

# Wherever They Go

Transnational Repression and  
the Targeting of Egyptians Abroad



المنبر المصري  
لحقوق الإنسان  
Egyptian Human Rights Forum  
Forum Egyptien pour les Droits de l'Homme





The Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF) is an independent Egyptian human rights organisation founded in March 2018. EHRF aims to promote the implementation and dissemination of international human rights law in Egypt, advocate for a human rights-based approach to democracy and the rule of law, and mainstream human rights in public policy.

EHRF seeks to achieve this mission through dialogue, networking, policy research, advocacy, raising public awareness, capacity building, and the integration of young activists into the work of the human rights movement. The Forum prioritises dialogue with political, civil, and human rights actors both inside Egypt and within the diaspora. Through this dialogue, EHRF aims to build broad consensus around practical measures and alternatives grounded in shared human rights values, which can serve as a foundation for constitutional and legal reforms in Egypt.

In parallel, EHRF coordinates with independent regional and international human rights organisations in order to strengthen international protection mechanisms and expand support for human rights.

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## **Research Team**

Abdelrahman Ayash

Sara Hamza

Mohamed Ebeid

## **Review and Supervision**

Moataz El Fegiery

Samar Elhussieny



## Executive summary

Egyptian political dissidents and human rights defenders living abroad face a systematic, transnational campaign of repression led by the Egyptian authorities. Having tightened its grip on dissent within the country with mass arrests, unfair trials, and torture, the Egyptian government has extended its reach abroad to retaliate against activists residing outside Egypt.

The forms of this transnational repression include denying official documents and consular services to peaceful activists and dissidents in exile; stripping them of their citizenship; prosecuting them on fabricated charges in absentia; placing them on designated terrorist lists; and subjecting them to cyber harassment, including by digital surveillance, hacking of their electronics, and media and online smear campaigns and incitement. Nor are activists' families who remain in Egypt spared. In a flagrant demonstration of proxy punishment, their families may be detained or threatened to pressure their loved ones abroad. The Egyptian authorities have also repeatedly sought the extradition of activists from other countries by issuing international arrest warrants and drawing on bilateral security cooperation with some Arab and foreign governments.

A qualitative survey of 34 Egyptian expatriates, conducted by the Egyptian Human Rights Forum, shows the extent of these violations. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported being denied passports, identity documents, or basic consular services, leaving them in precarious legal situations in their host countries. Similarly, some 72 percent of respondents said that family members in Egypt had been subjected to police summonses or raids, or travel bans in retaliation for the respondents' activism. Almost half of respondents reported that they had received direct threats (via phone calls or messages) or had been prosecuted in absentia because of their activism. Around one-quarter of respondents said they had experienced online harassment, media smears, or attempts at forced deportation. These findings reveal widespread violations of the rights to nationality, freedom of movement, work, and privacy, and are indicative of a systematic pattern that transcends geographic boundaries.

This repression has targeted Egyptians around the world, with a marked focus on countries where they have an active political or media presence. In Europe and North America, despite the legal protections afforded to political activists and dissidents, they face obstacles such as the denial of passport renewals or intimidation by spies and collaborators with Egyptian security services operating within Egyptian expatriate communities. In some Middle Eastern countries allied with Cairo, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, activists have been arrested and extradited to Egypt, in blatant disregard of those countries' international human rights obligations. This report, along with previous reports by international human rights organizations, documents increasing security cooperation and information sharing between Egyptian authorities and their counterparts in these countries to pursue activists residing in their territories.

Several Egyptian agencies are responsible for these violations, most importantly the National Security Agency and the General Intelligence Directorate, in coordination with the Foreign Ministry, which exploits diplomatic missions to pressure Egyptians abroad. Cairo also benefits from some host governments' complicity in or tacit approval of these abuses. For example, the Bahraini and Lebanese authorities recently cooperated with their Egyptian counterparts to extradite detained activists, severely endangering their lives and freedoms. While democratic states refrain from extraditing individuals wanted for political reasons, they typically fail to publicly condemn these practices or hold violators on their territories accountable.

With such transnational repression, the Egyptian authorities aim to silence dissenting voices wherever they may be and to send a clear message of intimidation: public criticism of the regime, even outside Egypt, will come at a high price. These practices have created great hardship for activists in exile. Many are stranded without travel documents or citizenship and so are in danger of losing their legal residency. Others live in constant fear of surveillance of their electronic devices and communications as well as physical attacks. These practices have also generated anxiety in Egypt among the families of critics living abroad; in effect, they have become hostages, vulnerable to proxy reprisals.

Despite this rising repression, many activists abroad continue their media and advocacy work, and some have even redoubled their efforts to raise awareness of these violations, putting Egypt's deteriorating human rights record under a global spotlight.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations. It calls on the Egyptian government to end these practices, which violate the Egyptian constitution and international law, and urges host states to guarantee the safety of those residing in their borders while refusing to cooperate in violations against them. To the international community, it recommends stepping up the pressure on Cairo and holding perpetrators of the campaign of transnational repression accountable. Silence only encourages the offenders to persist, and it erodes human rights principles that should protect everyone regardless of where they are.

## Introduction: Dialogue at home, repression abroad

On April 26, 2022, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi tasked the National Youth Conference with organizing a national dialogue between the state and the opposition. Egyptians were optimistic, especially given the president's directives to reinvigorate the Presidential Pardon Committee and the adoption of the slogan "The Road to a New Republic." What followed, however, was less political liberalization than a recalibration of the instruments of repression and control. The authorities toned down their rhetoric and made tactical concessions that allowed some activists and political figures to return to the country, but domestic repression continued and even expanded beyond Egypt's borders to an unprecedented degree.



This contradiction became glaringly apparent in recent years and was documented in Egypt's Universal Periodic Review on January 28, 2025. International human rights organizations documented new waves of repression targeting political activists, journalists, and human rights defenders both inside and outside the country. Carried out by the state's security, judicial, and even diplomatic apparatus, these repressive practices showed that the national dialogue was a form of crisis management rather than a transformation of the rules of politics in Egypt.

While the rhetoric of "dialogue" was revived domestically, repression extended beyond Egypt's borders. Instruments of the state were transformed into an architecture designed for transnational targets. This structure brought together legal and consular channels with digital and informational conduits, and even familial and social networks, to form an invisible prison around government critics wherever they may be.

During the period of 2022–2025, Egyptian state practices were not limited to the exploitation of international and regional police cooperation or in absentia court judgments. A new phase began, as diplomatic missions abroad were weaponized and used as organs of intimidation, while smear campaigns and online trolling escalated, targeting families inside Egypt to silence voices abroad. This was not a series of isolated incidents, but rather a deliberate strategy to suppress dissent wherever it may be found.

Transnational repression, as defined in this report, means the totality of actions and measures that are taken by the Egyptian authorities outside their territory, or whose repressive effects extend beyond it, with the aim of silencing or punishing individuals in other countries or those associated with them in Egypt, for their political or human rights activities or opinions. Such actions include the abuse of international police cooperation, the denial of personal documents and nationality, consular pressure, prosecution, digital surveillance, smear and incitement campaigns, and the targeting of families and socioeconomic ties, all in violation of the obligations of Egypt and host countries under international human rights law, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention Against Torture, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and other relevant international agreements.<sup>1</sup>

Economically, Egypt has experienced a currency crisis and record inflation, exacerbating social pressures such as declining incomes, job insecurity, and soaring prices that erode purchasing power. This climate has driven more Egyptians to leave the country in search of work, education, or protection, as reflected in migration data. Egyptians topped the list of irregular migrants to Italy in 2022, with more than 20,000 migrants, up from 1,264 in 2020.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the transnational activism of human rights defenders has succeeded in raising the cost of repression for the government, prompting the authorities to invest more in regional and international mechanisms to mitigate these pressures. Human rights organizations have observed a growing role for the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC) in exchanging information and lists of wanted individuals to facilitate extradition or illegal deportation to Egypt, alongside systematic attacks and violations targeting activists, journalists, and human rights defenders in Western capitals.

