

World  
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Research

## Egypt: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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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 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Egypt

## Brief country details

Egypt: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
108,032,000	9,797,000	9.1

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Egypt: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	68	38
WWL 2023	68	35
WWL 2022	71	20
WWL 2021	75	16
WWL 2020	76	16

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

*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 occur mostly at the community level, with many Christians regularly facing discrimination. In addition, incidents take place such as Christian women being harassed in the street (especially in rural areas), Christian children being bullied at state schools or in rare incidents, Muslim mobs forcing Christians to leave their homes after an alleged blasphemy accusation.

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 and continues in efforts to create one Egyptian identity, which includes both Muslims and Christians. However, the lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians leave them vulnerable to attacks, especially in Upper Egypt. In addition, due to the authoritarian nature of government administration, 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. Despite promises from the president that a church will be built in every new neighborhood and despite the fact that an increasing number of churches are being legalized through official registration, Christians of all backgrounds face difficulties when trying to find (new) places for holding worship. Communal hostility and mob violence, in particular, continue to cause difficulties.

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 security services also actively

detain and intimidate converts in order to make them stay silent about their conversion, while the state makes it impossible for them to obtain 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

**May 2023:** A Coptic architect was ran over and killed by a bulldozer driver, who confessed to have attacked him because of his faith. The perpetrator has been sent to a mental health hospital, a common way to deal with individual Muslim extremists who attack Christians ([Open Doors UK, 12 July 2023](#)).

**November 2022 / July 2023:** Two young Coptic men were killed in separate incidents, with their faith likely to have made them extra vulnerable for these violent attacks ([Copts Today, 25 November 2022](#); [Free Christian Voice, 22 July 2023](#)). One was killed following an argument over an item stolen from him. It is likely that his faith has made him extra vulnerable and resulted in a lethal outcome. The other Christian was killed in what appears to be a retaliatory attack for his brother's intention to expand a local church ([Shorouk News, 20 July 2022](#)).

**December 2022:** A Muslim mob violently prevented the replacement of a roof on a church in the Nile Delta, thereby attacking and damaging the church building, several Coptic houses and injuring some Christians ([Coptic Solidarity, 27 December 2022](#)).



**January 2023:** In Minya, Upper Egypt, a traffic incident between a Copt and a Muslim escalated into large scale mob violence against the local Coptic community, damaging the church and numerous houses and shops belonging to the Christians. The police arrested several Copts and Muslims, with all attackers being released after a customary reconciliation council ([Watani, 9 January 2023](#)).

**June 2023:** Following numerous insults of the Christian faith, a Coptic student in Upper Egypt replied privately on social media to the offender. However, his messages were published publicly and he was accused of blasphemy. He was severely beaten by several young Muslim men and arrested by the police. His university referred him to the Disciplinary Council because of contempt of religion and subsequently dismissed him. Afterwards, he and his family had to relocate because of continuing death-threats. His case led to a spike of hatred towards Christians on social media. While Muslims regularly mock Christianity and insult Christians on social media, even a rumor of blasphemy against Islam is enough to lead to mob violence against Christians. This issue in particular shows the second-class status Christians often have to accept ([El-Shai, 19 June 2023](#), [Coptic Solidarity, 22 June 2023](#)).

**Converts to Christianity:** During the WWL 2024 reporting period, several converts from Islam to Christianity were arrested and mistreated by the security services.

**Missing in mysterious circumstances:** During the WWL 2024 reporting period, at least 29 young Coptic women were reported missing, of whom 11 were later returned to their families. This number is lower than previous years. It often remains unclear whether the young woman in question 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 converted to Islam by force. 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 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

**Church registrations:** The legalization of churches under the 2016 Church construction law has been continuing. Over 3,000 churches out of more than 5,500 requests have received official registration, but many churches are still waiting ([Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 29 November 2022](#), [Ahram Online, 19 June 2023](#)). The official recognition of churches sometimes leads to sectarian tensions with the local Muslim population.

**No major violent attack:** During the WWL 2024 reporting period, no major violent attack was carried out by Islamic militants targeting the Christian Coptic community.

**Release of prisoners:**

- **July 2023:** Coptic Christian human rights defender Patrick George Zaki was released on 7 December 2021, after more than 20 months of pre-trial detention during which he was beaten and mistreated. However, he received a travel ban and still needed to appear in court on charges of "publishing false news inside and outside Egypt" for an article he wrote about his life as a Coptic Christian in Egypt. On 19 July 2023, he was sentenced to three years in prison by an emergency court. However, following an international outcry, President al-Sisi pardoned him the following day. With his travel ban lifted, Zaki promised to continue his human rights work ([Africa News, 23 July 2023](#)).
- **January 2022 (outside WWL 2024 reporting period):** Coptic Christian journalist and activist Ramy Kamel was released on 8 January 2022, after more than two years of pre-trial detention ([USCIRF, Religious prisoners, accessed 29 December 2022](#)). Kamel was arrested in November 2019 for his continued reporting on violence and discrimination against Christians in Egypt as well as his activism and leadership of the Maspero Youth Union and was charged with "joining a terrorist organization" and "spreading false news". He was reportedly beaten and mistreated while in detention which included solitary confinement.

