



The Unfreedom Monitor

A Methodology for Tracking Digital Authoritarianism Around the World

EGYPT
COUNTRY REPORT

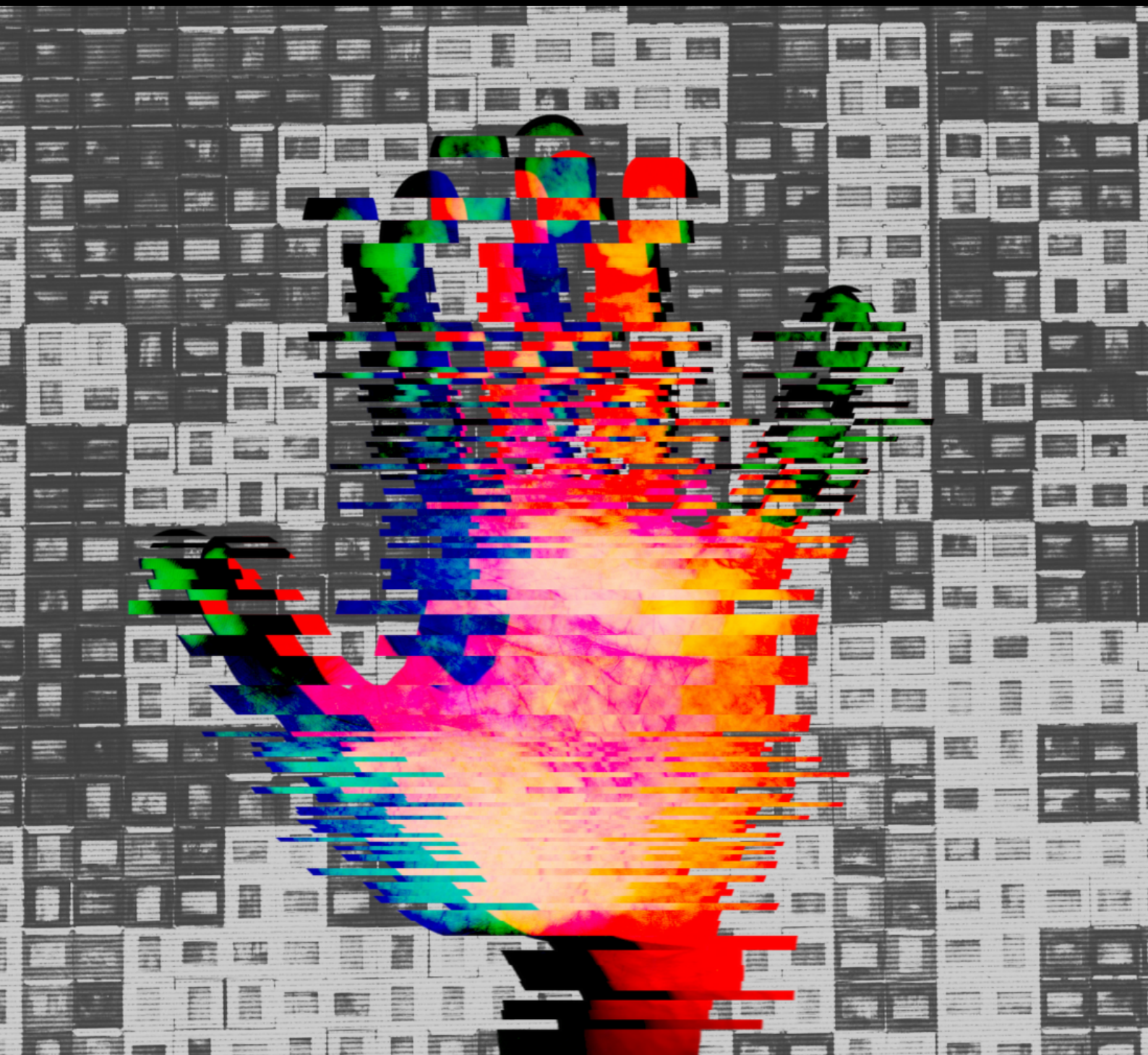


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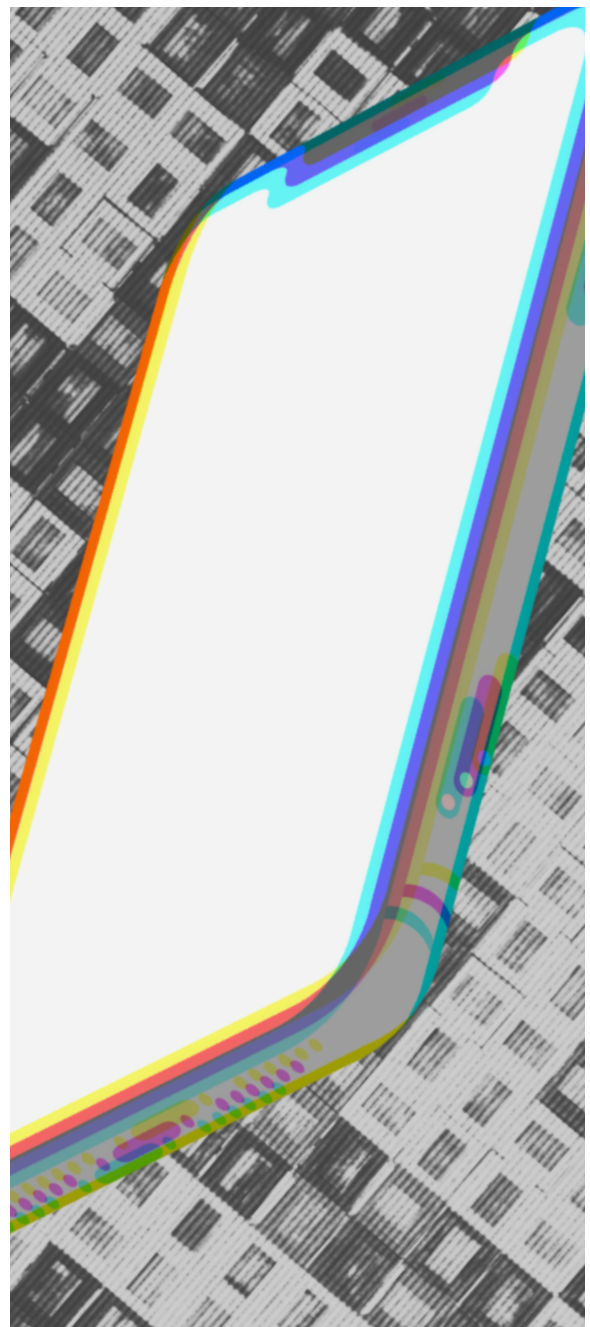
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BACKGROUND

Before January 25, 2011, the "We are all Khaled Said on Facebook" page called for demonstrations against the minister of the interior on the same day as Police Day, a traditional holiday celebrated in Egypt. With many Facebook pages starting to call for these protests, the number of users who responded to the protest reached 1 million (Barrons). Beginning on January 24, 2011, Egyptian internet users, for the first time, encountered attempts to slow down and block social media on a massive scale, and the internet was painfully slow (Blocking Facebook). Then on January 25, 2011, people started using proxies and the Tor website to log into Twitter and Facebook. On January 28, 2011, Egypt pulled the plug on the internet, changing the people and government's relationship with the internet forever (Why Egypt Shut Down the Internet).

In the years following 2011, Egypt experienced a shrinking of the offline space due to police brutality against any peaceful demonstrations or protests. People started using social media platforms to campaign and organise around political or social issues. Women began using social media in Egypt to publicly highlight sexual harassment for the first time, defying the narrative of women being blamed for sexual harassment. The pressure exerted by women in the following ten years had a significant impact on public awareness (Naguib). These efforts have recently resulted in some legislation supporting women's rights, such as the approval of the new draft law that guarantees the confidentiality of data on victims of sexual harassment and assault (Al-Masry Al-Youm) and the amendments to the Penal Code No. 58/1937 to combat sexual harassment (Egypt Today staff). For the first time, these amendments addressed sexual harassment as a crime. They tightened penalties for harassing others in public or private settings through sexual innuendos, gestures, words, or actions. These changes represent the valuable positive impact of the internet and how the internet empowered the women's movement in Egypt to create considerable social changes.