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1 Human Rights Watch, “Q&A: Transnational Repression,” June 12, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/12/qa-transnational-repression>.

2 Reuters, “Italy’s Foreign Minister Eyes Migration, Energy on Trip to Cairo,” January 22, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/italys-foreign-minister-eyes-migration-energy-trip-cairo-2023-01-22>.

This report aims to provide an analytical and legal overview of patterns and types of transnational repression by the Egyptian state from 2022 to September 2025. It attempts to break down the structure of this repression by briefly outlining its procedural tools—from extradition requests and Interpol channels to consular sanctions—as well as the digital tools used to monitor or punish activists and media tools used for defamation. The report also seeks to document the targeting of activists and defenders’ families, which amounts to collective punishment.

Collective punishment is defined under international human rights law as any punitive measures or restrictions imposed on individuals or groups (such as families) not for acts they personally committed, but for acts attributed to others. This constitutes a grave violation of the principle of individual criminal responsibility and the presumption of innocence and is fundamentally inconsistent with the guarantees for a fair trial enshrined in the ICCPR.<sup>3</sup>

The report paints a picture of the international environment in which transnational repression operates, which is a stage for either complicity with Egyptian authorities’ violations or resistance to them using available legal means. It also offers actionable recommendations to the Egyptian government, host countries, UN bodies, and civil society organizations, aimed at strengthening the protection of rights and freedoms and limiting the effects of transnational repression.

## Methodology

This report relies on a combination of primary and secondary data covering the period from January 2022 to September 2025, with the aim of drawing a portrait of transnational repression by the Egyptian authorities and analyzing its patterns and effects.

To this end, an internal database of the cases studied was created and updated as new documentation became available. In addition, a survey was conducted with a limited number of Egyptian activists abroad, from which we extracted indicators of transnational violations that affect Egyptians abroad, among them consular, digital, familial, economic, and psychological violations. Anonymized quotes from survey participants are also included in this report.

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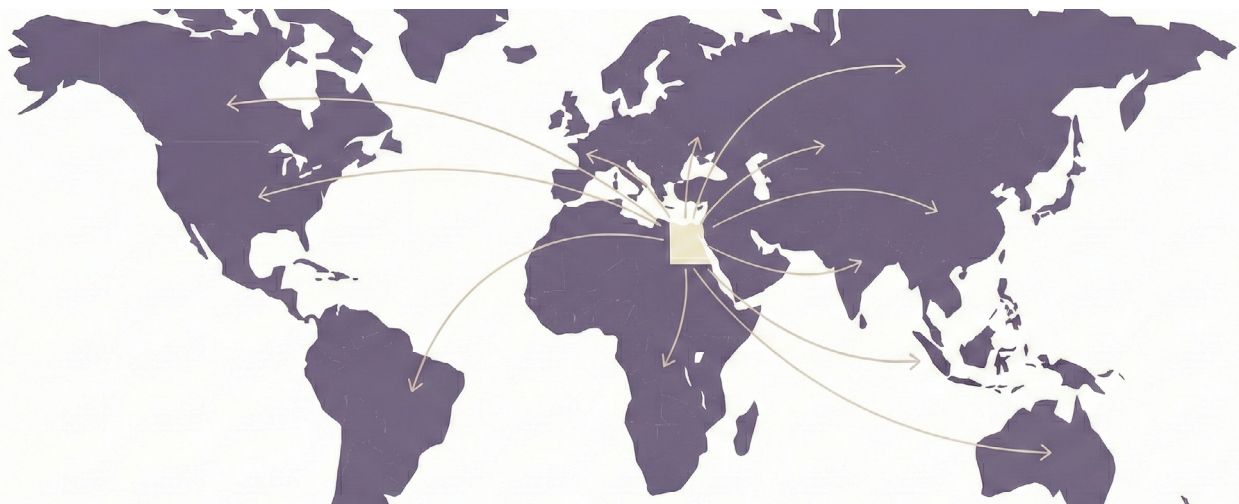
<sup>3</sup> United Nations General Assembly, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” December 16, 1966, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

In parallel, the team tracked publicly available and open-source publications about victims or their families relating to consular denial, harassment, threats, or smear campaigns. All information was rigorously verified using triangulation, meaning that each incident was verified by three different types of sources whenever possible: a direct primary source (such as victim or family testimony and case files), an independent secondary source (such as press releases, media reports, and social media posts), and a supporting media or documentary source. Only cases with consistent, cross-referenced evidence from multiple sources were included to ensure the highest degree of accuracy and credibility in the report's final findings.

The survey participants and the cases included in the database come from diverse backgrounds. Thirty-four people participated in the survey (24 men, 9 women, and 1 who preferred not to disclose their gender) living in nine countries, led by Turkey (the current home of some 62 percent of participants), followed by the Netherlands, Germany, and France. Respondents were also residing in the United Kingdom, Qatar, Nigeria, and Brazil, while some general responses referred simply to "Europe." The database documents 84 cases (69 men and 15 women), across at least 17 countries or geographic locations. Turkey and Egypt top the list, followed by the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, along with other countries including Germany, Qatar, and the United States.

Ten interviews were conducted with victims of transnational repression. testimonies were collected from victims, witnesses, or human rights defenders working on case involving transnational violations. Interviews were conducted remotely using secure communication channels where possible, and only after participants gave their consent and were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and how their information would be used. Names and identifying details were withheld in all interviews, and the Egyptian Human Rights Forum did not offer any incentives to participants in exchange for their testimony.

Finally, the findings of this report should be interpreted within the context of its methodology. The report describes the structure of transnational repression relying on documented cases and recurring patterns; it does not claim to provide a comprehensive inventory of violations committed by Egyptian authorities against their citizens abroad.



## **Transnational repression in international legal frameworks**

Transnational repression strikes at the heart of the international human rights legal system. It violates rights guaranteed by the ICCPR, such as freedom of expression (Article 19), freedom of movement and the right to enter one's own country (Article 12.4), and guarantees of physical safety and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, which are absolute and non-derogable under the Convention against Torture (Article 3) and the ICCPR (Article 7). These rules complement the principle of non-refoulement in the 1951 Refugee Convention (Article 33), which obligates states not to return a person to a place where they face a risk of persecution, torture, or other serious human rights violations. Accordingly, politically motivated arrests, deportations, and extraditions, or those that disregard the risk of torture and unfair trials in the country of origin, constitute a direct breach of these obligations.

Collective punishment or repression by proxy, which targets the families of activists and dissidents to pressure them, requires a precise legal definition that removes it from the context of armed conflict and places it in the framework of human rights violations. Such practices contravene the heart of Article 14 of the ICCPR, which establishes the principle of individual criminal responsibility as part of fair trial guarantees, stipulating that no person may be punished for an act attributed to another. These violations also constitute a flagrant breach of Article 17, which prohibits any arbitrary or unlawful interference with the private or family life of individuals. When these practices take the form of detaining relatives as hostages or intimidating them, they directly violate the right to liberty and personal security guaranteed under Article 9, making the targeting of families an integrated system of human rights violations, not merely a trivial administrative or security measure.