## 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: Open Doors UK, 12 July 2023 - <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/egypt-architect-attack/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Copts Today, 25 November 2022 - <https://www.coptstoday.com/446632/%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Free Christian Voice, 22 July 2023 - <https://www.light-dark.net/%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9%D8%A9->

%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B2%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%AE/

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Shorouk News, 20 July 2022 - <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=20072016&id=c3839bcf-a45c-4cdd-aaac-73a8f8dc76bf>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Coptic Solidarity, 27 December 2022 - <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2022/12/27/christmas-eve-church-violence-erupts-in-egypt/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Watani, 9 January 2023 - <https://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/coptic-affairs/police-restore-order-in-ashrouba-following-attack-against-copts/40725/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: El-Shai, 19 June 2023 - <https://www.el-shai.com/religious-insults-calls-for-equal-accountability/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Coptic Solidarity, 22 June 2023 - <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2023/06/22/a-coptic-student-is-accused-of-contempt-for-responding-to-attacks-on-christianity/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 29 November 2022 - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2022/11/29/press/5860/article.htm>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Ahram Online, 19 June 2023 - <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/503319.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Africa News, 23 July 2023 - <https://www.africanews.com/2023/07/23/freed-egyptian-human-rights-activist-pledges-to-continue-work/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: USCIRF, Religious prisoners, accessed 29 December 2022 - <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/ramy-kamel>

## WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Egypt

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Egypt report	AI Egypt 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt/report-egypt/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt/report-egypt/</a>	3 July 2023
BBC News Egypt profile - updated 18 April 2023	BBC Egypt profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13313370">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13313370</a>	3 July 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index Egypt report 2022	BTI Egypt 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/EGY">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/EGY</a>	3 July 2023
CIA World Factbook Egypt - updated 20 June 2023	World Factbook Egypt	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/egypt/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/egypt/</a>	3 July 2023
Crisis24 Egypt report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Egypt report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/egypt">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/egypt</a>	3 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Egypt profile 2023	EIU Egypt profile 2023	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/egypt">https://country.eiu.com/egypt</a>	3 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Egypt	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	3 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Egypt not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Egypt	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-world/2023</a>	3 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Egypt	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2023</a>	11 January 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Egypt profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/egypt/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/egypt/</a>	3 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Egypt report	Girls Not Brides Egypt	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/egypt/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/egypt/</a>	3 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Egypt country chapter	HRW 2023 Egypt country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/egypt">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/egypt</a>	3 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Egypt	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#eg">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#eg</a>	3 July 2023
Middle East Concern Egypt profile	MEC Egypt profile	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/egypt/">https://meconcern.org/countries/egypt/</a>	3 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Egypt	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/country/egypt">https://rsf.org/en/country/egypt</a>	3 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Egypt	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/egy">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/egy</a>	3 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Egypt	UNDP HDR Egypt	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/EGY">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/EGY</a>	3 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Egypt	IRFR 2022 Egypt	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/egypt/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/egypt/</a>	3 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 Egypt report (17 CPC / 11 SWL)	USCIRF 2023 Egypt SWL	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Egypt.pdf">https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Egypt.pdf</a>	3 July 2023
World Bank Egypt data - 2021	World Bank Egypt data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=EGY">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=EGY</a>	3 July 2023
World Bank Egypt overview - updated 5 May 2023	World Bank Egypt overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt/overview</a>	3 July 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Egypt - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Egypt	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-egy.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-egy.pdf</a>	3 July 2023

## 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/ICG, 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 (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 was 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 second 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. Nevertheless, In December 2023, al-Sisi won another re-election, in a vote which again saw no meaningful opposition, with the official voter turnout being 66.8%. The relative high turnout seems to have been partly pushed by the government itself, given the widespread apathy among the general population ([Reuters, 19 December 2023](#)).

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the country hard in 2020. The whole COVID-19 crisis in Egypt was accompanied by fake news and conspiracy theories, with some Muslim and Christians clerics claiming that Muslims or Christians could not catch the virus ([Al-Monitor, 31 March 2020](#)). However, it did not help that the Egyptian government arrested health workers who dared to criticize the government's approach under anti-terrorism laws ([Amnesty International/AI, 18 June 2020](#)). Despite the release of some political prisoners because of the pandemic, the Egypt-

ian government did not at that point free Coptic activists Ramy Kamel and Patrick George Zaki ([The Tablet, 28 April 2020](#)). Their 'wrongdoing' was to highlight the plight of Egypt's Copts and, in the case of Zaki, to also mention the difficulties experienced by the LGBTQIA+ community. Kamel was later released in January 2022, while Zaki who had been released on bail in December 2021, was sentenced in June 2023, but subsequently received a [presidential pardon](#) - BBC News 19 July 2023). Meanwhile, Coptic lawyer Peter Ragheb remains in pre-trial detention. He was arrested in April 2021 on charges of “joining a terrorist group” and “spreading false news” after sharing articles relating to the political and human rights situation in Egypt on his social media accounts ([Egyptian Front for Human Rights, 6 April 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 Christians actively show support for him (Egyptian Independent, 28 November 2014).

First the COVID-19 crisis and then the worldwide economic deterioration following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 caused a strong headwind for the Egyptian economy. To attract foreign investors, secure loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and to halt inflation, the Central Bank devaluated the Egyptian pound by about 50% ([Reuters, 14 June 2023](#)). This devaluation came on top of an earlier 50% devaluation in 2016. Not surprisingly, poverty has increased with official figures stating that a third of the population lives below the poverty line, but other sources estimating that 60% of the population struggles to survive ([The Guardian, 8 May 2023](#)). A new major loan of 3 billion USD in return for reforms was approved by the IMF in 2022, with Egypt seeking to boost the loan to 5 billion USD ([Reuters, 13 October 2023](#)). However, the majority of past loans seemed to end up in the hands of the military and security establishment instead of being invested in the economy ([HRW, 4 April 2022](#)). In the meantime, any dissent remains severely oppressed by the regime, with arbitrary travel bans and the freezing of financial assets being used to stifle any criticism ([HRW, 6 July 2022](#)) Even simply fact-checking government provided information can easily lead to detention ([HRW, 20 September 2023](#)).

On the geopolitical level, Egypt participated in several historical summits which included Israel, in line with the Abraham Accords ([Al-Jazeera, 22 March 2022](#), [Carnegie Endowment, 6 April 2022](#)). While strategically and politically aligning itself with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, it also received major investment from both countries ([The Africa report, 4 July 2022](#)). Following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, al-Sisi guaranteed to protect Egypt against a forced displacement of the Gazan population into Egypt, and used his considerable influence over state media to switch the nation's attention from the struggling economy towards the Palestinian issue during the run-up to the elections ([France24, 10 December 2023](#)).

