

World
Watch
Research

Egypt: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Woman in Egypt (c) Open Doors International

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Egypt

Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Egypt: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
104,692,000	16,250,000	OD estimate

Map of country



Egypt: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	71	20
WWL 2021	75	16
WWL 2020	76	16
WWL 2019	76	16
WWL 2018	70	17

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Egypt: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials, Violent religious groups
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Clan oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Christians in Egypt report that freedom of religion violations come mostly at community level. Incidents vary from Christian women being harassed while walking in a street to a mob of angry Muslims forcing a whole community of Christians to move out, leaving their houses and belongings to be confiscated. These sort of incidents take place mostly in Upper Egypt, where Salafist movements are active in the rural communities. The Islamic Salafi al-Nour party continues to exist and operate legally, although the Constitution prohibits religious parties (Art. 74). Their influence is considerable in rural societies where there is a high percentage of illiteracy and poverty.

Al-Azhar University, one of the most influential Islamic universities in the world, has a prominent place within Egyptian society and even the Constitution. The university's Grand Imam, Ahmed el-Tayyeb, has [clearly stated](#) that there is no place in Islam for Muslims to convert to Christianity (World Watch Monitor / WWM, 22 June 2016).

President al-Sisi regularly speaks positively about Egypt's Christian community. However, the lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians leave them vulnerable to all kinds of attacks, especially in Upper Egypt. In addition, due to the dictatorial nature of the regime, it is futile for church leaders or other Christians to speak out against these practices.

Furthermore, in clear contrast to how mosques are dealt with, the building of new churches is restricted. Christians of all backgrounds face difficulties in finding (new) places for communal worship. The difficulties come both from state restrictions as well as from communal hostility and mob violence.

Christians with a Muslim background have great difficulties in living out their faith since they face enormous pressure from their families to return to Islam. The state also makes it impossible for them to get any official recognition of their conversion.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Egypt has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Egypt is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are arbitrarily accused and charged for blasphemy (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face discrimination in public and private employment because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings and to receive licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)
- Christian women, especially in rural areas, may be targeted, abducted and forced into marriage with Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **April 2021:** A video was released of the execution of 62 year old Coptic Christian Nabil Habashy Salama. Salama had been abducted from his village in Northern Sinai by the Islamic State group (IS) on 7 November 2020. His abductors subsequently asked jizya tax from his Christian village, if they wanted to see Salama return. Unable to pay the high amount, Salama was executed at the beginning of 2021. The execution video contained a number of death threats to all Christians in Egypt. Similarly, specific threats were sent to the sons of Salama, who decided to flee the region ([World Watch Monitor, 26 April 2021](#)).
- **November 2020:** Blasphemy charges can easily lead to mob violence against Christians, especially in Upper Egypt. In November 2020, several Christians homes and properties were damaged by a mob of hundreds of local Muslims in the village of Barsha, Minya governate,

Upper Egypt. The local church was also attacked and a minibus belonging to the church was set on fire. The sectarian violence started after a local Christian man allegedly posted a comment on social media deemed insulting to Islam ([CSW, 27 November 2020](#)).

- **Imprisonment without trial:** A Coptic Christian activist, who primarily advocates for full rights for the Coptic Christian minority, has been in prison for more than two years without trial. Ramy Kamil was arrested in November 2019 on charges of terrorism because of his activism and leadership of the Maspero Youth Union ([Frontline Defenders, accessed 14 December 2021](#)).
- **Forced conversions and marriage etc.:** During the WWL 2022 reporting period, at least 70 young Coptic women were reported missing. It often remains unclear whether someone escaped from an abusive home or a forced marriage, fell in love with a (Muslim) man and voluntarily ran away or if someone was groomed and forcefully converted to Islam. There are indications, though, that Salafi groups specifically target (young) Coptic women to convert them to Islam and that financial incentives are offered to (young) Muslim men to marry them. Although this number is comparatively low compared to the overall number of Copts, there are numerous worrying legal and cultural elements that make them particularly vulnerable to such practices, including (legal) difficulty to reconvert to Christianity and family honor preventing Christian women from returning to their families. In addition, there is a striking imbalance between the faiths: Whereas a Christian women can easily convert to Islam and marry a Muslim man, it is culturally and legally impossible for a Christian man to marry a Muslim woman. The latter is in the first place forbidden by law, but more importantly, women are considered the bearers of the (family) honor and (Islamic) pride. The slightest rumor that a Christian man is in a relationship with a Muslim woman is often enough to cause mob violence against Christians. (For more information, see below: *Gender-specific religious persecution*.)

Specific examples of positive developments

- The legalization of churches under the 2016 Church construction law has been continuing. 1800 churches out of 5540 requests have received official registration, but many churches are still waiting. The official recognition of churches often leads to sectarian tensions with the local Muslim population ([Asia News, 4 August 2020](#); [Egypt Independent, 30 December 2020](#)).
- During the WWL 2022 reporting period, no major violent attack outside of North Sinai has been carried out by Islamic militants targeting the Christian Coptic community.
- In January 2021, the prosecutor-general ordered an appeal in the case of Soad Thabet, a 74 year old Coptic woman who was stripped naked in a violent incident in 2016. Her attackers were first sentenced to ten years in prison, but later acquitted ([Ahram Online, 10 January 2021](#)).
- Although outside the reporting period, Coptic Christian human rights defender Patrick George Zaki was released on 7 December 2021, after more than 20 months of pre-trial detention. He will still need to appear in court on charges of "publishing false news inside and outside Egypt" ([Frontline Defenders, accessed 23 December 2021](#)).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: clearly stated - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/06/al-azhar-to-leave-islam-is-treason/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: World Watch Monitor, 26 April 2021 - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2021/04/death-threats-by-islamic-state-in-sinai-against-egyptian-copt-sons-who-mourn-dad/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: CSW, 27 November 2020 - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/11/27/press/4898/article.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Frontline Defenders, accessed 14 December 2021 - <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/detention-human-rights-defender-ramy-kamel>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Asia News, 4 August 2020; - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Egypt-legalizes-74-Christian-churches-and-places-of-worship-49773.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Egypt Independent, 30 December 2020 - <https://egyptindependent.com/egypt-legalizes-62-churches-and-affiliated-buildings-total-now-1800/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Ahram Online, 10 January 2021 - <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/398536/Egypt/Politics-/Egypsts-top-prosecutor-to-appeal-acquittal-of-three.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Frontline Defenders, accessed 23 December 2021 - <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-patrick-george-zaki-released-detention>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Egypt

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt/	28 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13313370	28 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-EGY.html	28 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/egypt/	28 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	28 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	28 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Egypt is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-world/2021	28 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2020	28 July 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/egypt	28 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/egypt	28 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#eg	28 July 2021
Middle East Concern country page	MEC Egypt	https://meconcern.org/countries/egypt/	28 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	https://rsf.org/en/taxonomy/term/156	28 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/egy	28 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI 2020	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/EGY	28 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/egypt/	28 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Egypt%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf	28 July 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt	28 July 2021

Recent history

After serving as president for three decades (from 1981 to 2011), Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down during the Arab Spring uprisings. The demonstrators put forward demands for more political freedom and expressed the discontent of the population with the country's social and economic situation. In June 2012, after a brief transition, Mohamed Morsi, a politician who was a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood, won the presidential election (gaining 52% of the votes). "Victory for Islam" was a widely used slogan in his election campaign, which raised levels of fear among the Coptic minority. Once in power, Morsi assumed dictatorial executive powers that alienated many Egyptians. Popular demonstrations were organized by a group called the Tamarrod which enjoyed the [support](#) of the police, the army, businessmen and also prominent Islamic and Christian Coptic religious figures (International Crisis Group, 7 August 2013). Ultimately, the army [intervened](#) and ousted President Morsi alleging that he had failed to respond satisfactorily to the demands of the Egyptian people (BBC News, 4 July 2013). The army adopted its own transition road map which culminated in the adoption of a new constitution and the holding of new parliamentary and presidential elections.

At the end of the process, Field-Marshal Abdul Fattah al-Sisi emerged as the new Egyptian strong man. Al-Sisi was minister of defense when Morsi was in power and he was the principal figure behind the ousting of Morsi. He was hailed by some as a hero who saved Egypt from the clutches of the Muslim Brotherhood, while others contend that his leadership is a sure sign of Egypt's return to the old days of autocracy backed by the army. Once the new constitution was adopted, al-Sisi ran for president as a civilian and - given the personality cult that had been built around him prior to the election - it was not surprising that he [won](#) with an overwhelming majority (International Crisis Group - ICG, 7 August 2013). Since al-Sisi's ascent to power there has been a large-scale crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. In March 2018, al-Sisi was [re-elected](#) with

97% of the votes (The Guardian, 2 April 2018). This huge win is a clear indication of how effectively all opposition had been removed during his first term.

