

Freedom on the Net 2018 - Egypt

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Status:	Not Free
Total Score:	72/100 (0 = Best, 100 = Worst)
Population:	97.6 million
Internet Penetration:	45%
Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	Yes
Political/Social Content Blocked:	Yes
Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
Freedom in the World Status:	Not Free


Key Developments, June 1, 2017 – May 31, 2018

- Authorities continued to shut down telecommunications networks in the Sinai Peninsula as part of military operations (see Restrictions on Connectivity).
- The blocking of websites reached unprecedented levels during a wider crackdown on freedom of expression and civil society in advance of the March 2018 presidential elections (see Blocking and Filtering).
- Parliament considered new media regulations, including provisions to register popular social media users, censor news sites, and criminalize the spread of false news. Several problematic laws were passed after the coverage period (see Legal Environment).
- Numerous bloggers, activists, and journalists were arrested for nonviolent political, social, or religious posts on social media, while others languish in arbitrary detention (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities).

Introduction:

Internet freedom further declined in 2018 as online censorship increased

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dramatically, with little to no transparency. Numerous individuals were arrested or imprisoned for critical online posts and commentary.

Blocking escalated to unprecedented levels during the coverage period as part of a wider crackdown on freedom of expression and civil society in advance of the March 2018 presidential elections. As of February 2018, around 500 websites were reported blocked, many of which had been blocked since the beginning of 2017. The blocked websites include local independent news, influential blogs, political movements, and a number of local and international human rights organizations. The entire online publishing platform Medium was also blocked, as well as hundreds of proxy tools, tech websites, and VPNs used to circumvent state censorship.

Egyptians continued to face heavy penalties for their online activities. Over the past year, a number of individuals were arrested for spreading false news, inciting violence, or insulting the president. In 2017, Coptic Christian Andrew Saleeb was sentenced to five years in prison under the antiterrorism law for allegedly "supporting terrorism" for posting criticism of President Sisi on Facebook and distributing fliers calling for protests against currency devaluation.

Egypt's internet freedom is poised to decline further with new legislation recently passed that targets the online sphere. In August 2018, after this report's coverage period, the president signed the new Law on Combating Cybercrimes, which creates a legal framework to block websites deemed to threaten national security. Individuals who visit banned websites may be jailed for up to one year, while creators or managers of websites that are later banned could face up to two years in prison. ISPs are required to retain browsing data of their customers and disclose it to security bodies upon request.

Parliament also approved three draft laws regulating the media in June 2018. The laws contain a number of new restrictions on online media, for example, stipulating that no websites may be set up or managed in Egypt without a license from the Higher Council for Media Regulation. Moreover, the draft law considers blogs and personal social media accounts to be websites, which would be subject to account removal, fines, and imprisonment if found to be spreading false news. President Sisi ratified several of the laws after the coverage period.

Obstacles to Access:

A poor telecommunications infrastructure and relatively high costs continue to pose obstacles to universal internet access in Egypt. Authorities continued to shut down telecommunications networks in the Sinai Peninsula as part of military operations to root out "terrorists and criminal elements and organizations" in 2018.

Availability and Ease of Access

According to the Information and Communication Technology Indicators Bulletin, a report issued by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT), at the fourth quarter of 2017, internet penetration stood at 41 percent, up from 39 percent at the end of 2016. Egypt's mobile phone penetration rate was 111 percent during the same period, amounting to over 101 million mobile subscriptions, as well as 32 million mobile internet subscriptions.^[1] Figures from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) put internet penetration at 45 percent at the end of 2017.

Egyptians are increasingly accessing mobile internet service. According to a report issued by the MCIT, in December 2017 there were only 5.2 million ADSL subscriptions, alongside 32.79 million mobile internet users^[2]. At 31 percent, the northern delta region has the highest percentage of ADSL subscriptions, followed by Cairo at 28 percent and upper Egypt at 12 percent^[3].