## Political and legal landscape

The Arab Republic of Egypt has 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 according to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2023 Egypt country chapter):

- "President al-Sisi's government has not eased its nationwide repression that caused one of Egypt's worst human rights crises in many decades. Whitewashing efforts meant little beyond cosmetic changes. Authorities released hundreds of detainees but arrested much more, adding to the thousands of critics, including journalists, peaceful activists, and human rights defenders, who remain imprisoned. ... Authorities harass and detain relatives of dissidents abroad and use vague 'morality' charges to prosecute LGBT people, female social media influencers, and survivors of sexual violence. Grave crimes, including torture and enforced disappearances, are committed with impunity."

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 (WWM, 11 November 2019).

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU Egypt profile 2023): Egypt is classified as an 'authoritarian' regime.

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Egypt profile):

- "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 ... . 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." (By May 2023, the number had risen to over 2800. See above: *Specific examples of positive developments*).

### Gender perspective

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, 2019, "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 (ILO, accessed 3 July 2023). 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 3 July 2023). As of 2022, [27.6%](#) of seats in national parliament were held by women (World Bank Gender Data Portal 2023). 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 and 2% are married before the age of 15 (Girls Not Brides Egypt). Under the Muslim Personal Status Law, men have the right to divorce their wives by *talaq* – a husband's right to dissolve a marriage by simply voicing his repudiation of his wife. Women can apply for fault-based divorces, although judges have discretion regarding the threshold of harm and whether divorce is granted. Upon divorce, guardianship of children belongs to the father while women retain custody of children until the age of 15 (UNDP: "[Gender Justice and The Law](#)" in Egypt, December 2019).

Men face [conscription](#) into the army from the age of 18, where they serve 18-36 months, with an additional 9 years reserve obligation (World Population Review, 2023). Within this context, Christians face discrimination. They are reportedly denied promotion and excluded from positions within certain areas of the armed forces and security services (US State Department IRFR 2022 Egypt).

### Religious landscape

Egypt: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	9,797,000	9.1
Muslim	97,533,000	90.3
Hindu	1,800	0.0
Buddhist	1,000	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0

Jewish	100	0.0
Bahai	2,500	0.0
Atheist	96,900	0.1
Agnostic	597,000	0.6
Other	2,100	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Islam is by far the most dominant religion in Egypt. Estimating the total number of Christians in the country remains a matter of some debate, with estimates varying between 7 million and 16 million. Egyptian church leaders, for instance, believe the total number is over 15% of the country's 106 million population. Open Doors follows the WCD estimate of 9,797,000 Christians.

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. Suburbs 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 25 July 2023): "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."

### Gender perspective

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 human rights [concerns](#) against the disparity, not vice versa (CBN, 15 January 2023). As such, a Christian woman can be married to a Muslim man, but a Christian man cannot marry a Muslim woman. There also have been multiple debates over the veiling of women ([Al-Monitor, 28 July 2022](#)).



## Economic landscape

According to the World Factbook Egypt and [World Bank's MENA Economic Update \(April 2023\)](#):

- **GDP per capita (PPP):** \$11,600 (2021 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 9.3%, with youth unemployment being two times as high at 24.3%. The unemployment rate has dropped slightly in recent years, but structural problems of illiteracy and poverty continue to be devastating, with the most recent devaluation of the Egyptian pound further increasing poverty rates and deteriorating the living standard for the majority of the Egyptian population.
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 32.5% (2017 est.)
- **Economy:** "These projections reflect moderately high growth forecasts for Egypt, which is expected to grow at 4.0 percent in both fiscal year 2023 and 2024. Relative to other developing oil importers in MENA, Egypt's forecast reflects the expectation that its competitiveness might be increased due to the recent depreciation of the Egyptian pound. Growth in the services sector (mainly tourism and Suez canal activity) as well as in construction are projected to sustain growth."
- **Inflation:** "Depreciations vis-à-vis the US dollar that led to higher levels of inflation occurred mainly in oil- importing countries such as Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. Their current accounts were hit by increases in the prices of food products and oil, most of which are imported."

World Bank puts the Egyptian economy in the lower middle income category (World Bank, [World by Income report 2022](#)).

The Fragile State Index (FSI 2023 Egypt) shows that there have been small but steady improvements in the economic indicators in recent years, but the economy indicator deteriorated slightly in 2023, probably reflecting the impact of the Russia/Ukraine conflict on the economy.

President al-Sisi's administration began early on to attempt 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](#)). In October 2022, a second devaluation of the Egyptian pound took place as the government wanted to secure another loan from the IMF, which led to inflation increasing to 18.75% in November 2022 ([Reuters, 6 December 2022](#)). This move came on top of a 14% depreciation against the dollar which the Central Bank had allowed in March 2022 ([Al-Jazeera, 27 October 2022](#)). Besides securing loans from the IMF, the devaluations seek to attract foreign investors.

Increased taxes and higher prices for gas, electricity and water have led to sharp price increases in general. While the middle class is struggling to make ends meet, 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 influenced by radical Islamic groups to initiate attacks on churches and individual Christians. Additionally, 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.