In February 2019, parliament members voted (later passed by a referendum) on extending the presidency term to allow President al-Sisi to stay in office for another 12 years after finishing his current term. New amendments also boosted the power of the army, already the dominant force in Egyptian politics. The political situation is generating some tension in the country as even some of al-Sisi's supporters are quite frustrated by the army's strong influence concerning the country's political decisions and economy. President al-Sisi's popularity is waning and hopes are currently low that he will be able to secure the basic needs for Egyptians in the low income bracket.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the country hard in 2020. The whole COVID-19 crisis in Egypt has been accompanied by much fake news and conspiracy theories, with some Muslim and Christians clerics claiming that Muslims or Christians cannot catch the virus ([Al-Monitor, 31 March 2020](#)). However, it does not help that the Egyptian government arrested health workers who dared to criticize the government's approach under anti-terrorism laws ([Amnesty International, 18 June 2020](#)). Despite the release of some political prisoners because of the COVID-19 virus, the Egyptian government did not free Coptic activists Ramy Kamel and Patrick George Zaki ([The Tablet, 28 April 2020](#)) - their only 'wrongdoing' being the highlighting of the plight of Egypt's Copts (Kamel) and the LGBTI community (Zaki, who was later released in December 2021). This is an indication that President al-Sisi may not have been entirely sincere in his 2014 public declaration to be a "[protector](#)" of the Christian community; or only as long as they support him (Egyptian Independent, 28 November 2014).

Political and legal landscape

The Arab Republic of Egypt is a republic with a semi-presidential system. On paper, Egypt is a democracy. In practice, ever since King Farouk was overthrown in 1952, the powers of the parliament have always been weak and - de facto - the president rules alone. The independence of the judiciary is limited and it is not unusual for the government to simply ignore court rulings ([Fanack, 7 July 2020](#)).

With President al-Sisi sworn into power in 2014 the situation in Egypt stabilized, but human rights have been experiencing a crisis as Human Rights Watch noted (HRW 2021): "Under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government, Egypt has been experiencing its worst human rights crisis in many decades. Tens of thousands of government critics, including journalists and human rights defenders, remain imprisoned on politically motivated charges, many in lengthy pretrial detention. Authorities frequently use terrorism charges against peaceful activists and harassed and detained relatives of dissidents abroad."

In June 2019, former Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi died during his trial, some reports linking his death to poor prison conditions. Since al-Sisi's rise to power, many of the Muslim Brotherhood's members have been detained, prosecuted and sentenced to death or life imprisonment and the movement has been forced to go underground ([Wilson Center, 17 March 2021](#)). The government continues to ban most forms of independent organization and peaceful assembly and has cracked down on various dissident and opposition groups.

One cannot help but feel a sense of déjà vu now that a military strongman is once again cracking down on the Muslim Brotherhood and all opposition in general. President al-Sisi's regime wants to project an image of being a guarantor of stability, order and security for Christians. The administration seems determined to tackle the increasing Islamization of the state that accelerated under the leadership of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. At the same time, there is a risk that segments of the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters, who feel aggrieved by their loss of power and the repression they are facing, might become more radicalized and join underground militant Islamic groups in great numbers. Such developments could lead to a further polarization of society in Egypt and could pose a serious risk to the nation's stability and the security of Christian Egyptians in the long run.

The current high level of support for President al-Sisi's regime by a large number of the churches and Christians, might also be used against them. Followers of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups are likely to [view church buildings](#) and Christians as easy targets to show that the Egyptian government is not able to protect its supporters (World Watch Monitor, 11 November 2019).

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2020):

- Egypt is classified as an 'authoritarian' regime.

According to Middle East Concern (accessed on 14 December 2021):

- "Egypt's 2014 constitution establishes Islam as the State religion and the principles of Islamic law as the main source of legislation. It also provides that Christians and Jews may govern personal status and religious affairs according to their own codes. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It states that freedom of religion is absolute and guarantees freedom of religious practice in accordance with regulations, though this right is limited to adherents of the Abrahamic religions (i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Although religious conversion is not prohibited in codified legislation, conversion away from Islam is not allowed in practice. ... In late August 2016 Egypt's House of Representatives passed Law 80/2016 on the construction of churches. The law aims to make obtaining a permit for the construction of churches easier. The president has since then given permission for several new church buildings, but no new churches have obtained a permit following the procedures of this new law. Critics complain that under the new law the National Security Agency maintains a de facto veto on church building permits. Prime Ministerial Decree 199/2017 formed a committee that deals with existing unlicensed church buildings. Church denominations had until September 2017 to file a list of unlicensed building with the committee. Of the more than 3,700 applications for a license the committee had issued 1,109 licenses by the end of August, 2019."

The Egyptian legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. Whilst it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, it maintained a [reservation to Article 16](#) (UNDP, 2018, "Egypt: Gender Justice and the Law"), which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage. Egypt has made positive steps in recent decades, introducing several laws that improve gender equality such as the [2008 Child law](#), which raised the minimum age of

marriage from 16 to 18. The President of the Republic even declared 2017 as ‘the year of the Egyptian woman’ and female representation in Parliament has [steadily risen since 2012](#) (Index Mundi, accessed 28 July 2021). Despite this, accomplishments lie behind aspirations and many laws are inadequate. Child marriage continues, particularly in rural areas; [17%](#) of girls are reportedly married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, 2021). Under the Muslim Personal Status Law, men have the right to divorce their wives by *talaq*. Women can apply for fault-based divorces, although judges have discretion regarding the threshold of harm and whether divorce is granted. Upon divorce they will likely lose custody of their children ([UNDP, 2018](#)).

Men face conscription into the army from the age of 18, where they serve 18-36 months. Within this context, Christians face discrimination. They are reportedly [denied promotion](#) and the possibility to serve in more sensitive branches of the army, linked to intelligence (Open Democracy, 29 May 2014).

Religious landscape

Egypt: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	16,250,000	15.5
Muslim	87,826,334	83.9
Hindu	1,488	0.0
Buddhist	837	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	93	0.0
Bahai	2,139	0.0
Atheist	88,443	0.1
Agnostic	520,800	0.5
Other	1,767	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)
(Adapted according to OD-estimate)

Islam is the most dominant religion in Egypt. The Open Doors estimate for the number of Christians is 16,250,000. However, the total number and percentage of Christians remain a topic of some debate, with Egyptian Christians claiming that over 15% of the population is Christian. Although Christianity has deep roots in Egypt going back centuries before the advent of Islam in North Africa, Christians are often marginalized and treated as second class citizens in modern Egypt. Christians can be found all over the country, but "they are particularly concentrated in Upper Egypt (the southern part of Egypt) and in major cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. Sub-

urbs in Cairo, other cities and some villages are sometimes regarded or described as ‘Christian areas’, but few are exclusively Christian (or Muslim)." ([Australian Department of Foreign affairs and Trade, May 2017](#))

Humanist International writes in its [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (accessed 23 July 2021): "One of the most visible signs of discrimination against atheists, apostates from Islam and members of minority religions is the policy concerning the Egyptian State ID cards, which include a section on religion where only one of the three “divine religions” can be recognized. ... Muslim-born individuals who leave Islam are not allowed to change the religion field on their identity card. Only in a few cases in which Christians converted to Islam and subsequently returned to Christianity have the Egyptian courts, albeit inconsistently, allowed the change in the documents."

Within this religious context, men and women face significant pressure, particularly converts from Islam to Christianity. Egyptian law permits Christians to convert to Islam, but despite several [campaigns](#) against the disparity, not vice versa (European Centre for Law and Justice, 25 January 2010). As such, a Christian woman can be married to a Muslim man, but a Christian man cannot marry a Muslim woman.

Economic landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and World Bank (which puts the Egyptian economy in the lower middle income category):

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$11,763 (2019 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 7.86%, with youth unemployment being three times as high at 24.7%
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 32.5% (2017 est.)
- "Economic activity and employment started resuming, yet the resurgence in COVID-19 cases is clouding the nascent economic up-tick. Pressures arise from the severely affected foreign income sources (tourism, goods exports, FDI), but remittances, port-folio inflows and external financing continue to support international reserves".
- "Besides pandemic-containment efforts, pushing ahead with macro-fiscal and structural reforms, strengthening social protection and advancing the human capital agenda will be crucial for a strong recovery."
- "In Egypt, growth is forecast to decline from 3.6% in FY2019/20 to 2.3% in FY2020/21 in light of the ongoing effect of the pandemic, and the renewed surge in the COVID-19 cases, as well as the slow vaccine roll-out domestically and abroad".

The Fragile State Index (FSI 2020) shows that there are small but steady improvements in the economic indicators.

President al-Sisi's administration has embarked upon an ambitious plan to revitalize the Egyptian economy and create much needed economic growth and jobs. However, many Egyptians suffered from the effects of the 2016 devaluation of the Egyptian pound which was carried out to secure a loan from the International Monetary Fund ([The Guardian, 3 November 2016](#)). The unemployment rate has dropped slightly in recent years, but structural problems of illiteracy and poverty continue to be devastating. However, for the first time since 1999, the

poverty rate decreased slightly to 29.7% in 2020, according Egypt's bureau for statistics ([Ahram Online, 3 December 2020](#)), whose 2019 report found that around 32.5% of the population lives under the poverty line of \$2 a day, a 4.7% increase compared to 2015 ([Egypt Independent, 30 July 2019](#)). The economic reforms seem to be paying off and Egypt is one of the few African countries with a growing economy, despite the COVID-19 crisis ([AFDB, 12 March 2021](#)).