Egypt continues to have the most affordable broadband internet in Africa. A monthly internet package costs US\$12.33.^[4] Despite the dominance of the state-owned internet service provider (ISP), increased competition between mobile providers has caused a decrease in broadband prices. However, starting in September 2017, prices increased due to the implementation of a 14 percent value-added tax (VAT) on ADSL internet.^[5] Following the implementation of VAT, ADSL plans prices have increased; 1 Mbps speeds with a 10 GB data allowance cost EGP 70 (US\$3.96) per month, up from EGP 50 (US\$2.83), while the 2 Mbps speed and 150 GB data package rose to EGP 160 (US\$9.08) per month.^[6]

During the Cairo ICT 2017 Conference, the minister of communication and information technology unveiled the first Egyptian-manufactured smart phone, made by a company called SICO, which reached Egyptian markets in February 2018. Approximately 45 percent of the phone's components are locally manufactured, and it retails at an average price of EGP 2,000 (US\$112).^[7] Yasser al-Qadi, Egypt's communications minister, had said that by the end of 2017, the minimum internet speed in Egypt would reach 4 Mbps, a promise that remains unfulfilled.

The majority of internet users prefer to browse in Arabic. However, only 3 percent of the web's content is in Arabic,^[8] creating a language barrier that in turn limits usage.

Restrictions on Connectivity

Authorities continued to shut down telecommunications networks in the Sinai Peninsula as part of military operations to root out "terrorists and criminal elements and organizations" in 2018.^[9] The military campaign has isolated residents of Al-Arish and other cities in a media blackout, with telecommunications shutdowns disconnecting Sinai residents. Similar shutdowns were noted throughout 2014^[10] and 2015.^[11]

In the beginning of 2018, internet users complained about disruptions to their service, lasting from days to two weeks for some users.^[12] After numerous complaints, Telecom Egypt stated that the internet outage was due to a damaged undersea cable in the Mediterranean Sea. On January 2, 2018, the company said that it had bypassed the severed cable and fully restored internet service.^[13]

The government has centralized the internet infrastructure and fiber-optic cables to create highly controllable choke points.^[14] In addition, virtually all of Egypt's telecommunications infrastructure is owned by Telecom Egypt, a state-owned company. The arrangement makes it easy to suspend internet access or decrease speeds, as was the case during the 2011 revolution.^[15]

VoIP services have been intermittently blocked over mobile networks. Users experienced disruptions when attempting to make voice calls over apps like WhatsApp, Apple's FaceTime, Viber, Skype, and Facebook Messenger in April 2017.^[16] The disruptions may have been linked to the announcement of a three-month state of emergency after a terrorist attack killed dozens at a church on Palm Sunday.^[17] The NTRA denied that VoIP calls had been restricted.^[18] This was similar to the blocking of VoIP services in October 2015; in that case however, mobile operators confirmed that the blocking had been requested by the NTRA.^[19] Periodic blockages of VoIP traffic over mobile networks were documented as early as 2010,^[20] but debate over VoIP intensified in June 2013 after the NTRA announced the establishment of a committee to "monitor" communications on free messaging apps WhatsApp and Viber, pending a potential decision to block or restrict them. The NTRA stated that the rationale for potentially blocking VoIP services was economic, citing the negative impacts on traditional

telecommunications companies.^[21] Making international calls over VoIP networks is technically illegal under article 72 of the 2003 Telecommunications Law, which forbids the "by-passing [of] international telephone calls by any means whatsoever."^[22]

ICT Market

The Egyptian mobile phone market is dominated by three companies. Vodafone Egypt enjoys the greatest market share with 40.5 percent. Orange Egypt has a market share of 33 percent. Formerly known as Mobinil, it underwent rebranding in March 2016, and is now 99 percent owned by its French parent company.^[23] Etisalat Misr has a 24 percent market share. The company is 66 percent owned by Etisalat, an Emirati company with strong ties to that country's rulers.^[24] In July 2017, the state-owned Telecom Egypt officially launched We,^[25] the country's fourth mobile network.