### Gender perspective

The male labor force participation rate in Egypt, is about [4.5](#) times higher than that of women (World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023). A 2017 Inheritance law has gone some way to protecting the economic rights of women, preventing persons from denying women their inheritance rights ([Al-Monitor, 12 December 2017](#)). 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 (Ahmed, Z. and Nada, A., February 2020). Reports indicate inheritance laws are more strict in the matter of real estate, particularly in [Upper Egypt](#) (Raseef, 11 May 2023). There have been positive developments in this regard, however; in one case an Egyptian court [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 World Factbook Egypt:

- **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".
- **Population growth rate:** 1.6% (2023).
- **Urban population:** In 2023, 43.1% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 1.9%.
- **Literacy rate:** 73.1% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (78.8%) and women (67.4%) (2021).
- **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 2023, Egypt hosted 255,000 refugees from Sudan, following the outbreak of the Sudan conflict in April 2023, in addition to 150,000 Syrian refugees. Furthermore, there are 70,000 refugees from the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip residing in the country (2022); as well as roughly 75,000 refugees from Sudan and South Sudan. Other refugees are from Eritrea (21,000), Ethiopia (15,500), Yemen (10,000) Iraq (6,800) and Somalia (6,800).
- **Life expectancy:** 74.7 years on average; women (76.0 years), men (73.5 years).
- **Education:** Egyptians are expected to enjoy 14 years of schooling on average (2018). This figure is the same for both boys and girls. However, the current mean years of schooling of the general population is 9.6 years.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Egypt:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Egypt ranks #97 out 191 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) rising from #116 in 2020 index. Despite ongoing difficulties, the combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a high score of 0.731.
- **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 2018 (0.880). The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Egypt has a high illiteracy rate, but with significant differences between urban areas (17.7%) and rural areas (32.2%) and between men (21.2%) and women (30.8%), according to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI Egypt report 2022, p.22). It is expected that the gender gap will gradually decline as there is equal participation in education between men and women. 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 not unusual 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 occasionally cases are reported that leaders of historical Christian communities use their authority to oppress the most vulnerable Christians of other denominations.

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](#)). Furthermore, the Grand Imam congratulated "the Christian brothers on the occasion of Christmas". However, in rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are clearly present. This was evident, for example, in the negative responses to the Grand Imam's Christmas congratulations ([Arab News, 29 December 2022](#)). The government is making efforts to reverse this trend, for example through more moderate media content. However, Egyptian society remains deeply conservative as far as Islam is concerned, making any government impact in this respect minimal.

### Gender perspective

Culturally, too, 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 multi-religious 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. Domestic violence is common in Egypt, and reportedly worsened during the COVID-19 crisis ([Wilson Center, 26 January 2023](#)).

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, it is generally reported that "reconciliation sessions are not an effective way of facilitating peaceful co-existence between religion and belief communities and generally serve to embolden perpetrators of sectarian violence, who face no real consequences for their actions" ([CSW, 17 January 2023](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Egypt):

- **Internet usage:** 51.9% penetration (December 2021)
- **Facebook usage:** 51.7% penetration (January 2022)  
According to [Napoleon Cat](#) in June 2023, 40.2% of Facebook users are women and 59.8% men.

According to the World Bank Egypt data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 94.7 per 100 people, increasing from 85.4 in 2010.

According to [Statista](#), the Internet is more accessible to men (Statista, 7 July 2022): 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 8%, with men ahead of women ([GSMA, 2022](#)). It is therefore harder for women to access digital Christian resources or online Christian communities.

According to Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2023 Egypt:

- (Overview) "Internet freedom and the rights of internet users are severely constrained in Egypt. Criminal penalties, harassment and surveillance have contributed to high levels of self-censorship among Egyptian internet users."
- (A2) "Internet penetration is hindered by digital illiteracy, among other factors. The Economist Intelligence Unit's [Inclusive Internet Index 2022](#) ranked Egypt 57th out of 120 countries due to high prices and low digital literacy."
- (B1) "The state continued to block news websites during the coverage period as part of a wider crackdown on freedom of expression. Through Article 7 of the Law on Combating Information Technology Crimes, the NTRA can order telecom companies to block websites."

- (B5) "State officials actively manipulate information online, and the media landscape is dominated by the online versions of state-owned newspapers or outlets that are backed by government-connected businessmen."

#### Other sources report

- Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom Index 2023 Egypt): Although Egypt slightly improved from rank #168 in the 2022 index to #166 in the 2023 index, the press freedom remains under severe pressure: "Egypt continues to be one of the world's biggest jailers of journalists. The hopes for freedom that accompanied the 2011 revolution now seem distant. ... Independent media are censored and targeted by prosecutors. As for television and radio, their popularity has confined them to the role of relaying political propaganda. ... Virtually all media are directly controlled by the state, the intelligence agencies or a handful of wealthy, influential businessmen who are under the government's thumb. By contrast, media outlets that refuse to submit to censorship are blocked, as is the case with Mada Masr, an independent news site that has been inaccessible in Egypt since 2017."
- Data from the Committee to Protect Journalists shows that at least 21 journalists are currently imprisoned in Egypt, with one missing ([CPJ, accessed 26 July 2023](#)).

Under President 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. Despite the anti-cyber laws restricting the press and all other media channels (thus limiting freedom of speech), Christians in Egypt report that modern communications technology is nevertheless widely used in Egypt. Social media (especially Facebook) is used to mobilize public opinion. However, all social media is monitored by the government and criticism of the government or Islam is not tolerated. Most churches are currently using little modern technology in youthwork or for evangelistic purposes.

## Security situation

The domestic security situation in Egypt is currently stable. For years, the northeast of the Sinai region, near the border with Gaza, was the exception, where the struggle between the Egyptian army and violent Islamic militants continued. However, in February 2023 President al-Sisi announced that "terrorism has been defeated" in the region ([Ahram Online, 9 February 2023](#)). Nevertheless, there are now fears that militant attacks could spread to other places in the Sinai region ([MAITIC, 26 January 2023](#)). In recent years, the Egyptian security forces have regularly conducted operations against these militant groups, often at no small cost to the local population ([TIMEP, 6 April 2021](#)). The groups targeted include Islamic State group-affiliated Wilayat Sinai, which probably also conducted the attack against a Sufi mosque in the north of the Sinai in 2017, killing 305 people. Since then, the Egyptian army increased its military operations in the region ([Al-Monitor, 7 September 2020](#)). However, it remains very difficult to control the entire area and the security forces cannot prevent militant groups from attacking

undermanned checkpoints and sometimes civilian targets. The threat of bomb attacks remains, especially for minority groups (including Christians). It is likely that such threats will continue in the short term.