Nonetheless, Egyptian Christians report that increased taxes and higher prices for gas, electricity and water have led to rises in the price of food, transportation and houseware. Price increases have put more pressure on the social structure of society, with the middle class struggling to make ends meet, while the high poverty rate especially affects many Christians living in rural areas. The increased economic pressure on already marginalized families fuels migration.

In addition, poverty is easily used to manipulate poor people for religious and political purposes. Unemployed Muslim youth can be led by radical Islamic groups to initiate attacks on churches and individual Christians. Secondly, there are indications that radical Islamic groups target poor Christians to convert them to Islam. Especially women and girls are vulnerable, as they become easy targets for forced marriages.

Discrimination against Christians in the job market remains evident, especially in governmental institutions. This applies in general to all Christians in Egypt, but converts from a Muslim background are particularly vulnerable.

A [2017 Inheritance law](#) has gone some way to protecting the economic rights of women, preventing persons from denying women their inheritance rights. Nonetheless, according to Inheritance Law No. 77 of 1943, all citizens – including Christians - are subject to Islamic Inheritance Law, which typically stipulates that men should inherit double that of what a woman receives. There have been positive developments in this regard, however; an Egyptian court recently [ruled](#) that a Coptic Christian woman should receive equal inheritance to her brothers. She was encouraged by her brothers to fight for this right (The Times, 27 November 2019).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Egyptian population (99.7%) are ethnically Egyptian.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with French and English "being widely understood by the educated classes".
- **Urban population:** In 2021, 42.9% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 1.9%
- **Literacy rate:** 71.2% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (76.5%) and women (65.5%) (2017).
- **Youth population:** The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up almost 52% of the population, making it another African country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities

- **IDPs/Refugees:** In 2021, Egypt hosted 130,000 Syrian refugees. In addition, there are 70,000 refugees from the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip residing in the country (2018); as well as roughly 70,000 refugees from Sudan and South Sudan. Other refugees are from Eritrea (19,000), Ethiopia (16,000), Yemen (9,200) Iraq (6,800) and Somalia (6,700).
- **Life expectancy:** 74.0 years on average; women (75.6 years), men (72.5 years).
- **Education:** Egyptians enjoy 13 years of schooling on average (2017). This figure is the same for both boys and girls.

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI 2020):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Egypt ranks #116 out 189 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI). Despite ongoing difficulties, the combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a high score of 0.707.
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.882, women are still clearly disadvantaged in comparison to men, although the score improved slightly compared to 2019 (0.878). The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Egypt is one of nine countries with the highest illiteracy rates in the world, with adult illiteracy at about 26%, according to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI 2020, p.15). In addition, poverty, a low level of health awareness and education and high and widespread domestic violence are common for many Egyptians, including Christians. It is common for children in villages to leave school at an early age to help earn family income. Reportedly, many Christian children face discrimination within the educational system from both teachers and peers. Although there are private Christians schools, most Christians cannot afford them. Power dynamics are at play at all levels of society: Muslims oppress Christians, men oppress women, and some church leaders may use their authority to oppress the most vulnerable Christians of other denominations.

Culturally, Egypt is conservative and despite its large urban centers (Cairo and Alexandria) is dominated by tribal attitudes. The population is not as ethnically diverse as other countries in North Africa and the Middle East and has a strong national identity.

Within Egypt's patriarchal context, men and women are expected to assume traditional gender roles. Women are legally required to obey their husbands (Law No. 100 of 1985: Article 11b) and should she fail to do so, her husband can file an obedience complaint against her ([OECD, 2019](#)). Domestic violence is common in Egypt, and has reportedly worsened in the context of the COVID-19 crisis ([UN Women, April 2020](#); [Egypt Today, July 2021](#)).

Especially with the rise of more radical interpretations of Islam, the pressure on Christians has been increasing over the past few decades. Egypt seeks to be a social and cultural center for Sunni Islam and continues to be influential through its Islamic Al-Azhar University and its media production houses. President al-Sisi called upon scholars at the prestigious Al-Azhar University to fight radicalism and introduce reforms in Islamic teaching. This has for example led to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar stating that "the terms *dhimmi* (the protected but second-class Christian or Jewish community in a Muslim state) and *jizya* (the tax paid to achieve such status

in lieu of converting to Islam) no longer have any relevance in Egypt" ([Christianity Today, 22 February 2021](#)). However, in rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are clearly present. The government is making efforts to reverse this trend, but has not been very successful so far.

Christians in Egypt report that, although Muslims and Christians have much contact in everyday life, it cannot be called a peaceful co-existence. Although all speak the same language, there is nevertheless considerable division caused by their contrasting belief systems. Radical Muslims in rural areas, where many Christians live, promote attitudes of rejection towards Christians, which is a fertile ground for aggression, especially targeting women and children. Christian women, in rural areas in particular, find themselves targeted by radical Islamic groups and as a result kidnapping for either conversion, ransom or forced marriage is not uncommon. In addition, when sectarian violence emerges, conflicts are often solved using so-called 'customary reconciliation councils'. However, because of their minority position, "reconciliation sessions often seem to punish Christians, leaving Muslim perpetrators with few consequences" ([Eshhad, March 2016](#)).

The COVID-19 crisis has had a serious economic effect on many Christians. Because of existing discrimination, many Christians are self-employed or work in the private sector. Only a small percentage of the Christian population has a job in the public sector. Whereas the government continues to pay salaries and pensions, the private sector has come to a complete standstill. Hence, Christians do not profit from this system of continued payment of salaries and pensions. Many Christians have had to use their savings, if they have any, to buy food. For example, 'Garbage City', the slum area where most of Cairo's waste is recycled by around 60,000 Christians ([BBC News, 26 September 2016](#)) came to a complete standstill. This leaves them more vulnerable than before. Hence, years of discrimination in government employment now result in the Coptic community being disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 52.5% penetration (June 2021)
- **Facebook usage:** 49.3% penetration (June 2021)

Internet usage saw a slight increase, with the previous survey showing 48.1% penetration in December 2019. According to [Statista \(April 2021\)](#), 37.5% of Facebook users are women and 62.5% men.

According to World Bank 2020:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 95.0 per 100 people, increasing from 85.4 in 2010. According to [Statista](#), the Internet is more accessible to men (Statista, 25 August 2020): In 2018, 52.4% of men had access to the Internet, compared to 41.3% of women. The gender gap in relation to mobile phone ownership [stands at 14%](#) with men out in front (Gallup World Poll, 2018). It is therefore harder for women to access digital Christian resources or online Christian communities.

According to Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021:

- Internet freedom is rated as "not free" in Egypt, scoring lower than most neighboring countries.
- Levels of censorship have increased under President al-Sisi, with more than 500 websites being blocked because of their (political) content. Journalists and others critical of the regime have been arrested, tortured and imprisoned.

Other sources report:

- Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom 2020: "The press freedom situation is becoming more and more alarming in Egypt, with frequent waves of raids and arrests. ... Ever since Gen. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi seized power in a coup in 2013, a process of a 'Sisification' has been under way in the media. The government has ... bought up the biggest media groups to the point that it now controls the entire media landscape and has imposed a complete clampdown on free speech."
- Data from the Committee to Protect Journalists shows that at least 27 journalists are currently imprisoned in Egypt. In addition, it shows that the number of attacked journalists has strongly increased since President al-Sisi came to power in 2014 ([CPJ, accessed on 26 July 2021](#)).
- According to the [Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression \(AFTE\)](#), the government has blocked access to almost 500 websites, most of them belonging to media organizations (AFTE, 2 July 2018)

Under al-Sisi, media censorship in Egypt has [increased](#) at a drastic pace (Atlantic Council, 28 August 2018). In 2018, the president ratified the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law, which ostensibly aims to combat "extremism" and "terrorism". However, these laws allow Egyptian authorities to arbitrarily block websites that are considered a threat to national security or to the national economy. Individuals who visit these websites can face steep fines and penalties. Although the anti-cyber laws regulate and restrict the press and all other media channels and is restricting freedom of speech, Christians in Egypt report that modern communications technology is widely used in Egypt. Social media (especially Facebook) is used to mobilize public opinion. However, all multimedia is monitored by the government and criticism of the government or Islam is not tolerated. Most churches are currently using little modern technology in youth-work or for evangelistic purposes.

Security situation

The domestic security situation in Egypt is currently stable except in the northeast of the Sinai region, near the border with Gaza, where the struggle between the Egyptian army and violent Islamic militants continues. The Egyptian security forces conduct operations against these militant groups on a regular basis, often at no small cost for the local population ([TIMEP, 6 April 2021](#)). These groups include Islamic State group-affiliated *Wilayat Sinai*, which probably also conducted the terror attack against a Sufi mosque in the north of the Sinai in 2017, killing 305 people. Since then, the Egyptian army has increased its military efforts in the region ([Al-Monitor, 7 September 2020](#)). However, it is very difficult to control the entire area and the security forces cannot prevent militant groups from attacking undermanned checkpoints and sometimes civil-

ian targets. The threat of bomb attacks remains, especially for minority groups (including Christians). It is likely that this situation will continue in the short term.