At the level of international policing, Interpol's constitution stipulates the principle of political neutrality (Article 3), and its data processing rules require the review of notices and requests of a political nature to ensure they are not abused. Less transparent regional channels, however, such as communications of the AIMC, can be used in practice to circumvent Interpol's oversight, resulting in rapid alerts and swift arrests in the region despite the shaky legal basis. States receiving such communications thus have a responsibility to conduct individual judicial reviews of each case and respect the principles of non-refoulement and fair trial guarantees before any action that would restrict the freedom of or diminish the legal status of wanted persons.

Turning to consulates, their function according to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963) is to provide services to citizens and facilitate their affairs. While states have some discretion when it comes to passports and personal documents, the arbitrary denial of essential documents, especially when it is punitive or selective in nature due to opinion, contravenes the obligations of good faith and non-discrimination.

In practice, it leads to the violation of other rights, such as recognition before the law, freedom of movement, family reunification, privacy, and the right to work. The impact is compounded when denying consular services is used to force an activist to return to a country where they fear persecution, effectively amounting to indirect deportation.

In host countries, these frameworks entail positive obligations, such as protecting human rights defenders and journalists from external intimidation, investigating incidents of transnational repression (whether digital or physical) within their territories, and facilitating access to remedies, asylum, and effective protection. National data protection and cybercrime laws also establish mechanisms for prosecuting cross-border hacking, phishing, and incitement, creating a protective layer that complements international safeguards.

As such, any system that includes trials in absentia, regional alerts not subject to independent judicial determination, and arbitrary denial of consular services represents a clear departure from the norms of international law and transforms legitimate security cooperation into a tool of transnational repression. States, platforms, and international instruments are therefore obligated to break this cycle through enhanced judicial oversight, controls on data sharing, and effective protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and activists in exile.

## International arena: Between collusion and resistance

Despite the rise of transnational repression in recent years, the response from legal, international, and security agencies remains largely inadequate. Victims' complaints are often ignored, with police or authorities in host or asylum countries refusing to take diligent action on complaints of threats or persecution by their own governments, as is clearly the case in Egypt. This inaction exacerbates victims' sense of vulnerability and allows repressive regimes to continue intimidating their opponents abroad with little consequence. This section focuses on responses in host countries, institutional failings, and regional examples where the risk of detention or deportation is higher.



On a broader international level, mechanisms for accountability for transnational repression remain limited. Despite occasional political or diplomatic condemnations, effective legal action has not been taken in most high-profile cases. The 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside his country's consulate in Istanbul is a stark example. Despite the global outcry at the time, the architects of the crime were never held accountable. Similarly, Russian intelligence services have continued to target dissidents abroad for assassinations and poisonings—from the 2006 murder of Alexander Litvinenko with a radioactive substance in London to the 2018 attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal with a nerve agent—absent any real deterrent. The international community proffered only verbal condemnations.

In the case of Egypt, the lack of deterrence is evident in the weak international response to Cairo’s orchestrated campaign against activists and dissidents abroad. Despite the Egyptian authorities violating their international obligations laid out in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the ICCPR, by denying their citizens abroad documents, identification papers, and consular services, or by initiating politically motivated, trumped-up legal proceedings against them, the international community has taken no firm action. Some countries have issued statements of concern, while other governments have continued security cooperation or shown tacit toleration for Cairo. Diplomatic immunity has also been exploited to commit violations in the territory of host countries (for example, attacks on peaceful protesters outside embassies), with little or no consequence.



Recent incidents demonstrate that many law enforcement authorities in host countries treat reports from targeted Egyptians as isolated cases of harassment or personal disputes rather than a systematic pattern of transnational repression. In the United Kingdom, a joint parliamentary committee concluded that the state’s response remains piecemeal and opaque, and that victims are losing faith in the system due to the lack of clear channels for reporting and protection, despite official acknowledgment of the rise in transnational threats and the launch of a dedicated government review in 2025.<sup>4</sup> In Germany, the case of Egyptian journalist Basma Mostafa, whose targeting in Berlin was documented by UN experts, prompted the German government’s commissioner for human rights to issue a public statement calling on Cairo to respond to allegations of transnational repression, while Reporters Without Borders urged the German government to provide effective protection. These incidents show that while the threat has been acknowledged, the institutionalization of response mechanisms has not kept pace with the risk.<sup>5</sup>

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4 FairSquare, “UK Must Overhaul Response to Transnational Repression,” March 2025, <https://fairsq.org/transnational-repression-uk-inquiry/>.

5 Federal Foreign Office of Germany, “Human Rights Commissioner Amtsberg on the Report by UN Special Rapporteurs about Alleged Transnational Repression against Egyptian Mournalist Basma Mostafa in Germany,” April 16, 2025, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/2714530-2714530>.

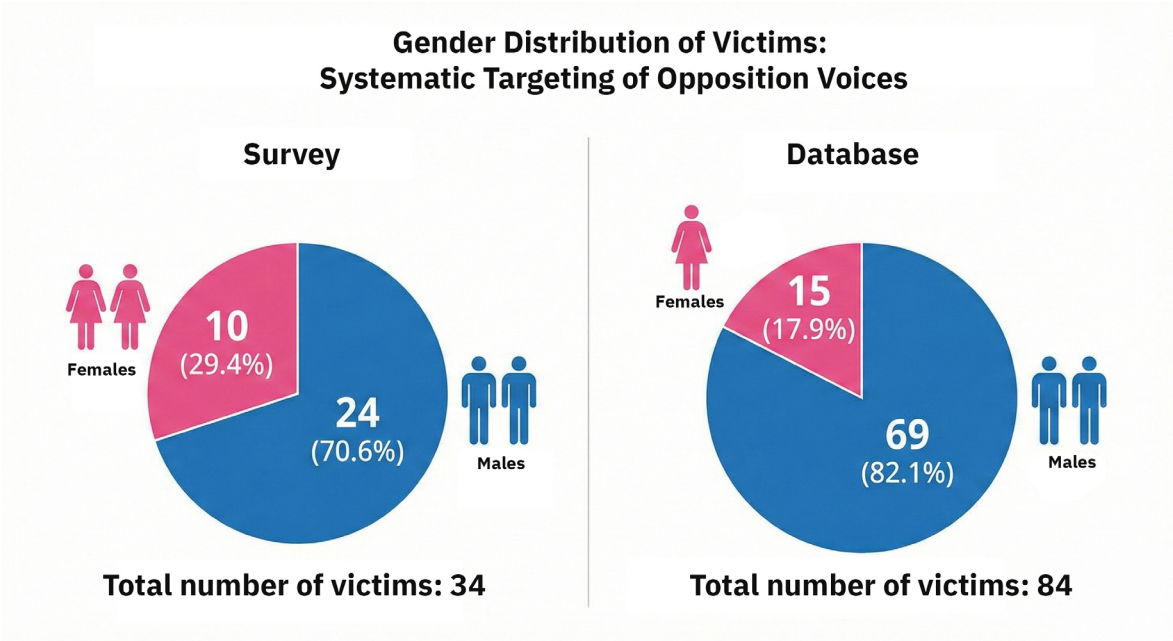
According to the survey conducted by the Egyptian Human Rights Forum, most reported cases come from Turkey, Germany, France, and the Netherlands, reflecting the geographical distribution of Egyptian activists abroad. The database of documented cases shows a greater diversity in the geographical locations of violations, including in the Gulf States, Lebanon, and Morocco, underscoring the transnational nature of these practices.



