

egypt

PERSECUTION 101






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Egyptian Christians face continued governmental and social pressure despite a presence that dates back thousands of years

Christianity was introduced to Egypt thousands of years ago, in the first century A.D. Though various social norms relegate Egyptian Coptic Christians to second-class status, the church is considered by many in the Muslim majority to be an acceptable part of the country's history. Today, much of the pressure faced by the Egyptian church comes from the government, which criminalizes minority religious expression through its blasphemy law, restricts the right of churches to build and keep their places of worship, and runs an educational system that marginalizes and disadvantages Christian students.



QUICK FACTS



Type of Government

Presidential
Republic



Head of State

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
*Since 2013 (elected
2014)*



Total Population

Approx. 109.54 million
(2023 estimate)



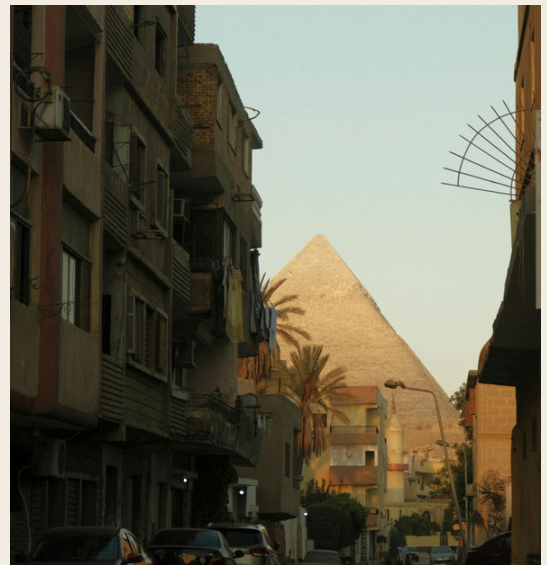
Religious Demography

90% Muslim - 98.58 mil
10% Christian 10.95 mil



Ethnic Demography

99.7% Egyptian
0.3% Other



TYPES OF PERSECUTION



Government Restrictions

Government policies hinder both corporate and private religious practice and further social discrimination against Christians through its education system.



Social Pressure

Many Christians in Egypt—especially those converting from Islam to Christianity—face pressure from friends, families, and neighbors



ICC IN EGYPT

To address the cyclical poverty faced by many marginalized Coptic Christians, ICC operates Hope House—a new program designed to provide private tutoring services to Christian students and their communities. Many poor students are forced to drop out of school early to help support their families, but through sponsorships ICC can provide holistic support to families facing the difficult decision to withdraw their children from school.

Hope House has served hundreds of children and their families in recent years. As in the rest of the world, children who are withdrawn from school early are severely limited in their ability to enter the professional workforce, perpetuating their poverty and reducing the chances of their own children finishing school. Through Hope House, ICC aims to break this vicious cycle and enable these indigent Egyptian Christians to thrive on their own.



Political Backgrounder for Religious Freedom Issues in Egypt

Social tensions and government hostility make Egypt a challenging place for Copts and other Christian groups, who collectively make up around 10-15% of the population in a mostly Muslim country. Though Christianity has existed in the country since the first century AD, the church has long faced opposition from the government at the national level and social ostracization locally.

Among other problematic legal stances, the Egyptian government supports an anti-blasphemy law that criminalize minority religious thought. Despite being party to the major international human rights conventions, which universally protect the right of persons to follow and share the faith of their choosing, Egypt continues to enforce this law punishing non-Muslims for their beliefs.

Though convictions for blasphemy are sporadic, the threat that they pose is a serious one, with prison sentences stretching up to five years under the law. Religious minorities, who endure the most of the law's enforcement, must tread carefully to avoid falling afoul of the law.

The Coptic church, though founded nearly 2,000 years ago, is not seen as an equal legal institution under Egyptian law. Over time, Egypt's laws have blocked it from building and restoring churches and today many Coptic churches face issues with registration. Reports show that local officials often block or delay church building or renovation projects in a widespread practice that hinders the Christian community in Egypt.

The law even creates issues within Christian families, perhaps most notably in a 2022 case where the authorities seized a young child from a Coptic Christian family who had adopted him years earlier. The boy, four years old when he was taken by the authorities, had been abandoned as a newborn and taken in by the Christian family. After taking him, the authorities placed him in a state-run orphanage, changed his name, and declared him a Muslim by default.



Egypt's educational system is designed in a way that actively promotes the majoritarian Sunni view of Islam promoting discrimination towards religious minorities. The government has made some improvements over the years, but more work still is to be done as discriminatory content remains.

Topics such as language and social studies are of particular concern, with curriculum having antisemitic and discriminatory language towards Christians, Jews, and non-Sunni Muslims. Homework furthers an exclusionary perspective of Islam, leaving religious minority students in a difficult position at school. According to reports, Islamic religious studies in Egyptian primary curriculum have references to the "treacherous nature" and "vile history of the Jews."

Government opposition often intersects with social pressure, with Muslim-influenced cultural norms—such as those around adoption—finding legal backing and often trampling on the rights of Christian communities. Assaults and other community-level violence against Christians are all too common in the country, and particularly so during Muslim and Christian holiday seasons when religious tensions tend to be at their highest. Christian women are particularly vulnerable to this violence, doubly victimized by a system that too often treats them as second-class citizens not deserving of full protection under the law.

Resources and Reports

[ICC's 2022 POY Report — Egypt Chapter](#)

[State Department 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom — Egypt Chapter](#)

[USCIRF 2023 Annual Report — Egypt Chapter](#)