There is also the threat of protests becoming violent. Minor demonstrations, initiated mostly by the Muslim Brotherhood, occurred on 20 September 2019 in protest against government policies but they were quickly contained by arresting the demonstrators. Fear increased after the security services started checking the mobile phones of ordinary pedestrians who had shared messages about the protest ([Washington Post, 30 October 2019](#)). In March 2020, four activists were arrested after demonstrating for the release of prisoners threatened by the COVID-19 virus in overcrowded prisons ([The Guardian, 18 March 2020](#)). In September 2020, "small but widespread" protests occurred in remembrance of the 2019 protests ([HRW, 13 October 2020](#)). However, due to the very oppressive nature of the regime, protests are scarce and often quickly quelled.

Internationally, Egypt supports Libyan strongman Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar, who controls the east of Libya. Like al-Sisi, Haftar is strongly opposed to Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood (which Egypt has declared to be a terrorist organization). During 2020, Haftar's forces suffered considerable losses after Turkey brought military support to the UN-backed government which controls the west of Libya. Thus, in June 2020, al-Sisi announced that Egypt's army would intervene if Haftar were to lose more territory ([BBC News, 17 August 2020](#)). However, this has not yet happened since a ceasefire was reached in October 2020. Following the ceasefire and Haftar's defeat, it seems that Egypt has started betting on different horses, as al-Sisi opened up towards the western government and left Haftar out of diplomatic meetings ([The Arab Weekly, 6 July 2021](#)). Nonetheless, the situation in Libya remains volatile and could lead to a confrontation or proxy-war between Egypt and Turkey in Libya.

Most Egyptian Christians support President al-Sisi for the very reason that he has vowed to keep Egypt safe and to [protect](#) the Christian community against terrorist attacks (Egyptian Independent, 28 November 2014). Nevertheless, Christians remain vulnerable, especially in the face of mob attacks. Rumors of alleged blasphemy or the opening of a new church can lead to mob violence against Christians. In upper Egypt, the local authorities use so-called 'reconciliation sessions' to resolve a conflict, which - de facto - often means that Muslim attackers go free. This has resulted in a culture of impunity for violence against Christians in that area.

Coptic women and girls can be particularly vulnerable for exploitation across Egypt, with reports of forced marriages, disappearances and occasionally abductions. While some are kidnapped directly off the street, this tends to be a rare occurrence. More commonly, they are approached by Muslim men who groom them into romantic relationships and into eloping with them, promising they would convert to Christianity; in those cases girls can be then forcibly married and forcibly converted to Islam. Captors have reportedly filmed the girls being sexually abused and used the footage as blackmail material to deter them from returning to their families, utilizing the strong [shame culture](#) in Egypt to their advantage (J Zakarriya, 2019, Journal of International Women's Studies). The response by Egyptian police has been [dismissive and ineffective](#), particularly in instances where Christian girls displayed initial willingness to elope (World Watch Monitor, 14 September 2017). Additionally, conversion to Islam is always accepted and encouraged.

Further reflecting the fragility of the Egyptian justice system, the perpetrators of a 2016 attack on elderly Coptic Christian woman Soad Thabet (who was stripped naked and paraded through the streets) were acquitted after their appeal in December 2020 ([ABC, 18 Dec 2020](#)). A new case has been opened against the three men, the outcome of which is pending.

Trends analysis

1) Egypt continues to be susceptible to the influence of radical Islam

Egypt is an important country in the region due to its strategic location, its territorial and population size and because of its historical and diplomatic influence. The Church is also of critical importance since the Christian presence in Egypt is the largest surviving Christian population in the region. Throughout the 20th century and beyond, it seems that competing views of the Egyptian state have been vying for dominance in the country. One view (advanced by the army and political establishment) puts more emphasis on nationalism as opposed to religion, while another view (that of Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood) wants to make religion the foundation and central element of Egyptian identity. Both viewpoints have offered Egyptian Christians little by way of rights and security and as the competition between these two camps unfolds, Egyptian Christians are often caught in the political crossfire and forced to make difficult choices. The high level of illiteracy, economic stagnation and demographic pressure also means that - regardless of the political dispensation in the country - Egyptian society continues to be susceptible to the influence of the most radical and intolerant versions of Islam that are particularly appealing to the youth and the poor.

2) Christians remain vulnerable

General security has improved under President al-Sisi. No large scale terror attacks have taken place since 2018. Nonetheless, (sexual) harassment of women remains common. Despite the inclusive language by the president, sectarian violence and religious discrimination remains problematic, especially in Upper Egypt, in rural areas and economically disadvantaged urban areas. It is likely that customary reconciliation councils, which are prone to injustice, will continue to be used. In addition, al-Sisi's ongoing crackdown on any dissent or criticism, including human rights activism by human rights defenders like Coptic activists Ramy Kamel and Patrick George Zaki, will continue to make it difficult for churches and Christians to speak up for themselves and address injustices. Hence, the non-violent forms of rights violations that are prevalent in various spheres of life are likely to continue without much change for the better.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: support - <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/marching-in-circles-egypt-s-dangerous-second-transition.pdf>
- Recent history: intervened - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23173794>
- Recent history: won - <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/marching-in-circles-egypt-s-dangerous-second-transition.pdf>
- Recent history: re-elected - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/02/sisi-poised-to-declare-landslide-victory-in-egypt-election>
- Recent history: Al-Monitor, 31 March 2020 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/egyptian-superstitions-jokes-on-coronavirus.html>

- Recent history: Amnesty International, 18 June 2020 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/egypt-health-care-workers-forced-to-make-impossible-choice-between-death-or-jail/>
- Recent history: The Tablet, 28 April 2020 - <https://thetablet.org/despite-coronavirus-fears-egypt-refuses-to-release-coptic-activists/>
- Recent history: protector - <https://www.egyptindependent.com/sisi-vows-protect-egypt-s-coptic-christians/>
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- Political and legal landscape: Wilson Center, 17 March 2021 - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/egypt-2021-muslim-brotherhood>
- Political and legal landscape: view church buildings - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/11/egypt-series-of-fires-in-their-churches-not-a-coincidence-say-copts/>
- Political and legal landscape: t - <https://meconcern.org/countries/egypt/>
- Political and legal landscape: reservation to Article 16 - https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Egypt%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: 2008 Child law - http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=79736&p_country=EGY&p_count=537
- Political and legal landscape: steadily risen since 2012 - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/egypt/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- Political and legal landscape: 17% - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/egypt/>
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- Economic landscape: AFDB, 12 March 2021 - <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/north-africa/egypt/egypt-economic-outlook>
- Economic landscape: 2017 Inheritance law - <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/1661394.aspx>
- Economic landscape: ruled - <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/woman-overturms-arab-inheritance-rules-jcv3g2qr9>
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WWL 2022: Church information / Egypt

Christian origins

The Coptic (= Egyptian) Orthodox Church prides itself in the tradition which names the Bible's New Testament apostle Mark as founder of Christianity in Egypt. In Alexandria, a vibrant church developed with its own 'school' of theology in the 2nd century. This was home to the Church Father, Athanasius of Alexandria (+ 373 AD), who was one of the foremost theologians of the worldwide church, especially for his defence of the view of God as a Trinity. Initially, the church was mainly a Greek phenomenon in the cities, but the original Egyptian population was soon won over for the new faith as well. Egypt became the cradle of monasticism; the Monastery of St Anthony became an important model for monasticism throughout Europe.

Persecution under Roman occupation was often severe in Egypt. This is why the Coptic calendar begins with 284 AD as its first year: In that year Diocletian became Emperor of Rome. His reign was marked by the torture and mass executions of Christians, especially in Egypt. After Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, the Coptic Christians were soon in trouble with the Empire since their theology was branded as heretical at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). Arab armies then conquered Egypt (639-646 AD) and this led to more periods of severe persecution under Islam. The Church became focused on survival, instead of playing a public role in society. In the 10th century, the Coptic Christian community had decreased in number, making up about half the population.

The British colonial role in Egypt (1882-1952) gave much freedom to Christians. Since the Revolution of 1952 this freedom has been steadily eroded and there have been short periods in which Christians have faced severe violations of religious freedom, but this has always been a localized phenomenon and not driven by the state.

Currently, the vast majority of Christians in Egypt (well over 90%) belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Roman Catholic Church entered Egypt in the 17th century through the missionary activity of the Capuchins and Jesuits. In 1847 the Anglicans began working in the country, followed by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1854. Many other independent church groups and missionaries have followed since, adding to the rich variety of Egyptian church life.