**Table 1**

Country of residence	No. of case (survey)	No. of cases (database)	Total
 Turkey	21	38	59
 Egypt	0	14	14
 UK	1	4	5
 Sudan	0	4	4
 Germany	2	2	4
 Saudi Arabia	0	4	4
 Netherlands	3	0	3
 Austria	0	2	2
 Tunisia	0	2	2
 France	2	0	2
 Qatar	1	1	2
 Lebanon	0	2	2
 Bahrain	0	2	2
 Other	4	6	10

The data also shows that the overwhelming majority of victims are men (24 of 34 in the survey and 69 of 84 in the database), most of them involved in political, media, or advocacy activities. This suggests that dissenting voices and activists are systematically targeted.

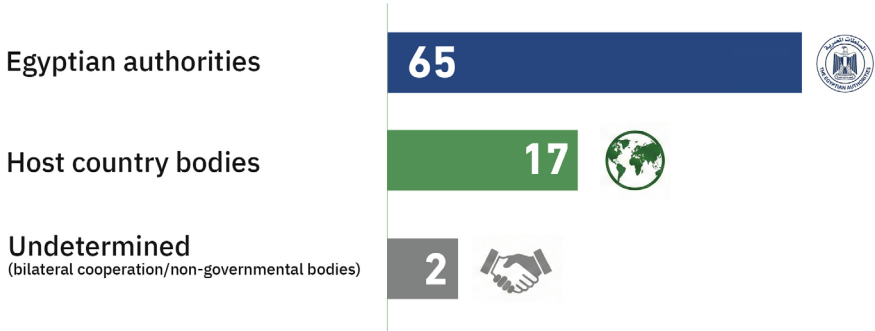


The data indicates that the Egyptian authorities are the main perpetrators of these violations, though other actors are often implicated as well, including the authorities of host countries (in cases of detention and extradition) or regional security cooperation channels (such as the AIMC). International and regional mechanisms such as Interpol (albeit less transparently in some cases) and bilateral security cooperation channels are also used.

**Table 2**

**Body responsible for violation**

No. of cases (of 84 cases in database)



## Areas of danger: Security collaboration in the Middle East

Host countries' approach to transnational repression ranges from open collaboration and toleration to some resistance or attempt to protect.

### Egyptians in the Gulf

In recent years, the Gulf has come to hold multiple meanings for Egyptians. For thousands of them, the Gulf states represent a source of employment and economic stability; for others, they are a temporary haven for professional or family activities; and for a smaller but politically influential number, the Gulf has become an arena where the interests of host countries intersect with Cairo's security priorities. This intersection has produced a mix of administrative, legal, and practical measures that converge on a single point: the restriction of the freedoms of activists or those suspected of involvement in opposition political activities, sometimes through arrest or attempted deportation, and other times through more subtle consular and bureaucratic means.



Among the Gulf states, Kuwait has cooperated most openly with Egypt in its pursuit of political activists.

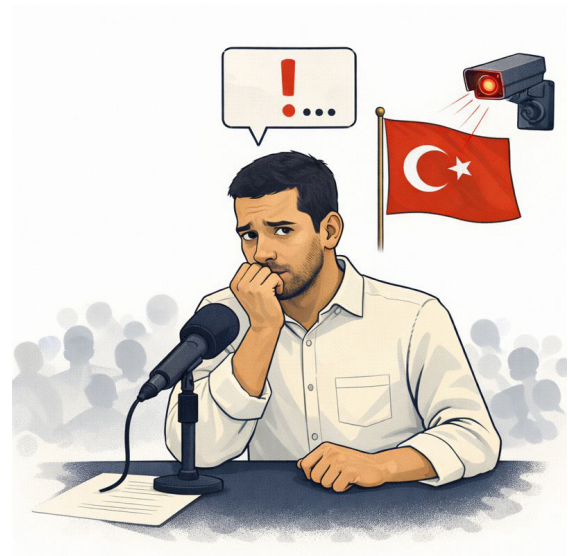
In 2019, Kuwaiti authorities deported eight Egyptian activists to Cairo in an operation documented by Human Rights Watch, which described it as an “unlawful extradition of dissidents at risk of torture.” In June 2023, Kuwait showed the same cooperation in the case of engineer Sayyed al-Shuwayhi, an Egyptian-Turkish dissident residing in Istanbul. Al-Shuwayhi was detained at Kuwait International Airport upon entering the country on his Turkish passport. He was held for several hours at the request of Egyptian security officials before authorities decided to release him and deport him to Turkey instead of Cairo following Turkish consular and diplomatic interventions. The case sparked widespread protests from Egyptian and international human rights organizations, which urged Kuwait not to extradite him to Egypt pursuant to its obligations under the Convention Against Torture.

Although the Kuwaiti authorities ultimately did not cede to Egypt’s request, the incident confirmed the existence of open security communication channels with Cairo. It further indicates that Kuwait does not differentiate political from criminal cases in its implementation of security cooperation, suggesting that Egyptians engaged in public activism in Kuwait face elevated risks and necessitating a thorough review of non-refoulement obligations.

The situation is no different in other Gulf states. In August 2023, Bahraini authorities extradited two Egyptian citizens, Mohammed Mahmoud Agez and Mohammed al-Iraqi Saad Hassanein, to Cairo after arresting them at their residence in Manama. According to the Egyptian Front for Human Rights, the extradition was carried out based on a warrant from AIMC issued in response to an Egyptian request.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptian Front noted that the detainees were not brought before any Bahraini judicial authority and were not allowed to contact lawyers or UN representatives. In addition, their extradition was carried out on an expedited basis, less than 24 hours after their arrest.

## Egyptians in Turkey

Since 2021, relations between Cairo and Ankara have entered a new phase, ending years of discord that followed the military coup in the summer of 2013. Driven by regional shifts and domestic economic pressures, Turkey opted to resolve problems with countries in the region, among them Egypt. This policy has gradually impacted the lives of thousands of Egyptians residing in Turkey, particularly those who sought refuge there after 2013, considering it one of the last safe havens for political and media opposition activity.



<sup>6</sup> Egyptian Front for Human Rights, “Zuhur al-Sayyid ‘Ajiz wa-Muhammad al-’Iraqi fi Niyabat Amn al-Dawla wa-Hab-suhum fi Qadaya Amn al-Dawla ba’d Tarhilihim min al-Bahrain,” August 16, 2023, <https://egyptianfront.org/ar/2023/08/%D8%B8%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B2-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9/>.

In the spring of 2021, Egyptian opposition channels based in Istanbul—such as al-Sharq, Mekameleen, and Watan—received direct instructions from Turkish authorities to tone down their rhetoric against the Egyptian regime.<sup>7</sup> This was the first concrete indication of a shift in the Turkish political environment, from an open space for Egyptian activists to one of oversight conditioned by bilateral relations. Some channels quickly complied with these directives, suspending their political programming or revising their content to use less stringent language; others chose to leave. In April 2022, Mekameleen TV announced the closure of its Istanbul offices and the resumption of its broadcasts from London, a symbolic move that signaled the beginning of a period of self-censorship among Egyptian journalists residing in Turkey.