There is also the threat of protests becoming violent. Minor demonstrations occurred in September 2019 in protest against government policies, after an exiled influential Egyptian businessman posted several videos accusing al-Sisi of widespread corruption. Reportedly, some of the protest were initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood, but other sources stated that the organization is too weak and that the government used the accusations as a distraction ([France24, 30 September 2019](#)). One way or the other, the protests were quickly contained by arresting the demonstrators. Fear further 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. Even around international summits like the COP27 Climate Change Conference there is no room for demonstrations to take place, while former protest leaders languish in jail ([The Guardian, 29 June 2022](#)). In addition, despite the deteriorating economic situation, a survey found that a small majority of the population reject street protests. Further analysis suggests that "any protests resulting from Egypt's current economic crisis will be sporadic rather than systemic" ([Washington Institute, 5 June 2023](#)). The same report found that only 25% of the population supports religious reforms towards moderation and tolerance. Similarly, the general public remains suspicious of the developing relationship with Israel, another issue in which there are clear differences between the views of the general public and the public policies of the government.

Internationally, Egypt supports Libyan strongman Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar, who controls the east of Libya. Like al-Sisi, Haftar is strongly opposed to Islamist groups 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 did not happen since a ceasefire was reached in October 2020. Following the ceasefire and Haftar's defeat, it seems that Egypt has started betting on a different horse, as al-Sisi opened up towards the western government and left Haftar out of diplomatic meetings ([The Arab Weekly, 6 July 2021](#)). Above all, Egypt wants stability in its border region and hence is actively trying to find a political solution for the volatile situation in Libya ([Al Monitor, 12 April 2022](#)).

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.

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. Another legal case was repeatedly delayed, after which the Court of Cassation upheld the acquittal ([Mada Masr, 16 January 2023](#)). The case is widely viewed as a clear sign of the very vulnerable position of the Christian minority, including in the legal system.

### **Gender perspective**

Coptic women and girls appear to 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 then be forced to marry 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 Zakariya, 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 (WWM, 14 September 2017). Additionally, conversion to Islam is always accepted and encouraged.

## **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 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 president's inclusive rhetoric, sectarian violence and religious discrimination remain problematic, especially in upper Egypt, in rural areas and in economically disadvantaged urban areas. It is likely that traditional 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 such as (now released) Coptic activists Ramy Kamel and Patrick George Zaki (see above: *Recent history*), 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

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## WWL 2024: Church information / Egypt

### Christian origins

The Coptic\* 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. \*The term [Coptic](#) is derived from the ancient Greek word for Egyptian (ABC News, 9 April 2017).

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 very 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	9,022,000	92.1
Catholic	292,000	3.0
Protestant	534,000	5.5
Independent	134,000	1.4
Unaffiliated	9,600	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-194,000	-2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,797,600</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	432,000	4.4
Renewalist movement	704,000	7.2

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**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.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Islamic society in Upper Egypt, the southern part of the country, is known to be more 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 in recent years violent Islamic militants have only been 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 had previously been abducted by the Islamic State group. In August 2022, a Coptic father and son were found murdered in the same area; it is assumed that they were also victims of IS-related militants. At the end of February 2023, President al-Sisi claimed that terrorism had been [defeated](#) in the Sinai region (Ahram Online, 2 March 2023).

## 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, for instance when rumors are spread that a building is to be turned into a church. Also, an accusation of blasphemy (on social media) or a relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman are enough to lead to acts of violence, often perpetrated by mobs. 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, but also by the security services. The former punish converts for abandoning the Islamic faith, often by means of beatings or expulsion from the family home.

**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.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Coptic - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-10/who-are-egypts-copts/8429634>
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# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Egypt

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Egypt: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	68	38
WWL 2023	68	35
WWL 2022	71	20
WWL 2021	75	16
WWL 2020	76	16

The overall score remained the same in WWL 2024: 68 points. The rise in violence score from 7.0 points to 7.8 was offset by the fall in average pressure which decreased very slightly from 12.2 points to 12.1 points in WWL 2024. At least 3 Christians were killed, while at least 44 were attacked, among other incidents. In addition, a significant number of Christian converts from a Muslim background were arrested and physically abused by the Egyptian security services.

## 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	Weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Strong
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 families, 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 past decade, although in the last five years attacks were mainly conducted by individual radical Muslims targeting individual Christians. The activity of militant groups in north-eastern Sinai, the last stronghold, has been subdued.

### **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-elections in March 2018 and December 2023. 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.

### **Christian Denominational Protectionism (Strong)**

Especially in Upper Egypt and the Delta region, the Coptic Orthodox Church acts strongly against other denominations. Members of Orthodox congregations have been warned by their clergy not to have contact with other denominations, especially the Evangelicals. There have been cases in which families depending on financial and social services from the Orthodox Church, have been deprived of those sources after attending a non-Orthodox church or allowing an evangelical pastor to visit them in their homes.

### **Clan oppression (Weak)**

The influence of tribalism for Christians from historical Christian communities is mostly limited to rural areas, yet it does play a significant role in persecution dynamics. Although few commentators see a clear ethnic distinction between (Christian) Copts and (Islamic) Arabs, Christians and Muslims act as two distinct groups in Egyptian society. 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.

In addition, converts from a Muslim background face pressure in particular from their (extended) family for shaming values like the honor of the family. Although *Islamic oppression* remains the main engine, this tribal mindset also instigates family pressure.

## Drivers of persecution

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

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. 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 Christian denominational protectionism (Strong)

- **Religious leaders of other churches (Strong):** Mainly clergy from the Coptic Orthodox Church are using their position to add pressure on other denominations.