Vodafone and Orange launched their 4G services in September 2017 after receiving access to the frequencies from the government. We was the first mobile carrier to acquire the license in July 2016, but the remaining three companies faced delays in the launch of the service due to their refusal to meet the terms set by the NTRA, including paying half of the license fee in US dollars^[26].

In the fixed-line broadband market, Telecom Egypt (under the banner TE Data) controls 75 percent of the ADSL market. Egypt's other main ISPs, also known as class A ISPs, are Etisalat Egypt, Noor, and Vodafone data. These companies lease lines from TE Data and resell bandwidth to smaller ISPs.^[27]

Regulatory Bodies

Mobile service providers and ISPs are regulated by the NTRA and governed by the 2003 Telecommunication Regulation Law. The NTRA's board is chaired by the ICT minister and includes representatives from the defense, finance, and interior ministries; the state security council; the presidency; workers' unions; and public figures, experts, and military representatives.^[28] Officially, the NTRA is responsible for regulating the telecommunications industry, ensuring a competitive environment in the market, managing the frequency spectrum, standardization, and interconnection agreements.^[29] In addition, it aims to enhance and integrate advanced telecommunications and broadband technologies.^[30] The NTRA has led reforms to upgrade the telecommunications infrastructure by installing fiber-optic cables to increase internet speeds and, in October 2016, auctioned 4G frequencies to all mobile providers.^[31]

Limits on Content:

A growing number of websites were reportedly blocked in the past year, including independent news outlets, human rights organizations, VPN and proxy services, and social media platforms. Incidents of content removals also increased without any transparency behind censorship decisions.

Blocking and Filtering

Blocking escalated to unprecedented levels during the coverage period as part of a wider crackdown on freedom of expression and civil society in advance of the March 2018 presidential elections.

As of February 2018, around 500 websites were reported blocked, many of which had been blocked since the beginning of 2017.^[32] The blocked websites includes nearly every local independent news source, several influential blogs, political movements, and a number of local and international human rights organizations. Numerous news sites are also blocked, including *Huffington Post Arabic*, the

financial newspaper *Al-Borsa*, and the entire online publishing platform Medium, where the blocked *Mada Masr* had reposted content in an attempt to avert censors. Websites run by Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, the activist April 6 Youth Movement (which was active in the 2011 revolution), and the jailed democracy activist Alaa Abdel Fattah were also inaccessible.

In addition, hundreds of proxy tools, tech websites, and VPNs used to circumvent state censorship are blocked.^[33] Users have reported that open and free VPN services are no longer available,^[34] making paid VPN the only option, at a cost that is prohibitive for many.^[35] In December 2016, authorities blocked the encrypted messaging application Signal.^[36] However, the blocking was circumvented by the app's developers, Open Whisper Systems, using domain fronting.

In June 2017, an online skit mocking the army's production of Ramadan cookies – a seasonal staple – that ran on a little-known website attracted the ire of the government and its supporters, who called the actors "traitors" and "foreign agents." The website removed the video, but it was blocked a few days later.^[37]

In May 2018, the Supreme Administrative Court issued a ruling on a 2013 case on appeal to block YouTube over the "Innocence of Muslims" video posted online in 2012 that was deemed to have denigrated the Prophet Mohammed.^[38] The final ruling ordered regulators to block YouTube for a month and further decided that government agencies and the NTRA may block websites on national security grounds.^[39]

In May 2017, the state news announced that 21 websites had been blocked for allegedly supporting terrorism. The government implemented the blocking as part of the state of emergency that was put in place following terrorist attacks in April. Among the sites blocked were several prominent news outlets linked to Qatar, the extremist group Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood. *Mada Masr*, an independent, progressive, and bilingual news site based in Egypt, which has been nominated for awards by Reporters Without Borders and Index on Censorship, was also on the list of blocked sites. Security officials interviewed by Reuters stated that the sites were blocked for their links to the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar. Reporting on its Facebook page, *Mada Masr* indicated the decision to block the websites was made by the Egyptian authorities, rather than ISPs.^[40] In mid-2017, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) and *Mada Masr* filed separate lawsuits to appeal the blocking. However, no official blocking orders were issued by a court or government authority, making it impossible to challenge the action through legal channels.^[41] The websites remained blocked at the end of the reporting period.