The restrictions were not limited to the media. Since mid-2021, Turkish authorities have tightened residency and work permit procedures for some Egyptian activists, particularly those known for their political or media backgrounds, generating a general climate of fear and suspicion. Many activists and journalists refrained from participating in public events or giving statements to the media, fearing that their positions would be interpreted as opposition to the new policies of the Turkish government. Obtaining long-term residency or a stable work permit became a recurrent challenge, prompting some to seek refuge in Europe—especially in Britain and the Netherlands—while others chose to scale back their public appearances and focus on professional activities unrelated to Egyptian politics.

Although subsequent years have witnessed no documented extraditions of Egyptian dissidents to Cairo, the 2019 extradition of journalist Mohammed Abd al-Hafiz still weighs heavily on the diaspora. Sent from Istanbul Airport to Egypt, Abd al-Hafiz was arrested immediately upon arrival. At the time, Turkish authorities described the incident as an “administrative error,” launched an investigation, and suspended officers. Nevertheless, the incident remains an ever-present warning for every Egyptian dissident living in Turkey. Since then, airports and border crossings have been treated as danger zones, and domestic and international travel has become a fraught experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with an Egyptian anchor and activist who resides in Turkey.

As Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement continued apace, various political developments reinforced the reality of this new climate. In November 2022, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shook hands with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Doha for the first time in a decade, signaling a new phase of pragmatic normalization. In July 2023, the two countries reinstated their ambassadors, and Erdogan visited Cairo in February 2024, followed by Sisi's visit to Ankara in September of the same year. With each of these developments, the margin of freedom for Egyptian dissidents in Turkey narrowed further, while the red lines became increasingly clear: no direct attacks on the Egyptian regime and no public political activities that could become a diplomatic nuisance for Ankara.



In this context, transnational repression was no longer limited to kidnappings or extraditions, but assumed a more subtle, effective form. For many Egyptian activists, Turkey became a conditional exile, a country that did not officially expel them but restricted their ability to engage in any political or human rights activity. Several journalists reported receiving verbal warnings from local officials to “restrain their rhetoric,” and female human rights activists said their residency permits were not renewed, or they were forced to leave the country after participating in events related to detainees in Egypt. These incidents, while not amounting to extradition or arrest, created an atmosphere of silent fear, in which activists censor themselves before anyone else can.

A review of individual cases between 2022 and 2025 reveals multi-layered forms of repression: first administrative pressure through restrictions on residency and work permits then a comprehensive crackdown on all opposition media channels, including social media accounts, which has led to the spread of a culture of self-censorship and a significant decline in the public activities of the Egyptian opposition community.

According to documentation by the Egyptian Human Rights Forum and other human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Egyptian embassies and consulates in several countries, among them Turkey, Qatar, Sudan, and the United States, rejected dozens of applications to renew passports or issue alternative documents. The rejections were typically justified in vague terms, citing “security directives” or “sovereign reasons,” without written rejections or any avenue for appeal provided.

At the same time, Cairo played an indirect role in this system by employing its own tools of transnational repression, such as denying consular services, revoking citizenship, and withholding official documents from families, further exacerbating the precarious situation of Egyptian activists in Turkey.



One survey participant said that the Turkish Immigration Department informed her in October 2025 that it would revoke her permanent residency, which she had received on an exceptional basis five years earlier, due to the lack of a valid passport, after she was told she could not renew her passport through the Egyptian consulate.

This was confirmed by Bassem, an Egyptian journalist residing in Istanbul, who described the situation of Egyptians there as “a life at the mercy of exceptions.” In the absence of laws regulating political asylum in Turkey and the lack of any legal mechanism for claiming rights, many Egyptians are dependent on exceptions granted to foreigners by the Turkish authorities, and these exceptions are dictated by political considerations rather than law and human rights.

Many Egyptians in Turkey exist today in a double bind: they are in a country that gives them material refuge but no longer guarantees them freedom of expression or the right to engage in human rights work. They are exiled twice over: once outside the borders of their homeland and again within the borders of silence imposed on them in the name of shared interests between the two countries.

Clearly, the transformation witnessed by the Egyptian diaspora in Turkey in recent years does not merely represent a shift in bilateral relations, but reflects a transformation in the very nature of transnational repression. Instead of resorting to direct violence or open threats, the Egyptian regime has expanded its sphere of influence through political agreements and security understandings that keep its opponents abroad in constant fear of “symbolic deportation.” They are not physically returned to Egypt, but they are contained by its borders wherever they go.

The risks of detention and deportation are thus concentrated in the Middle East because of the convergence of authoritarian interests and the complicity of security agencies. In contrast, dissidents in Europe and North America enjoy stronger legal protections that prevents their direct extradition. This does not mean, however, that they are immune to repression. Violations there take various forms, such as consular harassment, online defamation, and family punishment.

## Models of resistance

Democracy promotion institutions, human rights organizations, and a small number of Western states have sought to resist the targeting of dissidents on their soil, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Generally, Europe and North America offer a safer legal environment for Egyptians wanted by the authorities. Extradition requests are typically rejected if they are politically motivated or entail the risk of torture, and many activists are granted asylum or residency on humanitarian grounds. However, this relative protection is marred by institutional gaps and delays in response.



The landscape can be divided into two levels: first, the incipient official, legislative, and governmental efforts to counter transnational repression; and second, the parallel role of civil society and international organizations in lobbying to curb transnational violations.

## Europe and North America: Growing awareness, existing gaps

Since 2022, Western governments have increasingly recognized the seriousness of transnational repression as a threat to the rule of law and human rights within their own countries.<sup>8</sup> For example, the European Union acknowledged the need to focus on combating transnational repression in its 2023 human rights priorities.<sup>9</sup> In March 2023, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on member states to facilitate the reporting and investigation of incidents and to impose sanctions on perpetrators.

Additionally, in early 2024, EU member states committed to exploring measures to prevent and counter transnational repression and to working in UN forums to address it.<sup>10</sup> Despite these important political signals, however, the response remains piecemeal and slow. A 2025 survey of ten European states found coordination and information gaps that hinder governments' action against transnational repression, even in cases involving countries notorious for such violations, such as Russia and China. These gaps include poor information sharing on threats between security agencies.

In most documented cases, victims do not inform the authorities at all, partly due to a lack of confidence in the host country's police response. Among those who reported threats, most stated that the police took little action, and they were sometimes explicitly told that nothing could be done due to a lack of physical evidence. This reality highlights the need for host countries to adopt more specialized mechanisms for addressing the phenomenon, rather than the pursuing the traditional approach, which may disregard the political and human rights dimensions and focus solely on the narrow criminal aspect.

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8 International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, "Poor Coordination, Information Gaps Hamstring EU Efforts to Combat China's Repression of Overseas Dissidents," April 2024, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-targets/poor-coordination-information-gaps-hamstring-eu-efforts-to-combat-chinas-repression-of-overseas-dissidents/>.

9 European Parliament, "Question for Written Answer E-000459/2024: Transnational Repression in Tunisia and Morocco," February 2024, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2024-000459\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2024-000459_EN.html).

10 Amnesty International, "Open Letter: The EU Must Address the Chilling Effect of Transnational Repression on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedoms of Chinese Students," May 21, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.eu/news/open-letter-the-eu-must-address-the-chilling-effect-of-transnational-repression-on-freedom-of-expression-and-academic-freedoms-of-chinese-students/>.

