimed was a central location for same-sex sexual activity. Eight men arrested under the same charge that month, in connection with a video of a supposed same-sex wedding, received reduced sentences of one year in jail after being subjected to forced medical examinations to determine if they had engaged in sex with other men. A televised raid on a bathhouse in December resulted in debauchery charges against 26 men.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16 (-1)

Freedom of movement and property rights were both severely affected by the government's counterinsurgency efforts in the Sinai in 2014. In addition to the curfew and other travel restrictions, beginning in October the military summarily demolished hundreds of homes in the town of Rafah to create a secure buffer zone along the border with the Gaza Strip, displacing more than 1,000 families. Also during the year, a number of foreign scholars and activists were barred entry to the country.

Unlike Egypt's past constitutions, which have limited women's rights to those compatible with Islamic law, the 2014 constitution clearly affirms the equality of the sexes. However, this has not resulted in practical improvements for women. 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. Spousal rape is not illegal, and the penal code allows for leniency in so-called honor killings. Other problems include forced marriages, human trafficking, and high rates of female genital mutilation or cutting.

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. This includes sexual harassment on the street, and severe cases of group sexual assaults at public gatherings. A June 2014 decree criminalized sexual harassment, with prison terms of up to five years and fines of up to \$7,000, but critics argued that the law was inadequate, citing a lack of protection for witnesses among its weak points. In July, seven men were sentenced to life in prison for attempted murder and other offenses in a series of group sexual assaults committed in Cairo's Tahrir Square. After a video circulated of one such assault, in which a crowd stripped and beat a woman on the night of Sisi's inauguration, the government had vowed a stronger response to the attacks.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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