The blocks coincided with a diplomatic crisis between Qatar and several of its Middle Eastern neighbors. The crisis began when hackers posted remarks attributed to the emir of Qatar on the Qatar News Agency website, which appeared to confirm regional fears that he supports extremist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as Iran and Israel. The *Washington Post* reported that the hack was orchestrated by the United Arab Emirates to discredit Qatar.^[42] Egypt was one of several countries that severed relations with Qatar after the incident. Two other news sites, *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed* and its English version, the *New Arab*, have both been blocked since December 2015 due to their links to Qatar.

In March 2018, the telecommunication and information technology minister stated that Egypt was working towards establishing an "Egyptian Facebook," part of an effort to expand Egypt's influence in social media. He added that Facebook and Google, which are used by millions of Egyptians, were making millions of dollars from advertisements, and that the revenue is not subject to taxes or fees.^[43] The government would be better positioned to coerce a local Facebook alternative into

removing political content and providing data on users.

Content Removal

During the coverage period, the government increased its efforts to block social media pages and remove objectionable content from certain outlets.

In March 2018, the Facebook page of opposition TV network Watan was removed, as was a Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated page entitled "Hassan Al Banna, leader of the generation."^[44] Observers believe the removal was due to an onslaught of government supporters reporting the page to Facebook for violating the platform's terms of service.

News outlets also regularly remove articles from their websites. In October 2017, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* removed an article that was critical of the president but claimed that the website had been hacked and that the hacker had removed the article. In February 2018, the same newspaper removed an article from its website that criticized the UAE government, a key Egyptian ally.

In May 2018, Russia Today's Arabic website was pressured to remove an online poll it had posted regarding the disputed territories of Halayeb and Shalateen, on the Egyptian border with Sudan. The removal of the poll came in the aftermath of formal rebukes by the State Information Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the cancellation of an interview with the minister of foreign affairs.

Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation

At a time when traditional media has become increasingly consolidated and homogenized, online media has also struggled to maintain its independence.^[45] Numerous news sites have been blocked for failing to adhere to the government's editorial line (see Blocking and Filtering).

The rising number of arrests for social media posts, including satirical images and comedy videos, have had a chilling effect on online speech. Online journalists are often reluctant to cross red lines on sensitive topics, including sectarian tensions, sexuality, the Muslim Brotherhood, detainees, military operations in the Sinai, and the military's outsized role in the national economy. A provision in the August 2015 antiterrorism law criminalizes the publication of information regarding militant attacks that contradicts official government statements, a crime punishable by up to two years in prison.^[46] Additionally, new legislation passed in June 2018 makes the publication of "false news" (as identified by the government) a criminal offense.

Registering a local .eg domain requires the submission of personal data and copies of the applicant's national ID, which may inhibit local sites from criticizing the government. Online-only news websites are not recognized by the state as news outlets, unless connected to a print newspaper, making it difficult to obtain press credentials, gain access to sources, or fact-check information with officials.