#### Drivers of Clan oppression

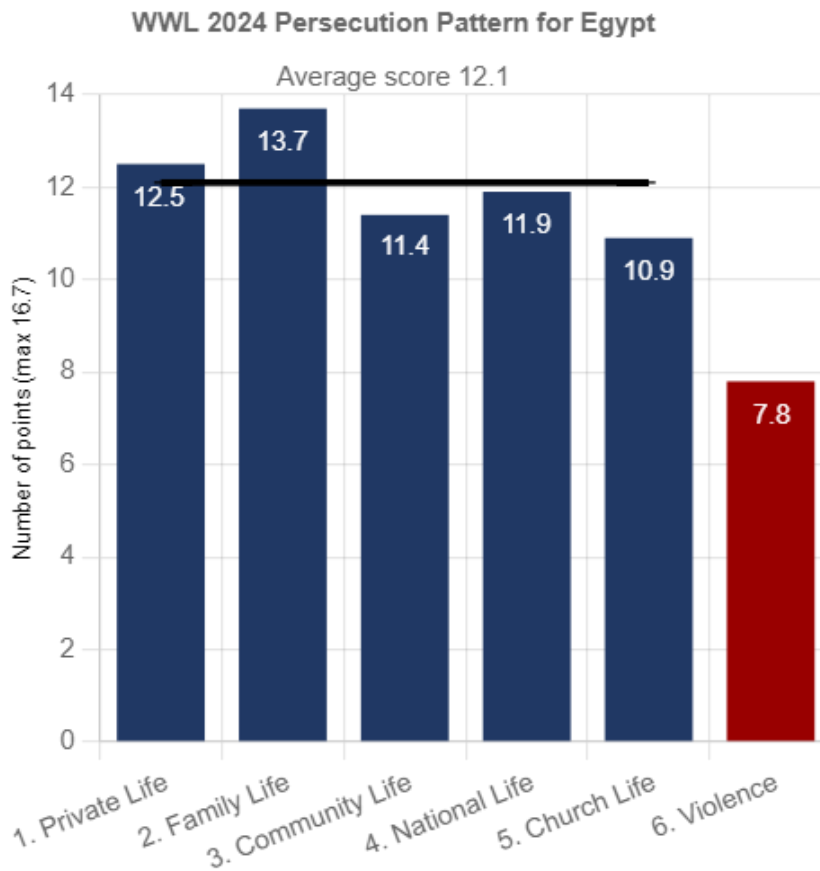
- **One's own (extended) family (Weak):** In a context of tribal thinking based around Islamic faith, family members often regard conversion from Islam to Christianity as betrayal of the family and a shame to the family honor, which needs to be corrected.
- **Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs (Weak):** Wider society functions as a watchdog to make sure that the honor and power of the group 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.

## The Persecution pattern

As can be seen in the WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Egypt below:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.1 points), very slightly decreasing from 12.2 in WWL 2023.
- 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 13.7 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 increased, but remained a high level, increasing from 7.0 in WWL 2023 to 7.8 in WWL 2024. In previous years, the violence score was always above 10.0 points.



## 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 2024 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. Despite promising statements by President al-Sisi that he even respects non-believers and that they are "free to choose" ([Al-Monitor, 20 September 2021](#)), converts from Islam to Christianity are regularly detained, mistreated and forced into silence by the security services.

In addition, conversion is punished via the blasphemy laws. Societal hostility towards 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 try to get converts to recant their faith, and may expel them from the family home or even kill them.

**Block 1.10: Christians have been isolated from other family members or other like-minded Christians (e.g. house arrest). (3.25 points)**

Especially converts from Islam to Christianity often find themselves isolated from other Christians, both because they are in many cases still living within their Muslim families and because of social barriers which make it difficult to connect to Christians belonging to the historical or non-traditional church communities. In addition, especially in upper Egypt and rural areas, young Christian women are often isolated as an indirect effect of persecution: Their family members force them to stay at home, partly because of cultural norms but also - through experience of life as a religious minority - out of fear that they might otherwise fall victim to sexual abuse by Muslim men.

**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.). (3.00 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 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.00 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 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.75 points)**

In line with Islamic law, adoption is prohibited in Egypt. However, fostering a child is possible and becoming more common and there is an ongoing debate within society concerning the care for children in need. Nonetheless, Christians are most likely to be hindered if they want to foster a Muslim child. A telling example is the case of 'Baby Shenouda', who after four years was taken from his Christian foster parents into an orphanage because unidentified foundlings are by law considered to be Muslim and cannot be raised by non-Muslims ([Watani, 4 September 2022](#)). Despite such flagrant discrimination, the public outcry by both Christian and Muslim commentators following the incident offers a ray of hope for long-term change.

### **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. (3.50 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 teaching. Children of privileged Christians can avoid this by attending private Christian-run schools, but this is only financially possible for some parents.

### **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 gen-

eral, marriage and burial for converts can only be carried out according to Islamic rites. In addition, if their new faith becomes known, converts are likely to be forced into divorce, lose custody of their children and be disinherited.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**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.). (3.50 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. They also regularly detain converts to force them to stay silent about their new faith and stop all involvement with other converts.

**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 a sizable percentage 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.). (3.00 points)**

Christians face discrimination and hostility 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 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (2.50 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 4.1: 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 Islamic 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 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.50 points)**

The threat of being accused of blasphemy always hangs like a sword of Damocles over Christian heads. Even alleged blasphemy can lead to mob violence or prosecution. In practice, Christians are generally very careful not to make critical comments about Islam and usually avoid saying anything at all about the prophet Muhammed. In 2023, a student was physically mistreated, arrested by the police and dismissed from his university after privately making a remark about the prophet Muhammed in response to mockery of Christianity. He and his family were subsequently forced to relocate inside the country following continuing death threats. In sharp contrast, Christian faith and Christians are publicly mocked (on social media) on a daily basis.

**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 perspective of national unity (which includes the Christian community and discourages 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 against Christianity (for instance, on social media) are overlooked. Although President al-Sisi has appointed some Christians to high-level positions, Christians are generally barred from high public offices, especially in the army and the very influential intelligence agencies. Despite this, it would appear that discrimination when engaging with the local authorities has become less over recent years, 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 local communities, 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)**

Following the enactment of the the 2016 Church Construction Law, over three thousand churches have been formally legalized. However, in many villages with a Christian population, Christians do not even have a church. There are still many administrative obstacles (such as security clearances and building regulations) when Christians want to build a church and opposition from society is in many cases strong. In sharp contrast, mosques can usually be built without hindrance.