EGYPT'S POLITICAL HISTORY

The turning point in Egyptian history was the moment of January 25, 2011, after 18 days of serious demonstrations that toppled one of the most robust and stable dictatorships in the Middle East and North Africa region. After February 11, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took power in a transitional period of significant civil unrest (Whitlock). On June 24, 2012, the Egyptian Election Commission announced that Mohamed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, had won the last round of elections. Morsi became the first democratically elected president in Egypt. However, later on, on July 3, 2013, he was overthrown by the military in a military coup led by General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who became the next president (Egypt's Mohammed Morsi: A turbulent presidency cut short). During the period between Morsi's removal and the upcoming elections, Adly Mansour, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, served as the interim president of Egypt from July 4, 2013, to June 8, 2014 (Fleishman and Hassieb).

“ Morsi became the first democratically elected president in Egypt. However, later on, on July 3, 2013, he was overthrown by the military in a military coup led by General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi

”

In June 2014, the government extended voting to three days during the presidential election due to low turnout. At the last minute, they declared Election Day a public holiday. Unsurprisingly, the Electoral Commission announced Abdel Fattah El-Sisi the winner (Kingsley). El-Sisi was officially elected twice, in 2014 and 2018. In 2014, elections were held amid widespread repression and massacre, and in 2018 elections were neither free nor fair ("Egypt: Planned Presidential Vote Neither Free Nor Fair"). After the second term elections, the House of Representatives called for a national referendum to amend the constitution to extend Sis's term from four to six years and give him greater powers over the judiciary ("Egypt: Constitutional Amendments to Extend the President's Term and Powers over the Judiciary Must Be Rejected").

