EGYPT

USCIRF–RECOMMENDED FOR SPECIAL WATCH LIST (SWL)

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in Egypt remained poor. The government continued to systematically restrict freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for religious minority communities and individuals who express ideas that differ from the state's interpretation of Islam.

Egyptian authorities subjected to prolonged pretrial detention those suspected of violating Law 98(f), which punishes "ridiculing or insulting a heavenly religion or a sect." After the January release of Christian convert Nour Fayez Ibrahim Gerges, imprisoned in 2021 on blasphemy and terrorism charges, state security summoned him for interrogations in March. In July, judicial authorities charged Said Abdelrazek, a Christian convert, with "contempt for Islam" and joining a banned terrorist organization. In October, authorities arrested Dr. Augustin Samaan, a researcher specializing in Christian apologetics, for allegedly promoting "contempt of Islam" online. The government also continued targeting nonbelievers. In September, authorities arrested Maged Zakaria Abdel Rahman, known as the "Mufti of Humanity." Authorities later arrested individuals who appeared on his YouTube program or posted video clips of themselves on the "Arab Atheists Network and Forum" Facebook page. Throughout the year, state security arbitrarily arrested 14 individuals, including atheists who deviated from the state's religious views for religious expression online. Although the government reportedly lifted its travel ban on Qur'anist Muslim Reda Abdel Rahman in 2024, authorities continued to bar him from obtaining a passport and traveling outside Egypt.

Although President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's administration previously solicited draft personal status laws from Christian denominations, the government took no further action in 2025. In October, a Cabinet-appointed committee approved 160 church building permits pursuant to the Church Construction Law, bringing the total number of permits to 3,613 since the law's 2016 adoption. However, the government has yet to act on roughly 2,000 legalization requests for churches and Christian facilities. In contrast, the Ministry of Endowments announced plans in February to reopen 115 mosques, part of a 2024 plan announced to invest 18.6 billion pounds ($366,000) into the renovation, maintenance, and development of more than 12,000 mosques.

In May, a judicial ruling on a property dispute regarding St. Catherine's Monastery raised concerns that the government was undermining the monastery's autonomy. While authorities have limited researchers' access to its manuscript collection and undermined the religious monastic community that has preserved the site for centuries, it continues to allow worship at the monastery and has stated its commitment to protecting religious and cultural identity.

In rural Upper Egypt, local authorities have failed to protect communities from violent attacks, and hostile attitudes towards Christians are more pronounced than in urban areas. While security services sometimes moved expeditiously to quell violent incidents against churches in Upper Egypt, authorities often failed to sufficiently investigate such incidents and hold perpetrators to account. In February, authorities neglected to pursue a full investigation into a fire that broke out in the Church of Archangel Michael in Qena Governorate. In May, after security forces extinguished a fire at St. George Church in Qift, local authorities attributed the event to a candle placed in an incense holder, even though this defies Coptic ritual practice. Anti-Coptic harassment—including the disappearances of young Coptic women—persisted, with reports that authorities were reluctant or unwilling to investigate potential cases of religiously motivated abduction or coercion.

Amid these concerns, Egypt's government maintained some initiatives to encourage religious inclusivity. In January, President el-Sisi delivered a message of interfaith tolerance and respect at the Coptic Orthodox Nativity Cathedral. In March, Al-Azhar Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayyeb emphasized the need for interreligious dialogue. In October, President el-Sisi expressed Egypt's commitment to religious freedom while meeting with the World Council of Churches after the group concluded its Sixth Assembly, hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church. Multiple state agencies continued efforts to revive the Holy Family Trail, which includes landmarks sacred to the Coptic community.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Include Egypt on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Raise with the Egyptian government during bilateral engagements the need under international law to repeal Article 98(f) of the Criminal Code and phase out its enforcement in the interim;
- Integrate religious freedom improvements into broader U.S.-Egypt security cooperation efforts and foreign assistance, such as releasing prisoners of conscience and lifting travel bans on religious dissidents; and
- Direct U.S. Embassy officials to engage in roundtables in Upper Egypt, including with local religious leaders, civil society organizations, and government officials, to discuss approvals of houses of worship, religious heritage preservation, and interreligious tolerance.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Hold a hearing on religious freedom in Egypt prior to the next designation of foreign military funding (FMF) with topics addressing attacks on and forced disappearances of Copts; and
- Conduct bipartisan congressional delegations to Egypt in 2026 to raise key FoRB issues, including implementation of the 2016 Church Building Law, anti-Christian targeting in Upper Egypt, and FoRB prisoners.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Country Update:** State Restrictions on Religious Freedom in Egypt
- **Spotlight Podcast:** Egypt's Continued Repression of Religious Minorities
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief Victims List and Appendix 2**