**Block 5: Additional information**

There are thousands of churches and Egypt has a rich and longstanding church presence. 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 such material 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, which especially target those who proselytize or speak publicly about their faith. Numerous converts have been detained and mistreated by the security services in recent years.



## 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 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

- **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. 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.

Egypt: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	3	5
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	3	1
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	25	40
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?	4	1
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	3
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?	2	2
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	44	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?	23	7
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?	16	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	11	2
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	7	7

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** No major terrorist attack happened during WWL 2024, although at least three Christians have been killed (see *Specific examples of violations of rights* above for more information).
- **Christians attacked:** At least 44 Christians have been attacked and sometimes severely injured because of their faith. Several Christians have been injured during mob attacks on them and their properties or the local church. Several converts from Islam to Christianity have also been beaten and mistreated because of their conversion, while some female converts from Islam to Christianity have been forced to marry Muslims. In addition, at least several young women are expected to have faced sexual abuse, while hundreds have expe-

rienced sexual harassment. According to some reports, some Christian girls were targeted in a systematic way, with their attackers at times being paid per victim.

- **Christians arrested/imprisoned:** At least five converts to Christianity were arrested and detained by the security services during the WWL 2024 reporting period. At least one Christian remained imprisoned after being accused of blasphemy. Others were detained after a mob violently prevented the extension of their church building. It is not uncommon for the victims of a mob attack to be taken into police custody to satisfy their attackers' demands and to de-escalate the situation.
- **Churches attacked:** Two church buildings were attacked during sectarian violence targeting Christians, while another church property was vandalized (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period*).
- **Christian homes/properties attacked:** During mob violence over a church extension, several houses belonging to Christians were also attacked and damaged. In other cases, individual houses and properties were targeted for attack, in a number of cases following disputes over land.
- **Christians forced to move:** Both converts from Islam to Christianity and several Christians belonging to the historical Christian community were forced to relocate inside or outside the country.
- **Impunity for attackers:** Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished.

## 5 Year trends

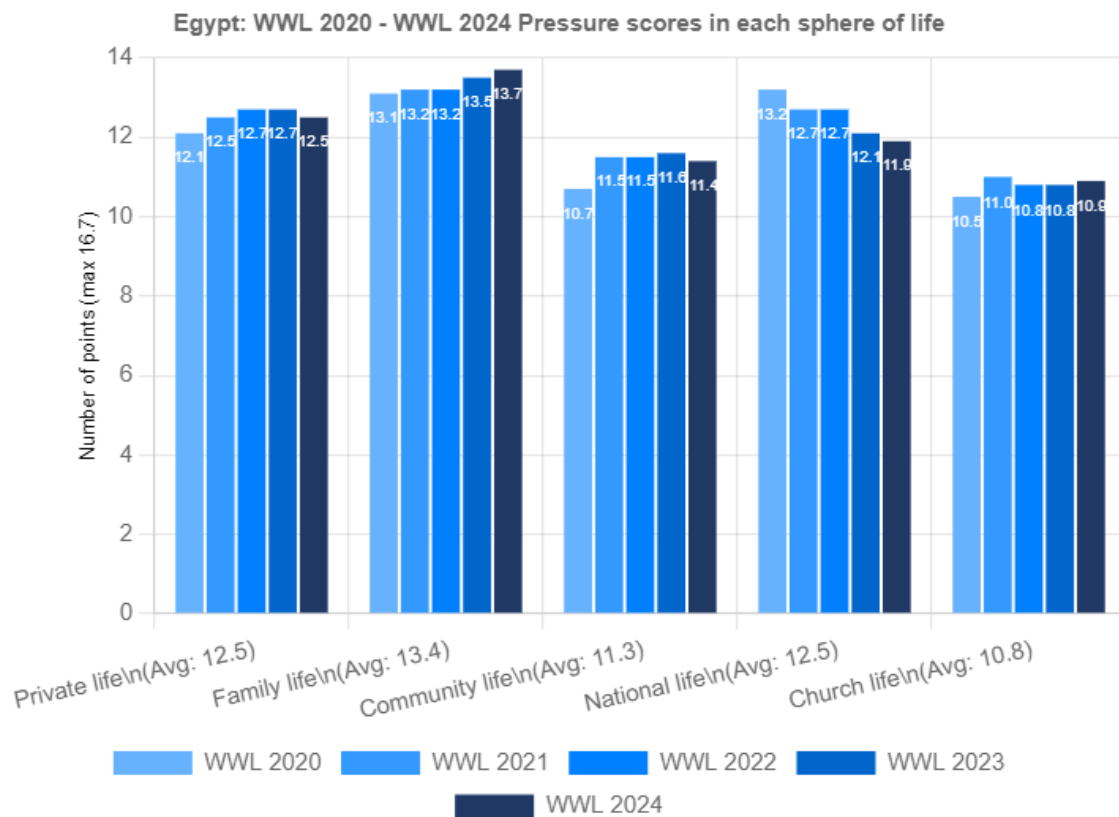
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Egypt: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	12.1
2023	12.2
2022	12.2
2021	12.2
2020	11.9

The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians in Egypt has been fairly stable at a very high level, ranging between 11.9 and 12.2 points.

## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that, in the last five WWL reporting periods, pressure on Christians has been very high in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*, mainly reflecting the difficulties converts from Islam to Christianity have to face. The level of pressure in the *National sphere* has consistently been higher than in the *Community* and *Church spheres of life*, which is partly showing that the political 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 chart below shows that the scores for violence in the reporting periods WWL 2020 and 2021 were all at an extreme level. Violence against Christians decreased in WWL 2022 and even further in WWL 2023, but is still categorized as being at a very high level. WWL 2024 saw a small increase in the violence score, but no change in overall pattern.