Some Western governments have taken legislative and security steps to curb the influence of repressive regimes within their territories. Following the shock of the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018, the US adopted measures such as a visa ban on those involved in targeting dissidents abroad. In 2022, the FBI uncovered a spy network targeting Egyptians in the US, and a man named Pierre Girgis was convicted of acting as an unregistered agent for the Egyptian government to gather information on activists in the diaspora.<sup>11</sup> Some states use tools such as targeted sanctions.

The US Treasury Department has placed individuals from foreign security services on sanctions lists for abuses against dissidents, but these lists have not included any Egyptian officials despite documented incidents of repression confirmed by US State Department reports. The European Union has also enacted a human rights sanctions regime, known as the Magnitsky Act, which could theoretically be used against officials involved in abuses of power, but as of mid-2025, no explicit sanctions of this type had been imposed. Even so, parliamentary and public calls have grown louder in Europe, urging a bolder use of diplomatic tools, such as recalling or expelling diplomats involved in threatening diaspora communities, and firm public stances against abusive governments.

## The case of the UK

Britain is a prime example of the shift from relative denial to open acknowledgment of the problem of transnational repression. Following a series of violations against Chinese dissidents and citizens of Hong Kong and Russia, a joint parliamentary committee launched a thorough inquiry into transnational repression. In a report published in July 2025, the inquiry concluded that foreign dissidents on British soil were being targeted absent adequate deterrence and offered a set of recommendations to the government.<sup>12</sup>



11 DAWN MENA, "U.S.: Sanction Egyptian Officials Implicated in Spying on U.S.-Based Critics of Egyptian Government," January 6, 2022, <https://dawnmena.org/u-s-sanction-egyptian-officials-implicated-in-spying-on-u-s-based-critics-of-egyptian-government/>.

12 Red Notice Monitor, "UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights Publishes Its Report, Transnational Repression in the UK with Key Focus on INTERPOL Abuse," March 2025, <https://rednoticemonitor.com/uk-parliament-joint-committee-on-human-rights-publishes-its-report-transnational-repression-in-the-uk-with-key-focus-on-interpol-abuse/>.

The British Parliament recommended strengthening the strategic framework for combating transnational repression by adopting a formal definition of the phenomenon and regularly collecting data on it, given the current lack of a clear definition or the methodical documentation of cases. The report also called for the establishment of a dedicated contact point for victims, either through a hotline or a central coordinating body, to facilitate reporting incidents. It noted that victims are often unsure where to file a report given the current limitations of police mechanisms that rely solely on public communications and the emergency hotline. The existence of a specialized body to handle reports of transnational repression would contribute to faster response times and more standardized case handling.

The report also stressed the importance of regularly training police and relevant agencies on how to recognize patterns of transnational repression and respond to victims sensitively and effectively. Investigations have shown that the level of response varies from region to region depending on the awareness of officers. The proposed training includes familiarizing them with the tactics used by offending states, such as consular threats or sham prosecutions, to ensure that the seriousness of these practices is not underestimated. British MPs also recommended the submission of annual reports to parliament on the evolution of threats and the measures taken to address them, enabling ongoing parliamentary oversight and ensuring transparency about the effectiveness of existing legislation. This step also aims to monitor novel forms of repression, particularly those carried out via digital media.

In addition, the report underlined the need to ensure that asylum and naturalization applications in the UK are not unfairly affected by politically motivated international arrest warrants or diplomatic pressure. Despite the British government's assertion that it has measures in place to prevent Interpol notices from influencing immigration decisions, the parliamentary committee recommended strengthening these safeguards and establishing a formal mechanism to inform individuals if a Red Notice is issued against them that is suspected to be politically motivated. The idea of reviewing security decisions in citizenship files was also raised to ensure that they are not used as a tool to punish dissidents at the behest of foreign governments.

More seriously, European inaction has not only resulted in poor deterrence or response but has recently assumed an institutional form that threatens the asylum system itself.

## The complicity of European policies and the concept of safe country

Within a broader context of international complacency toward transnational repression, the European Commission's proposal in April 2025 to include Egypt on its list of "safe countries of origin" is one of the gravest indicators of the normalization of systematic violations. Instead of the enhancing protection for asylum seekers due to a pattern of repression, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary detention, the proposed classification reverses the equation, placing the burden of proof on the victim, rather than the offending state. From the perspective of transnational repression, this classification opens the door to the reproduction of repression beyond European borders, as Egyptian asylum seekers who have fled persecution or torture will run the risk of having their asylum applications rejected or being swiftly deported absent any individual assessment of their risks. In practice, this concept of safe country of origin turns some European states into bureaucratic extensions of the Egyptian repressive apparatus through asylum policies that sideline evidence of violations and erode the principle of non-refoulement.



Furthermore, the adoption of this classification sends a political message that runs counter to the EU's stated human rights commitments and gives the Egyptian authorities cover that can be used to undermine the credibility of victims abroad. Ignoring documented evidence of arbitrary arrests, torture, and consular denial effectively amounts to legitimizing and institutionalizing transnational repression, rather than confronting it.

As such, resisting this trend is not only about defending the European asylum system but also about protecting the safe space for Egyptian human rights defenders in exile and ensuring that European policies do not help to reproduce the Egyptian regime's violations through European legal instruments.

## Analysis of types of transnational repression under Egyptian law

This section analyzes types of transnational repression in light of the provisions of the Egyptian constitution and relevant legislation, highlighting the discrepancies between the authorities' practices and Egypt's international human rights obligations. The analysis is based on four main types of repression: denial of consular services and identity documents, revocation of citizenship, in absentia prosecution and trials and inclusion on terrorism lists, and finally, surveillance, hacking, and media defamation.

### Denial of consular services and identity documents

The refusal to provide consular services is one of the most common forms of transnational repression and one of the most impactful for political dissidents and human rights defenders abroad. It is the refusal to provide even the simplest civil services, such as the renewal of passports, the issuance of birth and death certificates, and marriage and divorce documents, and other government services that Egyptian consulates abroad ostensibly provide.

It takes place when an Egyptian citizen residing abroad applies to the Egyptian embassy or consulate for the issuance or renewal of their national identity card or passport. The response the citizen receives is verbal, either referring to indefinite administrative delays or using phrases such as “the application is under security review” or “it was rejected for security reasons,” combined with a refusal to issue a written administrative decision.



Obtaining identity documents is a fundamental right stemming from the right of citizenship, and from it derive numerous other rights and freedoms, most notably the right to freedom of movement and the right to legal recognition. This is not a privilege or a gift from the state, but rather an obligation and a right of its citizens. In the context of obligations imposed by international law and national constitutions, it is a form of legal protection that enables individuals to exercise their legal status outside the country. Depriving someone of this right is thus not only an administrative violation that contradicts the requirement of the legality of administrative decisions, but also a violation of the inherent civil and political rights of citizens, which no law or administrative decision may infringe.

The authorities' refusal to provide civil services to citizens residing abroad is an instrument of punishment for political dissidents abroad, existing outside all constitutional and legal frameworks. It is deployed against politicians, journalists, and human rights defenders in their countries of asylum or residence, with the aim of severing their ties to Egyptian nationality and restricting their movement within those countries.