Background

Egypt's population is approximately 111.2 million, an estimated 90 percent of whom are Sunni Muslims. Shi'a, Qur'anist, and other non-Sunni Muslims comprise less than one percent. Egypt's Christians account for about 10 percent of the population, constituting the largest Christian minority in the Middle East and North Africa region. Over 90 percent of Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, while a minority belong to Evangelical, Catholic, and some smaller denominations. Baha'is number between 1,000 and 2,000; Jehovah's Witnesses account for up to 1,500; and the Jewish population has reportedly declined to fewer than 10 people. Article 2 of Egypt's constitution names Islam as the state religion, with the "principles of Shari'a" constituting the primary source of legislation. Although Article 64 ostensibly provides for freedom of belief, only followers of the three "heavenly religions" (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) have a legal basis to publicly practice religion and build places of worship. Since the 1960s, the government has banned Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'is.

Legal and Administrative Challenges

Egypt has several laws that coerce compliance with the government's interpretation of Islam. The government continued to detain and charge individuals under religiously grounded provisions of the Cybercrime Law (175/2018), which the government uses to censor the expression of religious beliefs and other ideas considered threatening to the state's interpretation of Islam. In June, authorities arrested at least seven social media creators for purportedly violating "values in Egyptian society" under Article 25 of the Cybercrime Law. In May, Egypt's Parliament passed a new Fatwa Regulation Law, further entrenching state control over religious affairs. The law gives exclusive authority to state-backed Islamic institutions, including Al-Azhar and Dar al-Iftaa, to issue religious edicts over public and private affairs. In June, lawmakers submitted draft amendments to the education law that would mandate state schools to increase the amount of religious education. Even though Muslim and Christian students take separate religious courses, the new law would systematically disadvantage Christian students, given a shortage of Christian religious education instructors and resources.

In March, authorities carried out arrests of more than 12 Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light members for hanging a banner advertising a religious TV channel on a pedestrian bridge. Throughout the year, prosecutors repeatedly extended their pretrial detention on charges related to blasphemy and membership in a banned group. Detainees have reportedly been subject to torture and cruel treatment in detention, including denial of food and access to medical care.

National identity cards present challenges to those who do not identify as Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, as those documents allow only for those affiliations. Baha'i religious identity is marked with a dash, denying equal protection of FoRB under the law. Baha'is' exclusion from the existing personal status law results in their inability to legally marry, obtain residency permits and birth certificates, pursue formal education, or gather for worship. Because of these legal obstacles to obtain official status, a Baha'i woman in Egypt continued to face imminent deportation and separation from her children in 2025. In September, authorities closed a Cairo facility where community members planned to teach Baha'i educational materials. Authorities also continued denying Baha'is burial land while prohibiting them from using Muslim cemeteries. In April, United Nations experts called on the Egyptian government to address systematic discrimination against Baha'is.

State Antisemitism

Despite the government's investment in restoration projects for historic synagogues, authorities continue to tolerate and promote antisemitic ideas. State-backed media continued to invoke antisemitic tropes and Holocaust distortion, fostering an environment in which Egypt's dwindling Jewish community feels increasingly threatened. A 2025 study found that of 180 opinion and commentary articles referencing Jews from the state-funded *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Gomhuria* newspapers published between January 2024 and March 2025, nearly 30 percent included explicitly antisemitic ideas. These included stereotypes of Jewish greed, depictions of Jews as disloyal and traitorous, and Holocaust denial. A February 2025 article in *Al-Gomhuria* claimed that Jews control global powers through financial influence and will be responsible for a third world war in their quest for wealth. In June, a television host for state-run Al-Hadath Al-Youm TV used the antisemitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion hoax to blame Jews for the purported destruction of Arab and Islamic societies.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture continued to deny community leaders' request to access and digitize the historical Jacques Mosseri Geniza documents, which have remained in the government's possession since 2016.

Key U.S. Policy

The United States and Egypt continued strong bilateral ties on a range of issues, including a defense partnership, economic cooperation, and regional security. Congressional leaders introduced legislation highlighting religious freedom conditions in Egypt. In July, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) introduced the Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act of 2025 co-sponsored by Senator John Fetterman (D-PA), among others. The bill seeks to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and impose sanctions on the group. The House also introduced a companion bill. President Donald J. Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke or met several times throughout the year with President el-Sisi and other high-ranking Egyptian officials in efforts to broker an end to the Israel-Hamas conflict.