These amendments extended El-Sisi's rule for another 15 years, expanded the jurisdiction of military courts to try civilians and gave El-Sisi the power to appoint the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) and its new members, the heads of all other judicial authorities, and the attorney general (Egypt: constitutional amendments to extend the president's term and powers over the judiciary must be rejected).

US INFLUENCE

The United States has a powerful influence on Egyptian political and internal affairs. The relationship with the US administration fluctuated sharply from Obama to Trump. In the aftermath of the military coup in 2013, the Obama administration was torn between describing what happened as a coup — and then having to cut off military and economic aid — and condemning the overthrow of the president-elect (Roberts). According to US law, since Egypt receives USD 1.5 billion in military and financial aid annually, the government must cut off any assistance to any country whose elected leader is overthrown in a coup

(Roberts). At the end of the Obama administration, relations between the United States and Egypt experienced turmoil after the United States reduced its military aid to Cairo due to the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt (Fick). The election of Trump in 2016 marked a breakthrough in the relations between the El-Sisi regime and the US administration. In the early days of former President Trump, Egyptian authorities released Egyptian–American citizen Aya Hegazy and her Egyptian husband from prison. They allowed them to travel to the United States. Hegazy and her husband are the founders of a humanitarian organisation for homeless children in Cairo called Belady. The security forces arrested them on false allegations of sexual abuse and human trafficking (Egypt: Aya Hijazi's Trial a Travesty). Despite persistent demands from the Obama administration to release Aya, the Egyptian authorities refused to do so, condemning these calls and considering them an interference in internal affairs with a disregard for the principle of the rule of law (Aswat Masriya).

Trump later bragged about his role in releasing Hegazy, saying that he asked the government to allow her to leave, and Egypt responded, while the Obama administration worked on this for three years, but they failed (Rabie).

"I met with President Al-Sisi, and it worked out quickly, and he was great about it, and not only did the court system and President Al-Sisi let her out, but they let her husband, her innocent eight people, and they all are back here right now."

Recently, despite promises by Joe Biden during his presidential campaign to end Donald Trump's "love affair" with tyrants like El-Sisi, the current administration approved a new military aid package for Egypt worth more than USD 1.1 billion (Beinin and Mcmanus). Instead of holding USD 300 million, it froze only USD 130 million, to be released on the condition that the human rights situation in Egypt improves (Whitson, Hursh and Mahmoud).

EGYPT AND THE IMF

Egypt started 2016 with a so-called economic reform programme. The inflation of the currency came parallel with the IMF-led programme in 2016 after they granted Egypt a loan of USD 12 billion (Mekay). According to the IMF programme, Egypt devalued its currency, implemented strict austerity measures, and lowered the commodity subsidy system (Rédaction Africanews with AFP).

Egypt completed the reform program after following the IMF's restrictions. Contrary to expectations of a leading jump in exports, the only export growth came from the gas industry. The government cut most public spending and cut the health and education budget to less than 1.6 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively, in violation of the constitution. But all this did not lead to the growth of non-oil exports (Stevenson).

In March 2019, Egypt borrowed from USD 12 billion from the IMF, USD 9.8 billion from the World Bank, and USD 3.2 billion the European Investment Bank (2019: *في ج راخ لاني دلا*) (هين ج ل عفت راو عاب ع أ ل ت داز فيك).

According to Tom Stevenson, Egypt spends 70 percent of citizens' taxes on debt servicing instead of public services or development.

However, in May 2020, the IMF approved USD 2.772 billion in emergency financial assistance to weather the shock of the pandemic (IMF Executive Board Approves US\$2.772 Billion in Emergency Support to Egypt to Address the COVID-19 pandemic). Then, in June 2020, the IMF approved about USD 5.4 billion as a standby arrangement for Egypt (Key Questions on Egypt).

Despite this, Egypt exceeded the maximum limit available to borrow from the IMF (External debt increases during first year of COVID-19 pandemic, each Egyptian indebted by \$900). However, the IMF recently decided to grant Egypt an additional loan due to the war in Ukraine, to save Egypt from a severe economic crisis (Rédaction Africanews with AFP). As a result, Egypt became the second-largest borrower from the IMF after Argentina.