Church spectrum today

Egypt: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox		92.5
Catholic		3.0
Protestant		5.3
Independent		1.3
Unaffiliated		0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians		-2.3
Total		100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement		4.4
Renewalist movement		7.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians

who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The Coptic Orthodox Church remains the largest Christian denomination in Egypt with more than 90% of the Christian population. The Coptic Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Coptic Roman Catholic Church are the two other main denominations in Egypt.

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Egypt

Reporting period

01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

Egypt: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	71	20
WWL 2021	75	16
WWL 2020	76	16
WWL 2019	76	16
WWL 2018	70	17

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The four-point drop in score in WWL 2022 was caused mainly by less reported violence; there were, for example, fewer church buildings attacked. The lower number of incidents is likely the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as Egyptians were told to stay at home as much as possible and churches significantly reduced their activities. However, the level of violence against Christians is still very high, with at least 8 Christians being killed and more than 50 attacked, among other reported incidents.

Persecution engines

Egypt: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak

Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Islamic oppression (Strong)

In Egypt, *Islamic oppression* operates in different ways. Islamic culture sustains a view in Egyptian society whereby Christians are regarded as second-class citizens. This view causes the discrimination of Christians in the political realm and their dealing with the state. It also creates an environment in which the state is reluctant to respect and enforce the fundamental rights of Christians. In the family sphere, converts to Christianity face great pressure to renounce their faith. Christians also face pressure from *Islamic oppression* in their daily lives in their local neighborhood or at work. There have also been several violent attacks perpetrated by militant Islamic groups targeting Christians in the recent past. However, the activity of such militant groups is largely concentrated in north-eastern Sinai.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

The tradition of authoritarian rule is perhaps the only permanent feature in Egypt's political system, which experienced three regime changes in just three years (2011-2014). All of Egypt's rulers have had an authoritarian government style. In 2011, Mubarak's long dictatorship was ended through massive social protests, which eventually led to the controversial election of the Muslim Brotherhood. The government led by Mohamed Morsi did not behave democratically and was ousted by a national uprising supported by the army in 2013. Currently, Egypt is ruled by a civilian government led by former army chief Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, after a presidential election in May 2014 and re-election in March 2018. This government seems to regard basic human rights and democratic pluralism as a low priority in view of the huge current economic, political, social and security challenges. In this context, therefore, religious freedom for Christians is not fully guaranteed.

Clan oppression (Medium)

Converts from a Muslim background face pressure in particular from their (extended) family for shaming values like the honor of the family. Additionally, Christians and Muslims act as two distinct groups in Egyptian society, although few commentators see a clear ethnic distinction between (Christian) Copts and (Islamic) Arabs. As in many other Arab countries, tribal thinking strongly influences group thinking and this can easily lead to verbal and physical violence where one group feels threatened. In Upper Egypt for instance, many cases of mob violence happen when Christians try to implement the official recognition of a church building. There is a mixture of *Islamic oppression* and *Clan oppression* in such cases which necessitates that the Christian minority has to operate carefully.

Drivers of persecution

Egypt: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			MEDIUM	WEAK			STRONG	
Government officials	Medium							Strong	
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong			Medium					
Religious leaders of other churches					Weak				
Violent religious groups	Medium								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong			Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Medium					

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Family members of converts regard their conversion from Islam to Christianity as betrayal of Islam, while Islam is seen as the all-encompassing pillar of society; something you cannot break away from. Those strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for family members to target relations who convert to Christianity.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Radical Islamic preachers who propagate hatred play a crucial role in sustaining a climate of intolerance and in fueling hostility against Christians. Their influence is most keenly felt in the rural and poorer urban areas of the country.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs (Strong):** Ordinary people whose views are shaped by intolerant and radical imams are significant drivers of persecution and contribute the lion's share of the pressure that Christians face in their daily lives in their local neighborhoods and at work. Societal hostility and prejudice against Christians are more pronounced in the poorer and rural parts of the country.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** Militant Islamic groups (such as the Islamic State group) are responsible for many of the most gruesome acts of violence targeting Christians. However, they are currently only openly active in the north-eastern area of the Sinai peninsula.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials also act as drivers of intolerance, discrimination and persecution through their failure to vindicate the rights of Christians (e.g. protecting Christians from mob attacks) and also through discriminatory acts which violate the fundamental rights of Christians (e.g. their refusal to acknowledge conversion from Islam to Christianity).

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials, including judicial officers, local administrative officials as well those belonging to various branches of the security apparatus in Egypt are the principal drivers here. The administration of President al-Sisi is attempting to shore up its support with the majority of the population and hold on to power. Thus, despite its promises to the contrary, the government has actually maintained existing restrictions on the freedom of religion of Egyptian Christians. Church leaders in Egypt are also constantly monitored and under surveillance by the state. In addition, the freedom of speech has been extremely restricted for all Egyptians by the al-Sisi government. Hence, Christians cannot speak out against injustices and violations.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **One's own (extended) family (Medium):** In a context of tribal thinking based around Islamic faith, family members often regard conversion from Islam to Christianity as betrayal of the family and a shame to the family honor, which needs to be corrected.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** The tendency to see conversion from Islam as a betrayal of both Islam and family, is strengthened by radical and intolerant imams and other group leaders when they call upon local Muslims to protect their faith.
- **Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs (Medium):** Wider society functions as a watchdog to make sure that the honor and power of the tribe is protected. This is especially the case in rural areas. Allegations that Christians are being given more space in society (e.g. by having their church legitimized) can ignite mob attacks.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Upper Egypt, the southern part of the country, is known to be more Islamically conservative and radical than the north. Most incidents and mob attacks take place in this region, with the Minya Governate being the most notorious and having the highest number of attacks on Christians per capita. However, Christians in the economically disadvantaged rural areas in the north experience a similar degree of oppression by radical Muslims, especially in the Nile delta villages and towns.

Radical Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood have nationwide support, but violent Islamic militants are only openly active in the north-eastern area of the Sinai peninsula. In April 2021, a video appeared of the execution of Nabil Habashy Salama, a Christian from north-Sinai who was previously abducted by Islamic State (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period*).

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Egypt are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

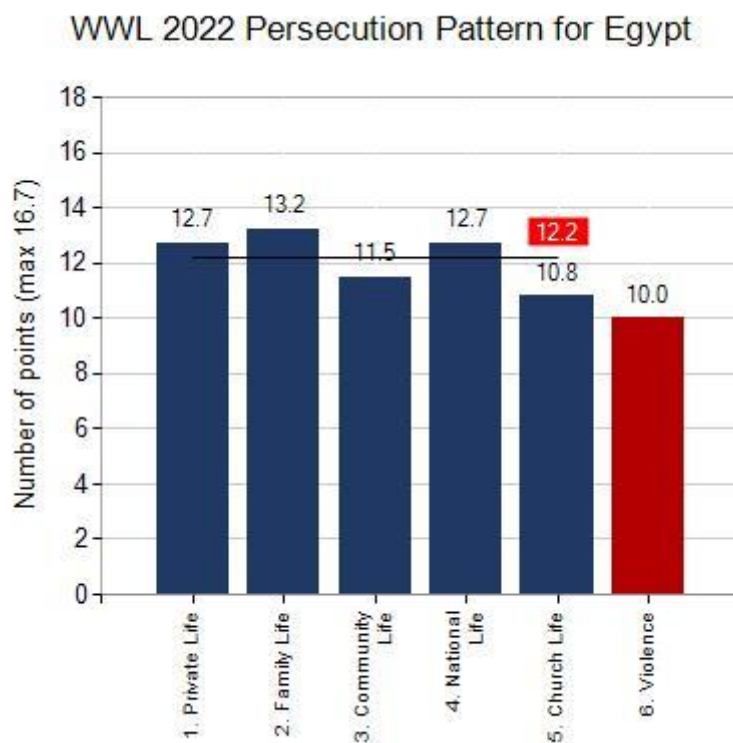
Historical Christian communities: The largest church in this category is the Coptic Orthodox Church. There are also established Protestant denominations throughout the country. The large Coptic minority, while facing important difficulties (including discrimination in education, health

and government legislation that hinders essential aspects of church life), has been tolerated by the state and by the Muslim majority in the country because of its historical presence and its significant size of several million. However, historical Christian communities are regularly targeted by their surrounding neighborhoods, with rumors that a building is turned into a church, an accusation of blasphemy (on social media) or a relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman being enough to lead to (mob) violence. Meanwhile radical Islamic groups remain a danger, particularly in the Sinai region.

Converts to Christianity: There is a small but growing number of Christian converts who bear the brunt of violations, most often at the hands of family members. The latter punish converts for abandoning the Islamic faith, often by means of beatings or house expulsion.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are several Evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the country, some of them being 2nd, 3rd or even further generations of converts from a Muslim background. Others come from an Orthodox background. They face pressure from both the Islamic society and to a lesser extent from the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Egypt shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.2 points), remaining at the same level as in WWL 2021.
- All *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, which is highest in the *Family*, *Private* and *National spheres of life*. The very high score of 13.2 points for *Family life* reflects in particular the difficulties converts from Islam to Christianity face concerning Christian weddings, baptisms and funerals. The very high score for *National life* reflects the levels of

discrimination all Christians face - and especially those with a Muslim background - when engaging with the authorities. The danger of being accused of blasphemy, followed by mob violence, is always present, while the police and other authorities will often side with the accusers and attackers in order to retain public order.