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; 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	-

Young Christian women living in Egypt's rural areas can be targets for grooming and sexual harassment by men influenced by radical Islamic teaching. Many women are reported to be missing under unclear circumstances, including affairs with Muslim men in an environment with a strong honor/shame culture and a power imbalance between the Muslim majority and Christian minority.

Police response to incidents of violence against Christians has been often complicit or apathetic and in cases of abduction, many women remain missing. In January 2023, three men were acquitted of attacking, beating and stripping an elderly Christian woman in an appeal ver-

dict. Initial reports also indicated that five houses were completely burned down and destroyed in the attack. The consequential message following such gender-based and discriminatory practices against the Christian community indicate that religion-related impunity remains entrenched, even in the Egypt's highest court ([CSW, 17 January 2023](#)). The psychological toll of such violence and associated impunity 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, 2023). Girls can also struggle to access education ([International Christian Concern, 1 August 2021](#)). Egyptian girls and women have very few rights in marriage and limited protection within the legal system. Marriage in Egypt is governed by various mainly religious-based laws, with the Muslim majority subject to Egyptian Personal Law, based on Sharia. Women cannot freely marry without the permission of a male guardian and are often excluded from marriage negotiations, A country expert states that “there is a threat of abduction and forced marriage to pressure girls to convert to Islam and marry Muslim men”.

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. For women and girls in upper Egypt, families may hinder them from going out of the house in order to protect them. There is a fear that she will be at risk on the street.

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. Official and reliable 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. Although no official statistics on sexual violence exist it is estimated that approximately 20,000 rapes cases are reported annually in Egypt; 90% of women in Egypt report experiencing some form of sexual harassment; and 3 in 10 married women report experiencing spousal violence, including sexual violence. In addition, the country has one of the highest rates of FGM in the world ([RAINN](#), accessed 12 January 2024).

## 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 out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death
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, especially in Upper Egypt. Particularly in rural areas, it is hard for Christian young men to find a job, which can be exploited to coerce young men away from Christianity with financial incentives. Further exemplifying economic discrimination, there have been instances of Christian men experiencing discrimination simply due to their Christian names. According to independent media platform [Daraj](#) (14 March 2021), only 12 Christian players have been part of Egypt’s Premier Football League over the past 30 years.

As the main financial provider, such discrimination 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.

Church leaders – most of whom are male – are particularly vulnerable to rights violations, in part as they are often easily identifiable as Christians. Whilst uncommon, the killing of clergy does occur; for instance, in April 2022 when an [Orthodox priest in Alexandria](#) was stabbed to death (La Croix International, 11 April 2022). But even the more common harassment of church leaders and their families has evoked 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. There are several cases in the past few years where Christian men have been attacked and murdered by men influenced by radical Islamic teaching.

Converts can be particularly targeted, and some male converts are eventually forced to flee the country. A country expert states that “this has happened in many instances where, for example, a father has had to leave his hometown for fear of persecution. There are many cases of many men who have left their countries and their children in order to escape fear and persecution”.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious groups facing intolerance, discrimination and persecution in Egypt include Shia and Sufi Muslims, Bahai, Jehovah's Witnesses and Jews. 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.

Jewish New Year was celebrated for the first time in seventy years in Egypt in September 2023 and an ancient synagogue was recently renovated and reopened ([CSW, 19 September 2023](#)). However, following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, two Jewish-Israeli tourists were killed by a police officer in Alexandria ([BBC News, 8 October 2023](#)).

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 Bahá'ís 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 of their rights, especially those active on social media networks. For example, blogger and atheist Sherif Gaber was 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 admitted to being 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 people with deviating views, including converts to Christianity) to be 'mentally ill' and in need of treatment; even universities actively try to 'sanitize' students by providing them with psychotherapy sessions ([TIMEP, 29 December 2021](#)).

Other sources report:

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Egypt):

- "The law does not recognize the Baha'i Faith or its religious laws and bans Baha'i institutions and community activities."



- "Although the government designates Jehovah's Witnesses as "Christian" on identity cards, a presidential decree bans their religious activities."
- "Organizers of the state-sponsored annual Cairo International Book Fair ... banned some publishing houses from participating and expelled others. For the second consecutive year, Palestinian writer and publisher Bisan Adwan was absent from the fair. Authorities expelled Adwan – who had resided in Egypt since childhood – from the country in 2020 amid accusations in the progovernment press that she promoted atheism."
- "Shia community sources and religious freedom observers again said information contained in a 2019 report by Minority Rights Group International, an international NGO, on challenges facing the country's Shia community remained valid. The NGO's report stated that there continued to be no Shia congregational halls (huseiniyas) in the country and Shia Muslims remained unable to establish public places of worship."

## 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 Egyptian Christians and churches. 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.

### 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, while he keeps oppressing any dissent, including from Christians. This can also be seen in the detention without trial of Coptic activist Ramy Kamel from November 2019 until January 2022 for his continued reporting on violence and discrimination against Christians in Egypt ([USCIRE](#), accessed 15 December 2023).

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points): Al-Monitor, 20 September 2021 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/sisi-statements-spark-debate-about-status-egyptian-atheists>
- Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.75 points): Watani, 4 September 2022 - <https://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/coptic-affairs/story-of-four-year-old-shenouda-raises-disturbing-questions-on-adoption-and-foster-care-in-egypt/39636/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (CSW, 17 January 2023). - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/01/17/press/5915/article.htm>
- 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: (RAINN, - <https://www.rainn.org/africa/egypt#>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Daraj - <https://daraj.com/en/69821/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Orthodox priest in Alexandria - <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/murder-of-coptic-priest-in-egypt-sparks-emotion-and-concern/15929>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: CSW, 19 September 2023 - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/09/19/press/6075/article.htm>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: BBC News, 8 October 2023 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67046394>
- 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/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: TIMEP, 29 December 2021 - <https://timep.org/2021/12/29/atheists-in-egypt-life-on-the-edge-of-civil-death/>
- Future outlook: USCIRF - <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/ramy-kamel>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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