The economic viability of independent news websites is constantly under threat, as many outlets have closed, and others face financial troubles. The media landscape is dominated by the online versions of state-owned newspapers or outlets that are backed by government-connected financiers.^[47] The most widely read news outlets, per the most recent Alexa ranking, are primarily tabloids, news portals aligned with the government, and sports websites. The blogging platform Blogspot is the 16th most popular website in the country, an indication that many Egyptians use it to share opinions and news.^[48]

Sheikh Shawki Allam, Egypt's Grand Mufti, has encouraged the screening of social media sites, claiming that a number of them promote fake news.^[49] He has also issued a fatwa (religious edict) against Bitcoin, saying it causes "fraud, betrayal,

and ignorance."^[50] Several members of parliament have also called on the government to censor social media in Egypt, and encouraged an awareness campaign on the "dangers of Facebook on the Egyptian society."

Digital Activism

Digital activism and political organizing have been less prevalent in recent years due to police crackdowns, arrests, harsh prison sentences handed down to protesters, and even killings at the hands of police at protests.^[51] A law passed in 2013 effectively banned protests and gave police broad powers to crack down on demonstrations.^[52] At the end of the reporting period, numerous activists remained in jail for protesting the government.

In July 2017, activists at the American University in Cairo, a private institution, used social media to draw attention to the university administration's decision to abruptly end the contracts of workers there.^[53]

Violations of User Rights:

In August 2018, after this report's coverage period, the president signed the Law on Combating Cybercrimes that legalizes the blocking of websites deemed a threat to national security. Numerous individuals were arrested or imprisoned for critical online posts and commentary. At least one individual was sentenced to prison.

Legal Environment

Egypt's constitution, which was amended in 2014,^[54] contains articles that address and nominally guarantee freedom of the press, stating that Egyptians "have the right to own and issue newspapers and establish visual, audio, and digital media outlets." A number of articles impact online media and internet freedom:

- Article 34 asserts the role of the government in preserving the security of cyberspace, "an integral part of the economic system and national security."
- According to article 70, "the law shall regulate ownership and establishment procedures for visual and radio broadcast stations in addition to online newspapers." This wording implies that even online sources of information could be regulated and their owners may be required to seek government approval in order to operate, as is currently the case with newspapers.
- Article 71 states that censorship is forbidden "in any way," and no individuals should be punished for publications. However, exceptions are made for "times of war or general mobilization," with crimes delineated for "incitement to violence," "discrimination amongst citizens, or impugning the honor of individuals."^[55]
- Article 211 outlines the establishment of a national media council tasked with regulating "the affairs of radio, television, and printed and digital press, among others" and ensuring that the press maintains a commitment to "professional and ethical standards, as well as national security needs." The Supreme Council for the Administration of the Media was created in December 2016, with the power to fine and suspend media organizations.^[56]
- The constitution also permits the trials of civilians using military courts, despite objections from political activists.^[57]

In June 2018, after this report's coverage period, parliament approved three draft laws regulating the media, including social media.^[58] Replacing the 2016 Institutional Regulation of the Press and Media Law, the laws regulate the three government bodies – the Higher Council for Media Regulation, the National Press Authority, and the National Media Authority – tasked with regulating the media. The

law contains a number of new restrictions on online media, stipulating that no websites may be set up or managed in Egypt without a license from the Higher Council for Media Regulation. Moreover, the draft law considers blogs and personal social media accounts to be websites, which would be subject to account removal, fines, and imprisonment if found to be spreading false news.^[59]

In August 2018, also after this report's coverage period, the president signed the new Law on Combating Cybercrimes.^[60] The law legalizes the blocking of websites deemed a threat to national security and punishes individuals who visit banned websites with up to one year in prison. Creators or managers of websites that are later banned could face up to two years in prison.^[61] ISPs are further required to retain browsing data and to disclose it to security bodies.^[62]

A new antiterrorism law was ratified by the president in August 2015.^[63] The law broadened the scope of offenses that are considered terrorism and provides for the establishment of a terrorism prosecutor's office, which would likely be subject to fewer checks and appeal provisions than normal civilian courts. One provision allows the police to monitor internet traffic and social media activity to "prevent their use for terrorist purposes."^[64] Furthermore, article 27 establishes a minimum sentence of five years in prison for "setting up a website with the goal of promoting ideas or beliefs inciting to the use of violence, broadcasting information to mislead the police or judicial authorities on terrorism cases, or exchanging messages and issuing orders between terrorist groups or organizations."^[65] Setting up a group with the intention of "advocating by any means the obstruction of provisions of the constitution or laws" is punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty. Activists argued that the broad language of the law could apply to any peaceful political party or advocacy group.^[66] Finally, journalists face heavy fines for disputing official accounts of attacks by militants.