These practices contravene several Egyptian laws, most notably the Diplomatic and Consular Corps Law,<sup>13</sup> which requires consular missions to carry out their duties in accordance with international agreements and treaties and the provisions of Egyptian laws and regulations pertaining to several services, enumerated in Article 96 of the law. These services include the registration of the births and deaths of Egyptians, the notarization of marriage contracts, the issuance and ratification of divorce certificates, the issuance of paternity and inheritance certificates to national and foreign authorities, the issuance and renewal of ordinary passports for Egyptians, and other functions.

The Civil Status Law (Law 143/1994) regulates the obligations of consulates abroad to maintain records of civil status reports,<sup>14</sup> applications for identity cards, replacements for lost or damaged cards, requests for any changes to identity cards, and renewals.<sup>15</sup> The law also requires citizens abroad to report births and deaths,<sup>16</sup> as well as incidents of marriage and divorce.<sup>17</sup> The implementing regulations of the law set forth the procedures for notification and registration and the relevant rules and processes.

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13 Law 45/1982 on the diplomatic and consular corps, issued on June 21, 1982, published on June 26, 1982, in the Official Gazette no. 25(bis).

14 Article 10 of Law 143/1994 on civil status, issued on June 7, 1994, published on June 9, 1994, in the Official Gazette, no. 23ff.

15 Article 62 of Law 143/1994.

16 Article 58 of Law 143/1994.

17 Article 60 of Law 143/1994.

The issuance and renewal of passports is regulated by Law 97/1959 on Passports,<sup>18</sup> amended by Law 165/2000, and its implementing regulations, issued with Ministerial Decree 63/1959.<sup>19</sup> Under Article 7 of the law, passports shall be issued to applicants who possess Egyptian citizenship, either by birth or by virtue of a naturalization certificate issued by the Interior Ministry. While the Foreign Ministry is responsible for renewing and issuing diplomatic and special passports, the Interior Ministry and Egyptian consulates abroad are responsible for issuing and renewing ordinary passports, pursuant to Article 10 of the law.

In a judgment issued on November 16, 2000, the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) declared Articles 8 and 11 of the Passport Law unconstitutional, specifically those provisions that delegated to the Interior Minister the authority to define the conditions for granting passports and the power to refuse to grant, renew, or revoke them after issuance for “important reasons at his discretion.” The court held that the legislator failed to establish “the general principles that regulate the entire subject of passports, although they are the sole means that enable the citizen to leave his country and return to it, and although this is intimately bound to the rights guaranteed by the constitution.”<sup>20</sup>

This judgment affirmed citizens’ right to obtain and possess a passport, considering it a symbol of their Egyptian identity, which they proudly display both within and outside their homeland, and a fundamental aspect of their personal freedom, which the constitution safeguards as inviolable. Movement cannot be prohibited, the court said, because freedom of movement falls in the category of civil liberties, and restricting it without legitimate justification strips personal freedom of some of its essential characteristics. The court affirmed that the constitution gives the legislative authority, exclusive of any other body, the power to determine this justification. Accordingly, a determination of the conditions for the issuance of a travel document rests with this authority. Moreover, since freedom of movement is the default, issuing a travel document is also the default; prohibition is the exception, and only a judge or a member of the Public Prosecution, authorized by law, has the power to restrict movement, without interference from the executive branch.

Moreover, the court upheld the right to freedom of movement, noting that a citizen may not be compelled to reside in a specific place or prevented from residing in a particular area, except as specified by law. Similarly, the Court stated that it is prohibited to deport a citizen from the country or prevent their return, by which the court recognized citizens’ right to emigrate and leave the country.

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18 Law 97/1959 on passports, issued on May 3, 1959, published on May 16, 1959, in the Official Gazette, no. 99; entered into force on May 16, 1959.

19 Interior Minister Decree 63/1959, issued on June 6, 1959, published on June 23, 1959 in the Official Gazette, no. 128.

20 SCC, case no. 243/22JY, session of November 4, 2000, Technical Office 9, part 1, p. 777, rule no. 93, judgment of unconstitutionality.

Since this judgment overturned the provision granting the Interior Minister the authority to refuse to issue or renew a passport, and since SCC's judgments are binding on all state authorities, the current practice constitutes an unlawful administrative circumvention of a ruling of Egypt's highest court. And insofar as the practice currently targets dissidents abroad, excluding other citizens, it is unwarranted discrimination based on political affiliation or one's stance toward the regime, in flagrant contravention of the constitutionally enshrined principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination.

Orders denying passports are not issued in official or written form, but are conveyed orally through intimations that the application is under security review or the outright denial of the application for reasons of sovereignty; at times, applications are simply subject to indefinite delays. The practice appears to be an attempt to manipulate the situation and evade judicial accountability by limiting the citizen's right to appeal the decision through the available judicial channels before the Egyptian Administrative Court. Yet, this type of unwritten decree can be legally challenged as a passive decision to refrain from implementing the law.

No affirmative action or official written document is required for such a petition before the Administrative Court; it is enough to prove that the public official refuses to follow the law by omission. In all cases— whether an affirmative, official decision to refuse to issue or renew a passport or a passive decision to refrain from doing so—this procedure constitutes a blatant violation of the principle of administrative legality, which requires the administrative body to state cause for its decisions and allow for judicial review of them, as affirmed by the Administrative Courts in multiple rulings.

In a 2019 judgment by the Administrative Court<sup>21</sup> concerning the administrative body's refusal to renew a citizen's passport, the court established several principles that demonstrate the violation of the rights of dissidents to obtain or renew passports by Egyptian consulates abroad and the interior minister. In its judgment, the court affirmed:

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21 Administrative Court, 2<sup>nd</sup> circuit, unpublished rulings, ruling no. 11857/71JY, session of January 20, 2019.

...the right of citizens to freedom of movement and travel from one place to another and from one area to another, whether within the country or abroad. This right is a personal constitutional right that inheres in the human being qua human being. Accordingly, it may not be infringed without justification, diminished without cause, or restricted except for the benefit and protection of society and within the limits of the legislation regulating this right, provided that such regulation does not entail a denial of the right. The approach taken by the constitutional legislator in this respect was merely acceding to the paramount importance given to the human right to exercise freedom of movement and travel, as firmly established in the conscience of civilized nations. This is clearly and unequivocally embodied in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted and promulgated by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, and which member states were called to abide by.

The court continued:

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Given that the right of a person to possess documents proving their belonging to their country is a natural right inherent in their person, and that most constitutions, guided by international conventions, strive to establish the foundations and rules for its preservation, thus guaranteeing the individual's dignity and ability to live their life outside their country's borders, and given that the honor of affiliation with Egyptian nationality is valued by every Egyptian, it is the duty of the state, through its various agencies, to enable the citizen to enjoy the consequences of Egyptian nationality, foremost among them the right to possess or renew a passport. The state must be as concerned with this as the citizen is, since a passport is tantamount to a bond that allows the citizen to leave Egyptian territory, and without it, the right to travel becomes meaningless. Consequently, if an Egyptian citizen, while residing in a foreign country, loses or damages their passport, it deprives them of their legitimate presence in that country.



Therefore, obtaining a passport is wedded to the established right of Egyptian citizens to travel, and the consequent legitimacy of their presence in the foreign country they are traveling to. This right does not truly exist and cannot be legally exercised except by obtaining a travel document that enables the Egyptian citizen in reality and in fact to exercise his right as set forth in the constitution, which grants him freedom of movement and travel and gives his presence in the foreign country to which he is traveling a legitimacy that protects him from the hand of the law of that country.