STATUS OF THE PRESS

In 2021, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Egypt as one of the world's largest jailers of journalists. Out of 180 countries in 2021, Egypt ranked 166, after Libya and Equatorial Guinea (2021 World Press Freedom Index). According to RSF, half of the media in the country is owned by the government or affiliated with the intelligence services. The rest are owned by pro-government businessmen (Sisification of the Media – a Hostile Takeover). The few independent press websites that are still open have been blocked. Their owners and editors were arrested and then released shortly after, as happened to Mada Masr (Editor of one of Egypt's last independent newspapers briefly arrested) and Al-Manassa (ElHaies). More than 500 websites have been blocked in Egypt, and more than 100 journalists have been arrested since 2014. The adoption of new regulations like the anti-terrorism law and cyber crime law and the creation of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation suppressed the freedom of expression and shut down the way to a free press. These new laws and regulations have affected the work of journalists who are at risk of charges such as belonging to a terrorist group or spreading false news. To the international community, Egypt denies imprisoning journalists for their work, which is true to some extent because Egyptian security is trying and imprisoning journalists on charges such as belonging to terrorist groups, without directly linking it to their journalistic work.

INTERNET PATTERN AND PENETRATION

As a government initiative, in 2004, Egypt raised the internet penetration rate from less than 1 percent in 2000 to 5 percent in 2004 (Estimated Internet users per 100 inhabitants). In 2004, the government adopted a policy to increase public access to computers and free internet connection plans. In 2008, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), the National Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (NTRA), the National Post Authority (ENPO), and the Computer and Software Department of the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce signed an agreement to place personal computers in each home, on instalments at low prices with discounts on ADSL subscription at a speed of 512 kbit/s for three years (Egypt).

According to the latest reports, the internet penetration rate in Egypt reached 57.66 percent, and the number of internet users in Egypt reached 71.9 percent of the total population, an increase of 1.9 percent over last January 2021 (Digital 2022: Egypt). Similarly, there are 51.45 million social media users in Egypt, which is about 48.9 percent of the total population, with an increase of 2.5 million (5 percent) in 2021. The number of mobile phone users in Egypt has exceeded 95.75 million users, increasing by 2.7 million (2.9 percent) in 2020. The total percentage of mobile connections is approximately 92.7 percent of the population. 44.7 million of this population are Facebook users. For YouTube, there are 46.30 million users, and 36 percent of YouTube's advertising audience is female, compared to 64 percent who are male. The number of Instagram users reached 16 million users, 15.2 percent of the total population, while TikTok reached 20.28 million users in 2022. The number of Twitter users in Egypt is 5.15 million, which is equivalent to 4.9 percent of the total population (Digital 2022: Egypt).

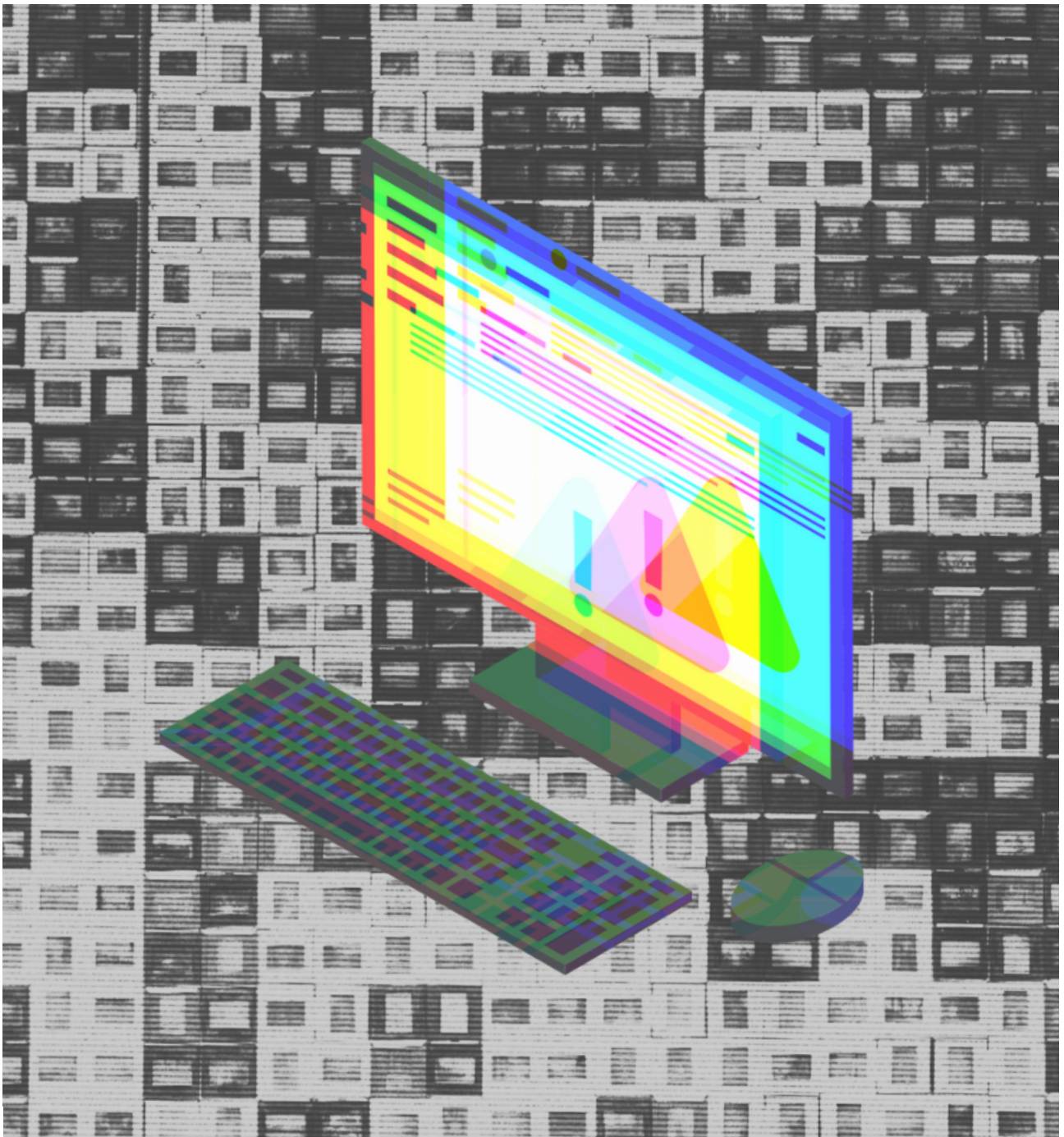
The internet speed was 17.28 Mbps on mobile and 35.67 Mbps on DSL. According to the GSMA, 93.4 percent of the total population were using mobile connections in January 2022. Almost all internet users (94 percent) use smartphones, and 90.6 percent browse the internet from their phones; 45.1 percent use desktop devices, which is 20.6 percent less than 2021 (Digital 2022: Egypt). Google is the most popular search engine, with 97.76 percent of users, while only 0.06 percent use the safe search engine DuckDuckGo, though this is an increase of 20 percent from the previous year, and 26.5 percent of internet users use a VPN at least some time during the day.