President Sisi had previously issued a separate law broadening the definition of "terrorist entities" to include anyone who threatens public order "by any means," and allowing the state to draw up lists of alleged terrorists or terrorist organizations.^[67] The law, which passed in February 2015, was met with skepticism from legal experts and human rights activists, who said that its vague wording could allow the state to consider political parties, student unions, political movements, and human rights organizations terrorist groups.^[68]

Amendments to the Emergency Law, Anti-Terrorism Law, and criminal code were rushed through in April 2017 after terrorist attacks on three Coptic churches. The amendments allow for the indefinite detention of individuals suspected of threatening national security through special emergency courts, and curtail the right to appeal court decisions and obtain a fair trial. Police may also detain individuals for seven days without bringing them before a judge or prosecutor.^[69] A similar law used during the Mubarak era was struck down by the constitutional court in 2013.

Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities

Egyptians continue to face heavy penalties for their online activities. According to Amnesty International, at least 240 members of political and youth groups in 17 cities were arrested between April and September 2017 for criticizing President Sisi on social media.^[70] At least one individual was sentenced to prison. In 2017, Coptic Christian Andrew Saleeb was sentenced to five years in prison for allegedly "supporting terrorism" for Facebook posts criticizing President Sisi and fliers calling for protests against currency devaluation. He was sentenced under the antiterrorism law.^[71]

Numerous other individuals were arrested for their critical online posts and commentary during the coverage period:

- In November 2017, Islam al-Refaei, a blogger and social media figure, known for his sarcastic comments on political and social topics, as well as for challenging conservative societal norms, was arrested and charged with "membership of a terrorist group, inciting against the state, and calling for demonstrations without a permit." His detention has since been repeatedly renewed, pending investigation.^[72]
- Also in November 2017, blogger Mohamed Ibrahim, also known as Mohamed Oxygen and host of the Oxygen Egypt blog, was detained, assaulted, and released a few hours later. He was rearrested in April 2018, and has remained in pretrial detention ever since.^[73]
- In April 2018, Adel Sabri, editor-in-chief of the news site *Masr al-Arabia*, was detained on "charges of publishing false news, incitement to disrupt constitutional provisions, joining a banned group and inciting demonstrations," and was reportedly released on bail in July.^[74] His outlet had translated a *New York Times* report on electoral bribes. The outlet was fined EGP 50,000 (US\$2,792). The site was also blocked in 2017.
- In May 2018, renowned journalist and blogger Wael Abbas was arrested. Police allegedly raided his house, ransacked it, and blindfolded him before taking him into custody. His detention has been repeatedly renewed, and he has been charged with disseminating false news and joining an outlawed group.^[75] Abbas is known for being a leading activist and publishing videos documenting police brutality and torture since the mid-2000s.
- In May 2018, activist Amal Fathy was arrested two days after posting a video to her Facebook page criticizing the government for its failure to protect women from sexual harassment, deliver public services, and improve the human rights and socioeconomic situation. Fathy and her husband Mohamed Lotfy, the director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF), were detained, as well as their three-year-old child. They were later released, but Fathy was charged with "disseminating a video on social media to publicly incite overthrowing the government," "publishing a video that includes false news that could harm public peace," and "misusing telecommunication tools." At the end of the coverage period, she was held in detention for a second set of charges including "belonging to a banned group," "using a website to promote ideas calling for terrorist acts," and "intentionally disseminating false news that could harm public security and interest." Prosecutors allege Fathy is a member of the banned April 6 Youth Movement. After Fathy posted a video to Facebook detailing her own experience of sexual harassment, online trolls reposted it to Facebook and Twitter "alongside gender-based insults and calls for her arrest." The case was picked up by state-owned and progovernment media, which falsely claimed that she is an April 6 activist currently working at ECRF.
- A Lebanese tourist, Mona el-Mazbooh, was sentenced to eight years in prison in July 2018 after uploading a video on Facebook in which she complained of sexual harassment, theft, and poor restaurant service in the country. She was found guilty of "deliberately spreading false rumors that would harm society, attacking religion, and public indecency," according to Reuters.^[76] She was deported after a court reduced her punishment to a one-year suspended sentence.
- Labor activist and lawyer Haytham Mohamdeen was arrested in May 2018 and held incommunicado on charges of "participating in the activities of a banned group" and "using the internet to incite terrorist acts," according to his lawyers. He had last been arrested in 2016 after calling for protests against the transfer of two Egyptian islands to Saudi Arabia.^[77]