- The score for violence dropped from an extreme to a high level, falling from 14.1 points in WWL 2021 to 10.0 in WWL 2022.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Conversion from Islam to Christianity ('apostasy') is not officially forbidden by law. However, a key ruling by the Cairo Administrative Court in 2008 stated that the freedom to practice one's religion is subject to certain limitations, and affirmed that conversion from Islam to another faith is a violation of the principles of Islam and therefore not allowed. In addition, conversion is punished via the blasphemy laws. Societal hostility to converts is very high and mere rumors of conversion can lead to mob violence, especially in rural areas. Conversion is seen as a huge shame for the honor of the family. As a result, family members will often cast out converts, try to get them to recant their faith or even kill them.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.25 points)

Several converts from a Muslim background who openly declared their Christian faith on social media have been arrested. Most converts refrain from publishing anything indicating their new faith, mainly out of fear of repercussions from family or society. On another note, the blasphemy law is widely used to target those who are criticizing Islam. Several Christians have been arrested or have been the victim of mob violence after allegedly insulting Islam on social media. Nevertheless, many Christians continue to share large quantities of Bible verses, Christian images and other Christian content on social media.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

Most, if not all, Coptic Christians wear a tattooed cross on their wrist or arm, which is used for recognition, i.e. to enter a church. However, it also makes them easily recognizable for attackers. Converts from Islam to Christianity have to be careful in particular, as wearing Christian symbols could lead to discovery of their new faith or lead to hostile questions from family members or society.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

Accusations of blasphemy are easily made, so most Christians refrain from discussing their faith with people they do not know or trust. Discussing their faith can easily be interpreted as an attempt to proselytize, which is heavily opposed by society. However, converts face the highest risk since discussing Christian faith can lead to discovery of their conversion.

Block 1 - additional information

Pressure in the private sphere of life has been very high for years, as especially converts from Islam to Christianity are severely limited in their personal expression of faith. Conversion to Christianity is strongly opposed, making it often difficult to speak about faith with family members: "it takes wisdom in choosing the right time and right place to speak with your family members about faith", according to one convert. While owning a Bible carries clear risks for converts, the internet has brought solutions here and makes it easier to privately worship. However, especially in the case of women, discovery of their new faith can lead to house arrest and domestic violence. Many converts are therefore also careful where and when to meet other Christians.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)

It is very difficult, if not impossible, for converts from Islam to Christianity to change the religious registration on their ID cards. The registered religion of the father is automatically applied to the child. Thus a convert's child is always registered as Muslim. If a Muslim man converts to Christianity and is married to a woman registered as Muslim, their marriage becomes invalid under Egyptian law and their children are considered to be illegitimate.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.25 points)

Converts from Islam to Christianity face the biggest challenges in this regard. As their conversion is not recognized in any way, neither by government nor society, it is very difficult for them to get married with a Christian ceremony (which is done in secret or in a foreign country). Under Sharia law, a Christian man cannot marry a Muslim woman. So the children of a Christian man married to a convert woman, will be regarded as born out of wedlock. Converts will have to register their children as Muslim upon birth.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)

Children of converts from Islam to Christianity have to attend Islamic religious classes, as their conversion is not recognized. However, other Christian children also face difficulties, as the Egyptian curriculum is heavily influenced by Islamic teaching. Christians have their own Christian religion classes, but they still have to learn verses of Islamic literature and parts of the Quran at

school. Some of the educational material also contains anti-Christian teachings. Children of privileged Christians can avoid this by attending private Christian-run schools, but this is only financially possible for some parents.

Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (3.25 points)

This is an issue that mainly concerns converts from a Muslim background. According to Sharia law, converts have no rights to any family inheritance. It is common that converts are disinherited by their family members.

Block 2 - additional information

It is difficult for converts from Islam to Christianity to live as a Christian family. They can only be baptized in secret. Giving their children Christian names would be socially questionable. In general, marriage and burial can only happen according to Islamic rite. In addition, if their new faith becomes known, converts are likely to be divorced, lose the custody over their children and be disinherited.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

This discrimination occurs at different levels. Christians are not employed within the intelligence agencies, and cannot be promoted to senior positions within the army or police force. Christians are also underrepresented in senior government positions. Job discrimination in private employment depends on the level of tolerance of the employer, but happens regularly. Such discrimination has led to a high level of entrepreneurial activity among Copts and other Christians, since they cannot rely on the state or even private (non-Christian) employers for employment. Finally, although constituting more than 10% of the population, there has not been a single Christian player in Egypt's national team in a decade and Christians are discriminated against and denied opportunities to play in the top professional football clubs in the country.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

Discrimination and hostility against Christians happens at times. Civil servants are sometimes unwilling to accept Christians as peers with the same rights and guarantees of safety. Although all women in Egypt experience some forms of (sexual) harassment, Christian women are particularly vulnerable because they do not veil themselves. Levels of pressure and discrimination vary; there is often less pressure in urban areas compared to rural areas.

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.25 points)

Monitoring occurs at different levels. Local communities and Islamist groups know where the Christians live in their neighborhood or villages. They watch and observe them, making sure the Christians do not disrespect Islamic principles by evangelizing or causing problems in others ways. This tension is less in urban places, but remains a problem in poor neighborhoods and rural areas, especially in Upper Egypt. In recent years, several Christians have been attacked after allegedly insulting Islam or allegedly having a relationship with a Muslim woman. Police presence and government control is less strict in poor and/or rural areas and mob attacks often go unpunished. At the state level, security and intelligence agencies spy on converts and try to force them to supply information on the activities of convert groups.

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (2.75 points)

The practice of so-called 'customary reconciliation councils' is relevant here. After Christians or churches have been attacked, the local authorities often force Christians to accept a meeting before such a council instead of requesting the prosecutor to prosecute the attackers. Christians often have to accept the terms imposed by these councils, which in most cases benefit the perpetrators at the cost of the Christian victims. In some cases, the Christians are even forced to sell their houses and leave the village. Despite intentions for peaceful reconciliation, in reality these councils perpetrate a climate of impunity and encourage further attacks.

Block 3 - additional information

Egypt's society is generally Islamic and conservative, although changing attitudes are visible in urbanized areas. Converts have to keep their faith hidden when participating in society and, especially during religious festivals like Ramadan, have to adhere to Islamic religious norms. Christians belonging to the Historical communities at times experience discrimination in both communal life and education, depending on the area where they are living. Examples of incidents are: Receiving lower grades, exclusion from university forums in Upper Egypt, being forced to memorize Quran verses, insulting songs being sung and Christian children being bullied. This can make them feel they are 'second-class citizens'.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)

There are two major concerns for Christians when expressing their views in public: First, they have to be careful not to insult or criticize Islam in any way. Even alleged blasphemy can lead to mob violence or prosecution. Secondly, President al-Sisi's government has adopted a harsh authoritarianism. Speaking out against the government can lead to arrest, physical abuse and imprisonment.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

Sharia law is "the principle source of legislation", according to the Constitution. Article 7 designates the Al-Azhar University, the most prominent educational institution within the Sunni

Islamic world, to have “main authority for religious sciences, and Islamic affairs”. It has considerable influence in society, and although attempting to curb extremism, its head has repeatedly stated that the death sentence is the only possible punishment for anyone leaving Islam. Hence, converts from Islam to Christianity are not protected by the Constitution, although Article 64 states that "Freedom of belief is absolute". Moreover, freedom of belief is limited to 'practicing religious rituals' and 'establishing places of worship' and does not allow for missionary activity. It is clear that Freedom of Religion or Belief as formulated in Article 18 of ICCPR, to which Egypt is a signatory, is not being fully upheld.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.50 points)

Although conversion is not forbidden by law, it is strongly opposed in practice. If converts try to officially change their religious registration, it is highly likely that the authorities will put them under surveillance and prosecute them under the blasphemy laws.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.00 points)

This is common in many areas of the country where perpetrators of mobbing and looting go unpunished, either through deliberate 'turning a blind eye' or through the use of customary reconciliation councils (see above: *Block 3.12*). In addition, mistreatment of converts by family members is considered to be a family issue. Converts do not receive any protection from the government and can even be killed by their family members with virtual impunity.