In 2012, Egypt began a plan to replace traditional copper-based internet cables with a high-speed fibre-optic network. This development included upgrading old wires and extending cables to rural areas (How fibre optic cables are forming the bedrock of our digital infrastructure overhaul). Recently, Telecom Egypt connected fibre-optic networks to about 1,413 villages in 20 governorates (Telecom Egypt connects fibre-optic cables to 1,413 villages as part of 'Decent Life' initiative).

The government owns 80 percent of Telecom Egypt, which is the only fixed-line operator in Egypt, provides 70 percent of the internet service in Egypt, provides connectivity to all mobile network operators in Egypt, and is the only international phone service. In 2017, Telecom Egypt launched the WE mobile operator service. Egypt has Three other main internet providers. Orange Egypt, the oldest mobile operator network, provides 4G, 3G, ADSL and broadband services. Etisalat Misr operates under the supervision of the Emirates

Telecommunications Group Company and offers mobile phone, 3rd and 4th generation services, and broadband services. Vodafone Egypt, of which Telecom Egypt holds 44.95 percent, which provides 4G, 3G, ADSL, and broadband services.

The NTRA is responsible for regulating telecommunications in Egypt by Regulatory Law No. 10/2003 (Egypt Telecommunication Regulation Law). In 2013, the NTRA banned Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services, including WhatsApp, Skype, Viber, Facetime and Facebook Messenger, claiming it was for economic reasons.



DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM PRACTICES

It only took the Egyptian government 20 minutes to flip the kill switch on January 27, 2011, and let the entire country sink into a complete blackout.

In March 2011, two Egyptian activists published a document found on the premises of the State Security Building stating that a British company offered to sell software to the Egyptian security services that could infect computers and penetrate email and web communications tools (McVeigh). Months after this revelation, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces — which took power after Mubarak stepped down — continued to monitor social media, cell phones and the internet. Moreover, in late 2011 and 2012, several activists were intimidated and referred to the military court for "insulting military force" or "disturbing social peace" on social media (Freedom on the Net 2012-Egypt). The authorities' realisation of technological ambition as a tool of expression and documentation has prompted a progressive tightening of the online space. They started disrupting communication and internet services around the places of protests, and activists were tried for insulting the president (Freedom on the Net 2013 - Egypt).

After the military coup in 2013, censorship, surveillance, and control of online spaces were at the forefront of the new administration's agenda. Months after the military coup, the number of journalists arrested for their work reached 65, and some journalists covering the anti-coup protests were shot (Amin). In 2015, President El-Sisi issued a decree approving the anti-terror law. This law gives the public prosecutor the right to block any websites that commit criminal offences, such as inciting violence or spreading terrorist messages, censoring and recording all forms of communications, from private meetings to internet activity. According to this law, the Public Prosecution Office also has the right to block websites that publish misleading materials to deceive justice. The vague and broad definition of "terrorist messages" is intended to deter any dissident or opposition group from posting any criticism on social media (Egypt: Memorandum: Egypt's draft law on counter-terrorism).