- Activist Shady al-Ghazaly Harb was arrested in May 2018 on charges of insulting the president, spreading fake news, and joining an outlawed group.^[78] He had made tweets critical of the government and its foreign relations, including the transfer of Egyptian islands to Saudi Arabia, a new US\$500 billion Saudi economic zone planned for the islands and 1,000 square kilometers of the southern Sinai Peninsula, and a gas deal with Israel.^[79]
- Sami Anan, a former chief of staff of the army, was arrested shortly after posting a video to his Facebook page announcing his intention to run in the March 2018 presidential election. In the video, he called on "civilian and military institutions to maintain neutrality towards everyone who had announced their intention to run and not take unconstitutional sides of a president who will leave his post in a few months." The military released a statement stating that Anan was "blatantly inciting" against the military and attempting to "drive a wedge between the armed forces and the great Egyptian people."^[80] He later suffered a stroke in military prison and was moved to a military hospital where, as of July 2018, he was reportedly in critical condition.^[81]

Authorities use social media and dating apps to entrap sexual and gender minorities accused of performing illegal acts.^[82] A number of Egyptians were accused of promoting "sexual deviancy" and "debauchery" after images shared on social media showed them holding a rainbow flag at a concert by the Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila, whose frontman is gay. Dozens were arrested in the aftermath of the concert, which took place in Egypt in September 2017.^[83] At least six concert attendees were sentenced to prison terms of between one and six years in early October 2017.^[84]

Several prominent digital activists and online journalists remain in prison. In many cases, individuals faced charges unrelated to their online activities, although their supporters believe they were arrested to prevent them from expressing their views. For example, Alaa Abdel Fattah, a prominent blogger and leading figure in the 2011 revolution, was sentenced to five years in prison in 2015, along with 24 other defendants, for participating in a 2013 protest against legislation that effectively criminalized any protests without government permission.^[85] In June 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued a legal opinion^[86] stating that Abdel Fattah was being detained arbitrarily and calling on the Egyptian government to immediately release him.^[87]

Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity

Surveillance is a significant concern in Egypt. Article 57 of the constitution states that private communications "may only be confiscated, examined, or monitored by causal judicial order, for a limited period of time, and in cases specified by the law." Judicial warrants are needed in order to enter, search, or monitor private property such as homes, as specified in article 58. In practice, the government's surveillance operations lack transparency, potentially violating privacy protections in the constitution.