Block 4 - additional information

Although the Egyptian government actively propagates a nationalist unity perspective, including the Christians and discouraging sectarianism, it is very clear that Islam is the dominant religion. Sectarian incidents with Christian victims are largely ignored by state media. Christians who have allegedly insulted Islam are actively prosecuted, while incidents of hate speech (on social media) against Christianity are overlooked. Except for a few exceptions, Christians are barred from high public offices, especially in the army and very influential intelligence agencies. Despite this, it would appear that discrimination when engaging with the local authorities has become less, although this still depends to a large extent on individual officials.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

There is strong opposition against conversion and proselytizing. Churches rarely accept converts into their meetings, in order to avoid troubles with both the government and society. Accusations of proselytizing are easily made and can lead to attacks on churches, followed by the closure of the church for 'security reasons'.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)

It is common practice for the police and intelligence agencies to request a schedule of all church events planned. Moreover, they have the authority to cancel any of the events under the rationale of protecting national security. It is also commonly required that priests and pastors hand over to the police their travel schedules related to their church activities. In addition, police in plain clothes sometimes attend church services to monitor what is said during sermons. Furthermore, many churches face opposition or even violence from society, especially when they are trying to legitimize their church building under the 2016 Church Construction Law.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)

Depending on the part of the country, Christian outside activities (such as activities for children) can be organized in a discreet manner. However, churches often refrain from holding processions in the street out of fear of attack by radical groups or mobs, since such processions might be interpreted as displaying a threat to Islam.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.25 points)

Despite the legitimization of over a thousand churches under the 2016 Church Construction Law, many churches are still awaiting recognition. In many other villages with a Christian population, Christians do not even have a church. There are still many administrative obstacles (such as security clearances) when Christians want to build a church and opposition from society is in many cases strong.

Block 5 - additional information

There are thousands of churches and Egypt has a rich and longstanding church life. However, it is clear that the building of new churches is much more difficult than building new mosques. Churches can print and import Christian material including Bibles, as long as the material is not deemed offensive to Islam. Christian books and other items can be sold in public places in some parts of Egypt, but is in general only sold to Christians to avoid accusations of proselytizing. There are Christian TV channels and Christian (social) media is widely accessible, but churches have to be careful not to openly proselytize or criticize Islam. The major church denominations run independent schools and hospitals.

Converts from Islam to Christianity lack recognition and can only gather discreetly without attracting attention. Their activities are monitored by the intelligence agencies, but are generally tolerated as long as they do not proselytize.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Egypt: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	8	8
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	2	10
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	11	26
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	5	10
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	1
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	51	19
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	31	9
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	15	3
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	117	10
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	7

For the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** No major terrorist attack happened during WWL 2022, although two Christians were killed by Islamic militants in the Sinai region. They are two of the at least eight Christians reported to have been killed, most of whom were living in Upper Egypt.
- **Christians attacked:** Many Christians have been attacked and sometimes severely injured because of their faith. At least ten young women were groomed and sexually abused, while several were forced to marry Muslims. In addition, hundreds have experienced sexual harassment. According to reports, some Christian girls were targeted in a systematic way, with their attackers at times being paid per victim.

- **Christians arrested:** In some cases, those arrested were the victims of a mob attack and were taken into police custody to satisfy their attackers' demands and to de-escalate the situation. Others were accused of blasphemy. Some converts to Christianity were also arrested and imprisoned.
- **Churches attacked:** Two churches were attacked, including one in Barsha (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period*)
Christian homes/shops attacked: During mob violence, several houses and shops belonging to Christians were attacked and damaged. In other cases, individual shops and houses were targeted for attack.
- **Christians forced to move:** Both converts from Islam to Christianity as well as Christians belonging to the Historical communities were forced to relocate inside the country for security reasons. Several families fled the Sinai region following the murder of Nabil Habashy Salama (see *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period*), while others felt forced to move following violent incidents.
- **Impunity for attackers:** Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished.

5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

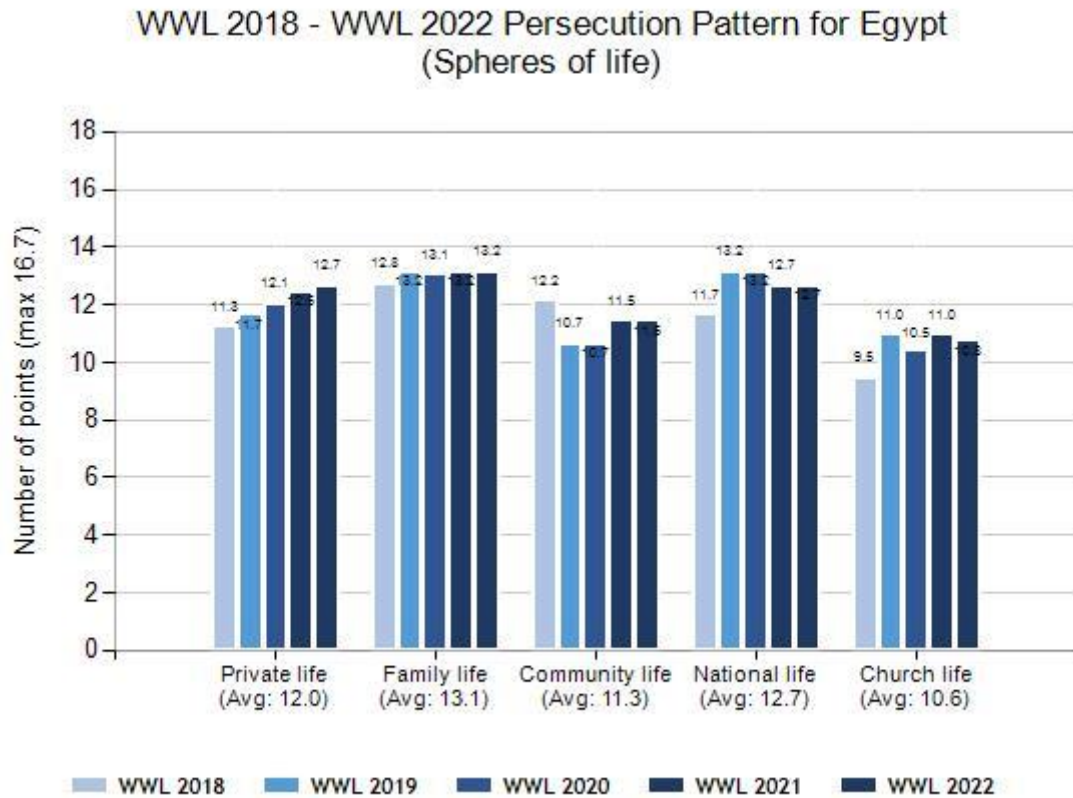
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Egypt: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	12.2
2021	12.2
2020	11.9
2019	12.0
2018	11.5

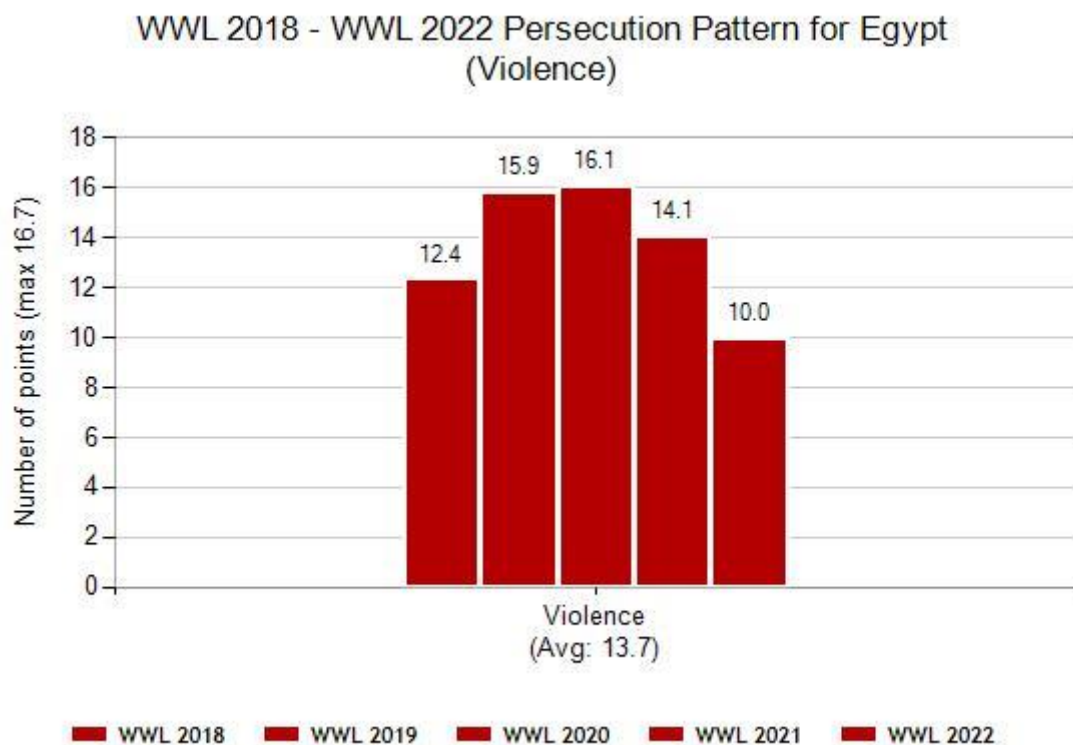
The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians in Egypt balances between 11.9 and 12.2 points.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The chart below shows that, in the last five WWL reporting periods, the levels of pressure on Christians in the individual *spheres of life* have in most cases increased and then levelled off (except for *Community and Church life*). The very high levels of pressure in the *National sphere* reflect the fact that the situation for Christians has not significantly improved under the rule of President al-Sisi. Christians are discriminated against in public life and speaking out against such violations can have serious consequences.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The table above shows that the scores for violence in the reporting periods WWL 2018 - 2021 were all at an extreme level. Violence against Christians decreased in WWL 2022, but was still at a very high level. This decrease is most probably related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a significant reduction in Christian activities.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

There have been [reports](#) that Christian women are targeted for marriage by grooming, rape and forced conversion by Islamist networks, mainly in rural areas, villages and southern towns (World Watch Monitor, 14 September 2017). Police response has been often complicit or apathetic and many women remain missing. The psychological toll is high, and many women live in fear, especially in rural areas. They feel as though they cannot leave the house by themselves and at times they will ask for male company for protection. There are also reports that Christian girls are lured into marriage; these girls are often under-age and come from vulnerable families, often from situations of domestic abuse. Traditional practices do not help in this regard: Early marriage is part of the [norm](#) in more rural and traditional areas (Girls Not Brides: Egypt). Girls can also struggle to access education ([International Christian Concern, 1 August 2021](#)). Older married Christian women whose husbands regularly work away have also been targeted. This can also devastate their husbands.