Soon after this law, on December 30, the government blocked the Al-Araby Al-Jadeed news website. (The site was simultaneously blocked in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.) The site-blocking curve didn't stop here. In June 2016, the Muslim Brotherhood's Financial and Administrative Assets Confiscation Committee decided to block 33 Brotherhood websites to prevent their content from reaching Egyptian users as they claimed (Elazhary, El Taher and Mohsen). This ban includes several media channels on Facebook, YouTube and channel sites (Blocking 33 websites).

That year, several journalists were sentenced to prison terms for doing their job for allegedly "spreading false news." Broadcasters and TV writers have been prosecuted and summoned for investigations related to their programs and articles ("Egypt sentences journalists to prison for 'publishing false news'"). To restrict and reduce Facebook's influence, the government pressured Etisalat to block Egypt's access to Free Basics, a zero-rate Facebook internet service provider, which allowed users on Etisalat's mobile network to access some internet sites and platforms for free (Micek, Olukotun and Chennoufi). This step came after Facebook refused to grant the Egyptian government the ability to spy on users (Abutaleb and Menn).

Furthermore, the charges of misusing the internet and social media do not exclude anyone. A young man who posted a photo of El-Sisi as Mickey Mouse was sentenced to three years in prison, and a group of Christian boys who posted videos mocking ISIS were sentenced to five years in jail (Sanchez). The court convicted two dancers for their YouTube video ("Egyptian belly dancers jailed for 'inciting debauchery'"). A prominent poet, columnist and El-Sisi supporter was sentenced to three years in prison for "contempt of religion" after a Facebook post critical of Eid al-Adha traditions (Gamal El-Din). Finally, in 2018, Parliament approved the Cybercrime Law as the first piece of legislation regulating social media posting and internet censorship. It includes harsh penalties for crimes, including piracy and hacking (Al-Abd).

“ Ayman Hadhoud, an economic researcher working at the American University in Cairo, was forcibly disappeared by the National Security Agency and then appeared as a corpse in the morgue two months later ”

One of the authoritarian practices analysed in this paper is the Attorney General's decision in 2019 to create a Communication, Guidance, and Social Media Division (CGSMD). This department operates through the Media Communication Unit, the Electronic and Social Media Unit, and the Monitoring and Analysis Unit (MAU). Soon after this department started running, MAU filed several cases against users of social networks (Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE)). Other than contradicting people's right to privacy, the newly established MAU violates many laws and legislations in Egypt and lacks any accountability or transparency mechanism regarding how it operates.

These decisions and laws enabled the security services to pursue dozens of doctors and medical staff at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, after they criticised the government's measures and its delay in announcing any plans to confront the disease. Instead of providing a decent environment for the medical staff to work and adequate equipment to reduce loss of life among medical staff, they arrested anyone who posted or complained about the situation on social media (El-Fekki and Malsin). In some places, photography has been banned inside public hospitals.

One of the authoritarian practices the research monitored was when the Supreme Administrative Court ordered the NTRA to block all Shiite websites after refusing the NTRA's appeal (دي دجل ا بي ر ع ل ا). Blocking access to certain websites is not new to the Egyptian government; in May 2017, Egypt blocked 21 news websites, accusing them of spreading lies that support terrorism and extremism (ى ل ا ج ل ا). On the same day, the Facebook news site Mada Masr announced that its website is now blocked in Egypt by injecting a reset package into the connection (Mada).

Economically, anyone who can provide a balanced online analysis, a simple explanation of the Egyptian economic situation, and decipher the central bank's deliberate ambiguity in monetary affairs is liable to arrest. Shocking details were revealed recently after the murder of the Egyptian economist Ayman Hadhoud. Hadhoud, an economic researcher working at the American University in Cairo, was forcibly disappeared by the National Security Agency and then appeared as a corpse in the morgue two months later ("The Full Story of Ayman Hadhoud"). Hadhoud was the economic advisor to MP Mohamed El-Sadat when he was a

member of parliament. Hadhoud was responsible for papers and reports on a corruption case in the House of Representatives in 2017 that led to El-Sadat's removal from the House of Representatives. After the second devaluation of the Egyptian pound in 2022, the security forces decided to arrest Hadhoud out of fear that he would stir public opinion with his posts against the state's economic policies (The New Arab). Another example is when, in 2017, security forces re-arrested the activist Mohamed Adel while he was serving his probation because he published tweets criticising the Egyptian loan from the IMF ("Egypt: Arbitrary and Excessive Use of Probation Measures against Peaceful Activists and Individuals Convicted after Unfair Trials").

Another form of practising digital authoritarianism is electronic flies and bots as disinformation tools. Twitter recently deleted 5,350 accounts linked to the Egyptian government and 2,541 accounts related to a pro-government newspaper. The security services used these fake accounts to spread false information against Qatar and Iran and praise the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the region (Borger).