Research and leaked documents have shown that Egyptian authorities have purchased or received surveillance equipment from international companies like Blue Coat,^[88] Nokia Siemens Network,^[89] and Hacking Team.^[90] Following pressure from human rights organizations, Italy revoked authorization from surveillance company Area SpA to sell equipment to Egypt's Technical Research Department in early 2016.^[91]

Encryption remains restricted. In December 2016, the government blocked Signal, a messaging app that allows users to send and receive content using end-to-end

encryption. According to Open Whisper Systems, the company behind the app, this was the first time the program had been entirely blocked in a country. One week after the block, Signal introduced a feature in its Android app allowing it to sidestep censorship in Egypt, using a feature called "domain fronting," which concealed Signal's traffic inside of Google's App Engine platform designed to host apps on Google's servers. Blocking Signal would thereby require blocking the entirety of Google's products.^[92]

The Egyptian government requested access to the internal software of ride sharing apps like Uber and Careem, including data about customers, drivers, and journeys. Uber rejected the request, but Careem's CEO, Mudassir Sheikha, stated that in a meeting with Egyptian military intelligence, they were offered preferential treatment over their rival if they provided the data.^[93]

In March 2018, Uber and Careem were banned by a decision of Cairo's administrative court following a lawsuit filed by 42 taxi drivers. However, in April 2018, another court suspended the ruling until the higher administrative court could deliver a final verdict, following an appeal filed by the companies.^[94] In May, parliament passed a law regulating ride sharing apps stipulating that companies obtain a five-year renewable license for a fee of LE 30 million (US\$1.71 million), that drivers pay annual fees to obtain special licenses, and that companies retain user data for 180 days and share it with authorities "on request" and "according to the law."^[95]

Intimidation and Violence

Imprisoned activists, bloggers, and journalists frequently experience abuse and torture while in detention. They also often languish in pre-trial detention for extended periods of time, sometimes years. The photojournalist known as "Shawkan," for example, remained in pretrial detention as of June 2018; he was arrested in August 2013 while covering protests.^[96]

Bloggers are frequently intimidated online by government supporters, who often work in collaboration with progovernment news websites to smear prominent activists. Esraa Abdel Fattah had her personal photos, emails, and recorded phone calls leaked on social media in 2017. A progovernment Facebook page posted photos of her without a hijab in order to accuse her of "indecency." Her cell phone had also been stolen.^[97]

Egyptians also face other sanctions for their online activities. For example, in March 2017, Cairo University student Hussein Bondoq was investigated in relation to comments posted on Facebook. In a separate case, a university professor was fired after she posted a video of herself dancing on her personal Facebook page.^[98] In February 2017, the government-aligned channel ONTV denied one of its own correspondents access to his office, allegedly in retaliation for comments he made on his Facebook page criticizing the government.

The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community is especially targeted on social media and dating apps. Following the controversy over the raising of the rainbow flag during a Mashrou' Leila concert in Cairo, the crackdown on the LGBT community for online activities intensified.^[99] Gay dating apps such as Grindr and Hornet have provided safety tips for Egyptian users to protect themselves from entrapment by the police.^[100]

Technical Attacks

Egypt was targeted in 2017 by several cyberattacks that used ransomware and affected companies worldwide.^[101] In addition, a CitizenLab report found that Telecom Egypt, the country's main ISP, has been redirecting Egyptian internet

users to malware that mines cryptocurrency or displays advertisements.^[102] Users across the country have, seemingly at random, had their browsing activity mysteriously redirected to online money-making schemes. CitizenLab found deep packet inspection (DPI) middleboxes on the Telecom Egypt demarcation point. The middleboxes were being used to hijack Egyptian internet users' unencrypted web connections and redirect the users to revenue-generating content such as affiliate ads and browser cryptocurrency mining scripts.^[103]

According to the report, the Egyptian scheme, AdHose, has two modes. In spray mode, AdHose redirects Egyptian users en masse to ads for short periods of time. In trickle mode, AdHose targets some JavaScript resources and defunct websites for ad injection. AdHose is likely an effort to covertly raise money. Citizen Lab's report showed that the same middlebox that runs AdHose was also responsible for internet censorship in Egypt, blocking websites for Human Rights Watch and the news outlet Al Jazeera.^[104]

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