Female converts from Islam are most vulnerable to freedom of religion violations. They may be isolated and locked in the home, physically abused or even killed to defend the family honor. If married, they will very likely be divorced by their Muslim husbands, leaving them without any financial support. The custody of their children may be taken from them, as well as inheritance rights, although an important [legal case](#) in 2019 has been seen as a protest to conventional approaches to inheritance (The Times, 27 November 2019).

Egypt has had a reputation for having relatively high rates of sexual harassment and violence within the Middle East. Due to international pressure and internal activists, there have been some [improvements](#) in protection for those reporting sexual abuse (Reuters, 16 August 2020). Official statistics for past years are lacking, in part because women and girls refrain from reporting incidents [out of fear](#) of retaliation and the stigma attached to sexual abuse (New Lines, 4 October 2020). Giving some indication of a baseline from which these improvements have come, a 2013 survey (UN Women, “Study on Ways and Methods to Elimi-

nate Sexual Harassment in Egypt,” p.6), reported that over 99% of women in Egypt have experienced sexual harassment, regardless of what they wear or what their religion is. A country expert comments: “Within the Middle East, even before Saudi Arabia or Iran, Egypt holds the infamous title of the country with the highest rates of sexual harassment and violence. In such an environment and without societal protection of women, Christian women are particularly vulnerable.” This is reinforced by a study that shows Cairo as the most dangerous megacity for women in the world ([Thomas Reuters, 16 October 2017](#)).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christians in Egypt often feel they are being treated as second class citizens in a Muslim-majority country. Exemplifying this, the number of Christian in senior military or government positions is minimal. Unemployment is a great pressure on men throughout the country, but especially in Upper Egypt. Particularly in rural areas, it is hard for Christian young men to find a job. Further exemplifying economic discrimination, there have been instances of Christian men experiencing discrimination simply due to their Christian names. According to [Daraj](#) (14 March 2021), only 12 Christian players have been part of Egypt’s Premier League over 30 years. As the main financial provider, this hinders a Christian man’s ability to provide and impacts his self-confidence, which in turn affects his family. The strain of these dynamics has reportedly caused higher rates of domestic violence and divorce. Perpetrators have also used these financial difficulties to convert younger men to Islam, luring them with financial incentives.

Church leaders - most of whom are male - are particularly vulnerable to rights violations, in part as they are easily identifiable as Christians. The harassment and killing of clergy has evoked some feelings of fear and helplessness in the Christian community and has been a factor in emigration spikes. Those who speak out against injustices are also targeted. As already mentioned above, in November 2019, Ramy Kamel, a Christian journalist and activist was arrested for his continued reporting on violence and discrimination against Christians in Egypt and has since been charged for “joining a terrorist organization” and “spreading false news”.

Social media can also trigger physical violence and arrest. In August of 2020 a 65-year-old Christian was arrested and jailed for a ‘blasphemous’ post on Facebook. Coptic activists and researchers have also been arrested for “undermining social order”. Converts can be particularly

targeted and some male converts are eventually forced to flee the country.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious groups facing intolerance, discrimination and persecution in Egypt include Shia and Sufi Muslims, Bahai, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. Shia Muslims are particularly targeted by Sunni extremists, making it dangerous for them to worship and practice their faith openly. Mormons, Bahai and Jehovah's Witnesses are denied recognition by the authorities, thus making it difficult for them to have places of worship. The missionary zeal and corresponding activities of such groups are considered illegal and thus adherents face hostility both from state officials and society, including Christian Egyptians.

In its [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (last updated 10 September 2021) Humanist International writes: "One of the most visible signs of discrimination against atheists, apostates from Islam and members of minority religions is the policy concerning the Egyptian State ID cards, which include a section on religion where only one of the three "divine religions" can be recognized. Many elderly members of Baha'i or other minority communities further lack birth and marriage certificates. In 2008 the situation slightly improved, when two Bahā'īs were given permission to use a dash ('-') in the religion section. However, Baha'is still do not enjoy the right to have their religion recognized, nor to profess it in public. Muslim-born individuals who leave Islam are not allowed to change the religion field on their identity card."

A clear example of violence against other religious minorities happened in November 2017, when Sunni militants attacked a crowded Sufi mosque in the Sinai peninsula, killing over 300. (Source: [New York Times](#), 24 November 2017)

In addition, atheists are very prone to violations, especially those active in social media networks. For example, blogger and atheist Sherif Gaber has been arrested and mistreated several times by the Egyptian authorities ([Inside Arabia, 2 November 2019](#)). Another telling example is the case of Mohamed Hisham. During a televised interview he publicly stated to be an atheist. He was removed from the show, but not before being told to visit a psychiatrist ([Humanists International, 27 September 2019](#)). It is common in Egypt to consider atheists (and other deviant persons, including converts to Christianity) to be 'mentally ill' and in need of treatment.

Other sources report:

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020, p. 4, 6, 11, 14.):

- "The law does not recognize the Baha'i Faith or its religious laws and bans Baha'i institutions and community activities."
- "Although the government lists 'Christian' on the identity cards of Jehovah's Witnesses, a presidential decree bans all Jehovah's Witnesses' activities."
- "Although in late 2018 President al-Sisi stated individuals have the 'right to worship God' as they see fit or 'even worship nothing', efforts to combat atheism sometimes received official support. In 2019, al-Azhar founded a 'Bayan' (Declaration) Unit in its Center for Elec-

tronic Fatwa to 'counter atheism' and prevent youth from 'falling into disbelief'."

- "According to a 2019 report by Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), ... there continued to be no Shia congregational halls (husseiniyachs) in the country, and Shia Muslims remained unable to establish public places of worship. Members of the Shia community risked accusations of blasphemy for publicly voicing their religious opinions, praying in public, or owning books promoting Shia thought. Shia Muslims said they were excluded from service in the armed services, and from the security and intelligence services."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians - as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

There have been no major attacks against Christians since the November 2018 bus attack. Nonetheless, marginalization and legal obstacles continue to put pressure on the Church and the Egyptian Christians. Discrimination is likely to continue, especially in Upper Egypt. Converts from Islam to Christianity will continue facing the most severe violations from their own families, as well as from society and the government.

Clan oppression

It is unlikely that the majority of society will ever recognize Christians as equal citizens with equal rights. Generally, Egyptians are expected to be Sunni Muslims and any deviation is seen as betrayal. Converts from Islam to Christianity will continue to be very vulnerable.

Dictatorial paranoia

Most Christians are happy that Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi was ousted. However, incumbent President al-Sisi does not seem to have the political will or power to improve the situation and security of the Christian community significantly. This can also be seen in the arrest of Coptic activist Ramy Kamel in November 2019 for his continued reporting on violence and discrimination against Christians in (Upper) Egypt ([Frontline Defenders](#), accessed 15 December 2021).

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: reports - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/egypt-ex-kidnapper-admits-get-paid-every-copt-christian-girl-bring/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: norm - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/egypt>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: International Christian Concern, 1 August 2021 - <https://www.persecution.org/2021/08/01/egyptian-girls-perspective-hope-brighter-future/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: legal case - <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/woman-overturms-arab-inheritance-rules-jcv3g2qr9>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: improvements - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-women-metoo/egypt-approves-law-to-protect-identities-of-women-reporting-sex-abuse-idUSKCN25C0SC>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: out of fear - <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/egypts-botched-metoo-moment/>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Thomas Reuters, 16 October 201 - <https://news.trust.org/item/20171013165501-7u32f>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Daraj - <https://daraj.com/en/69821/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/egypt/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: New York Times - <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/mosque-attack-egypt.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Inside Arabia, 2 November 2019 - <https://insidearabia.com/atheist-egyptian-blogger-jailed-for-expressing-his-views/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Humanists International, 27 September 2019 - <https://humanists.international/blog/do-you-remember-mohamed-the-egyptian-atheist-kicked-off-a-tv-interview/>
- Future outlook: Frontline Defenders - <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/ramy-kamel>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Egypt>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Egypt>