MAIN CONTOURS OF DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM

1. Motives

There are two types of events that lead authorities to crack down on digital spaces. First, when the government wishes to pass the dates of important events, the anniversaries and significant events peacefully. For example, at the beginning of each year, weeks before January 25, security forces launched a campaign to stop people and search their mobile phones in the streets, especially places around Tahrir Square and Downtown (Cairo's streets silent on 9th anniversary of revolution). People who post sympathetic messages about the anniversary of January 25 on social media are subject to arrest and referral to police stations. In 2018, and ahead of the presidential elections in March, the security forces began a campaign of mass arrests of opponents and leaders of political parties to prevent them from directing any criticism to the current president or to the election process (Egypt: Arrests Escalate Ahead of Unfair Elections).

The second type of event is when there are calls for protest, whether in the streets or online, when discussions capture the attention of an online audience or in response to token actions online. For example, in response to a hate speech attack against women influencers on TikTok, the authorities have arrested several of them. TikTok girls were sentenced to 10 years in prison for violating family values and human trafficking (Osman). Another incident triggered a severe attack when security forces arrested and detained human rights lawyer Mohamed Ramadan for posting a picture of himself on social media wearing a yellow jacket after the Egyptian authorities imposed restrictions on the sale of jackets similar to those worn by protesters in France (Egypt: Release human rights lawyer detained for wearing yellow vest).

In addition to the natural rivals to authority like activists and dissidents in Egypt, the heavy hand of repression has always targeted minorities and marginalised groups in society such as women, the vulnerable, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ people. The government's narrative to justify its authoritarian actions changes according to the situation, although it is generally justified by national security. This is what security sources cited when they ordered the

blocking of several news websites due to their “deliberate dissemination of lies and false news that support terrorism and extremism” (Blocking 21 websites in Egypt). Sometimes, security agencies claim that activities such as arresting people and putting them in prison protect public discipline and Egyptian family values (Egypt Today staff).

The judicial system colludes with the security services in illegally placing people in prisons for allegedly belonging to a terrorist group, inciting immorality, infidelity, etc. As we can see in the Attorney General's statement (Mahmoud):

...the incident in question has confirmed that a fourth border, besides the land, air, and sea borders, has been created for our country. We now face a new cyber border that consists of websites and, like the other borders, requires full vigilance and deterrence to guard.

...guarding this new border and firmly confronting such crimes and their perpetrators, who aim to lead the youth of this nation [ummah] astray... These youth are exposed to "dangers that have slipped through online outlets and a cyber border lacking any kind of monitoring.

It is noteworthy that the government is rarely keen to justify its authoritarian action unless it attracts international attention or is exposed to global criticism. The Egyptian administration is highly dependent on the support of Western countries, and their administrations can influence its policy. For example, the Trump presidency has been a honeymoon between Trump and El-Sisi, as many experts describe it. Trump himself expressed this when he called El-Sisi "my favorite dictator" (Mindock), in contrast to the Biden administration's cold relationship due to the human rights situation in Egypt. Bilateral interests with Western countries enable Egypt to avoid criticism of internal abuse.

2. Methods

Security uses two primary methods to monitor and surveil people's activities on social media. First, the traditional way to search people's mobile phones on the streets is to check their social media accounts and messaging apps. Security officers also search for any dating apps like Grindr. They also monitor social media and trends to find out and follow what grabs people's attention. One of the techniques of security officers is to join LGBTQ+ forums and dating apps as a member to start a conversation with users to catch them. The second method of social media monitoring is to deploy advanced monitoring technology to spy on people's activities. That could be by hacking people's accounts, injecting their devices with spyware, and creating phishing campaigns. Egypt has previously used technologies such as Pegasus, Predator (Abdul Razz, Marczak and Scott-Railton), FinFisher, and Sandvine to block hundreds of websites through deep packet inception (DPI).

Deploying this kind of surveillance operation does not come with a legal frame; it could fall under "national security" or "counter-terrorism." Despite that, occasionally the government issues draconian laws to justify their actions, like the Anti-Terrorist and Cyber Crime laws (The State of Internet Censorship in Egypt). For example, websites are vaguely blocked, without any mechanism to determine which entities are responsible for this decision or to legally object to the decision (Blocking Websites in Egypt "Techniques and Laws"). There was no legal context regulating the blocking of websites until 2015 when the government passed anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws. The authorities tried to find legal cover for their

actions through these two laws. Most blocking activities still occur without official agency announcements or prior court orders.

The absence of laws on access to information and transparency, and real oversight bodies to hold the authorities accountable hinders any attempts to know the total expenditures of importing surveillance technology on citizens. The only sources of information are the financial reports of other countries, which show the deals between them and the Egyptian government. For example, a website belonging to the US Department of Commerce, the European Commission and the Swiss administration said that the entire security systems and technology imported to Egypt in several locations amounted to USD 500 million in 2018 (Egypt - Safety and Security). According to the report, Egypt's primary buyer of surveillance technology is the Ministry of Interior, Defence and Intelligence. Typically the top suppliers are from France, Italy and the United Kingdom, with a total market share of 45 percent, Russia and Germany with a market share of 35 percent, and the United States with a market share of 20 percent.

RESPONSES

The brutal reaction by the security forces suppressed any possibility of defying government orders on the ground. Despite this, there are still some trials to push the boundaries and censorship. One such example is the increasing use of encrypted websites and applications to escape security radar, and awareness of digital security practices to protect personal accounts and devices (DIGITAL 2022: EGYPT). Despite the blocking, news sites started providing alternative links to mirrored sites and posting their articles on their social media accounts to get around the ban (Blocking Websites in Egypt "Techniques and Laws").

“ The European Union Commission has proposed a bill to regulate the export of dual-use technology to countries with a history of repression and human rights abuse. Nine countries, led by Sweden, pushed against this bill based on economic interest.

Local media and website news reported government surveillance of social media and surveillance technology as a national mission of the security forces that spare no power to protect the nation's security and keep Egypt free of terrorism. Criticism and highlighting of the dangers of violating people's rights are only published by a few independent local news platforms and NGOs such as Masar, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. Any publication about disseminating surveillance technologies to citizens without regulations, privacy policy or remediation mechanisms published on international platforms is usually prohibited in Egypt, just as the government has blocked Disclose. This French platform has published a series of investigations into French surveillance technology exports to Egypt.

Following the publication of the Disclose report on Egypt's uses of French surveillance technology to track any activities on social media and suppress people's freedom, the European Union Commission requested an explanation from France in a letter from the President of the European Union Commission (NIELSEN). It is noteworthy that the European

Parliament has consistently argued that countries such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom comply with the European Union's call to ban the export of any form of surveillance technology and dual-use items, including the supply of electronic surveillance equipment, to Egypt (MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION).

The European Union Commission has proposed a bill to regulate the export of dual-use technology to countries with a history of repression and human rights abuse (Stupp). Nine countries, led by Sweden, pushed against this bill based on economic interest.

On the other hand, pressures on Italy, especially after the murder of its citizen Giulio Regeni in Egypt ("Regeni murder: Trial of Egyptians for Italian student's murder suspended"), prompted Italy to strip Hacking Team of its license to export its technology outside the European Union and cancel its export of surveillance technology to Egypt (Politi and Kuchler). Another milestone was accomplished after German authorities opened an investigation into accusations of Fin Spy exporting surveillance technology to Egypt and Turkey and seized their accounts (Associated Press); the company declared bankruptcy and dissolved ("Munich-based tech company FinFisher is dissolved after investigations").

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The Airtable analysis undertaken in this project attempts to reflect the situation around monitoring technology through online content over the past few years. We can see a repeated goal of restricting the freedom of online spaces and banning any narrative parallel to the official one. This can be seen in the Attorney General's orders to establish a unit to monitor and monitor social media platforms and activities, contrary to constitutional articles that protect people's privacy and their right to freedom of expression.

By monitoring social media, the authorities target activists or opponents and any activities that could attract public attention or be considered outside the traditional framework of Egypt, such as what happened with TikTok influencers. Almost everything could fit into "national security" and "family values," from prosecuting a victim of sexual violence who used social media as a way to tell her story rather than protecting her, to blocking Shia websites, and calling out YouTubers who talk about Bitcoin in their channels.

It is difficult to estimate the Egyptian government's expenditure on importing and deploying surveillance technology. Even as the government announced the installation of CCTV cameras and facial recognition technology, this statement and news came without explanation of any measure of privacy or regulation of their use. One of the reports in the analysis stated that, after an official source announced the use of facial recognition cameras in streets and metro stations, they backed down and refused to comment. This measure can be explained in light of the concern that this statement could alarm the global human rights community about the Egyptian use of this technology.

There is no point in the international community criticising the Egyptian administration for violating people's rights without taking severe measures to stop these practices. Countries such as Germany and the United States have denounced Egypt's record on human rights several times. However, on the other hand, they continued to provide the same system with advanced surveillance technology under the rubric of "border protection." France has strong ties to the security services and provides them with smart technology used to track dissent, spy and arrest LGBTQ+ people. Although the security forces killed one of its citizens in Egypt, Italy did not withdraw its arms contract with Egypt until after pressure from the national and international community. There is no blame on countries like China, Russia, or Israel for exporting this technology to Egypt. The real blame should be placed on states that promote themselves as pioneers of freedom and protectors of human rights. At the same time, they cannot stop exporting the dual use of surveillance technology to authoritarian states for their economic benefit.

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