In its judgment, the Administrative Court referred to the SCC decision that vesting the Interior Minister with the authority to determine the conditions for issuing, refusing, renewing, or revoking a passport after its issuance was unconstitutional. This delegation of authority, the court reasoned, represented a failure of the legislature to establish the general principles regulating the entire subject of passports, which required the legislature to intervene with regulation. The judgment removed the legal basis for the discretionary authority previously given to the interior minister, resulting in a legislative vacuum in the regulation of citizens' constitutionally protected right to freedom of movement and travel.

The Administrative Court also cited a 2001 judgment by the Supreme Administrative Court<sup>22</sup> which followed the earlier SCC judgment. The higher administrative court had affirmed:

The default principle is freedom of movement and the exception is the prohibition of it, which is the sole prerogative of a judge or a member of the Public Prosecution authorized by law, without the interference of the executive authority. Until the legislator intervenes to fill the legislative gap resulting from the aforementioned ruling of the Supreme Constitutional Court, the lawful judge—the faithful guardian of civil rights and freedoms and the custodian of considerations of public order and respect for its exigencies—shall not have his authority shackled in assessing the special, underlying considerations. When legislation is enacted regulating the right of movement and the manner of imposing restrictions on it to protect considerations of public order, the lawful judge must bring to bear his subsequent oversight while maintaining a delicate balance, neither being excessive nor deficient, between the right of movement and considerations relevant to the maintenance of the security of society that truly and credibly justify the restriction of the right of a person whose travel is certain to represent a danger to matters related to the higher interest of the community, in accordance with the fundamental principle that requires properly ordering interests.

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<sup>22</sup> Supreme Administrative Court, appeal no. 3370/44JY, session of February 24, 2001.

As the foregoing analysis demonstrates, the refusal to provide consular services is unsupported by any legal foundation. It is a mere administrative decision that is selectively applied, directed only at political dissidents and human rights activists in exile to the exclusion of others. Accordingly, it is more akin to a punitive instrument used by the state outside its territorial borders to subjugate its citizens or exert pressure on them or their families with the aim of denying them legal protection in the contexts of immigration, asylum, or official representation. The consequences of this type of violation are not limited to the violation of the right to obtain official documents, but extend to denying individuals their social and legal rights in host countries, threatening their legal status, obstructing their movement, and impeding their access to basic services like education, health-care, and housing.

It is thus a compound form of repression that transcends political punishment and infringes on the fundamental necessities of life.

Constitutionally, preventing citizens from accessing consular services, including identity documents, constitutes a flagrant violation of several constitutional principles, most notably the right to nationality, as stipulated in Article 6 of the constitution, which obligates the state to legally recognize citizens and grant them official documents proving their personal details.<sup>23</sup> It is also a breach of the principle of equal citizenship and the prohibition of discrimination based on political affiliation or geographical location.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, the constitution guarantees freedom of movement, residence, and emigration, and prohibits banning a citizen from leaving the country except by a reasoned judicial order and for a defined period in accordance with the law.<sup>25</sup> It also obligates the state to protect the interests of Egyptians residing abroad, and protect and safeguard their rights and freedoms.<sup>26</sup>

Article 99 of the constitution criminalizes any infringement of rights and freedoms enshrined in the constitution and law, deeming such infringement a crime not subject to any statute of limitations in criminal or civil proceedings. It also allows the victim to file a criminal lawsuit directly, with mandatory compensation for the harmed party.

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23 Article 6 of the 2014 constitution, issued on January 18, 2014, published on January 18, 2014 in the Official Gazette, no. 3(bis) (a); entered into force on January 18, 2014.

24 Article 53 of the 2014 constitution.

25 Article 62 of the 2014 constitution.

26 Article 88 of the 2014 constitution.

Article 93 of the constitution affirms the supremacy of international human rights agreements ratified by Egypt and sets Egypt's obligations under the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the ICCPR, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights above national laws, obligating the state to apply their provisions even in its relations with its citizens abroad. Denying citizens a passport, identity document, birth certificate, or other documents contravenes the comprehensive system of constitutional rights that requires the Egyptian state to guarantee the rights of its citizens both at home and abroad, without discrimination or selectivity. This practice directly contradicts Article 12 of the ICCPR, which provides for the right of every individual to leave any country, including their own, and to return to it. This right presupposes that individuals have a legal means of proving their nationality, identity, and connection to the state, which cannot be effected without official documents issued by consulates and embassies. Article 16 of the covenant affirms that every individual has the right to recognition as a person before the law, a right that is effectively undermined when citizens are denied documents proving their legal status.

The practice similarly contravenes the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, Article 5 of which states that a primary function of consular missions is to issue documents to citizens residing abroad and assist them in civil status matters. Article 36 further provides for the right of citizens to access consular services without discrimination or arbitrariness.

Moreover, withholding documents as a means of pressuring or punishing dissidents or critics constitutes a form of discriminatory treatment prohibited under Article 2 of the ICCPR, which obligates states not to discriminate in the enjoyment of rights based on individuals' political opinions. When a citizen is prevented from obtaining a passport or identity card absent an official decision to revoke citizenship, it may nevertheless amount to de facto, arbitrary deprivation of citizenship, in contravention of Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that every person has the right to a nationality and no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of it.

## Revocation of citizenship

The practice of stripping citizenship from dissidents in exile—a punitive measure based on political affiliation—became one of the most prominent forms of transnational repression after 2013. Citizenship, besides constituting a legal bond between the individual and the state, represents the foundation of all civil and political rights acquired by citizens both domestically and abroad. It is the legal condition that grants an individual full legal personality so that they are not stateless, which is one of the gravest violations of human rights in law and daily life.

As discussed above, under to the Egyptian constitution, nationality is the right of every person born to an Egyptian father or mother. The constitution mandates legal recognition of this right and the issuance of official documents proving personal data, as a right guaranteed and regulated by the law governing citizenship. The constitution also refers to the law regulating the conditions for acquiring citizenship.<sup>27</sup> Law 26/1975 regulates the provisions of Egyptian citizenship and all related matters.

Under the law, the Cabinet is responsible for issuing reasoned decisions to revoke citizenship. The revocation of citizenship differs from the withdrawal of citizenship: the former applies to Egyptians who hold citizenship by birth, while the latter applies to foreigners who subsequently acquired Egyptian citizenship pursuant to any of the conditions defined by law. The law specifies seven grounds for the revocation of citizenship, though the broad wording of the statute could be interpreted to extend to countless other cases. The seven enumerated grounds include acquiring foreign citizenship without obtaining permission for naturalization; joining the military service of a foreign country without prior authorization from the defense minister; being convicted of a felony that harms state security of the state from abroad; accepting and remaining in a position with a foreign government or a foreign or international organization, despite a reasoned order from the Cabinet to leave it if remaining in that position would threaten the supreme interests of the country; joining a foreign organization whose objectives include working to undermine the social or economic order of the state by force or any other unlawful means; working for the interest of a foreign state or government that is at war with Egypt or with which diplomatic relations have been severed, and this would harm Egypt's military, diplomatic, or economic footing or prejudice any other national interest; and finally, being known at any time for Zionism.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Article 6 of the 2014 constitution.

<sup>28</sup> Article 16 of Law 26/1975 on Egyptian citizenship, issued on May 21, 1975, published on May 29, 1975, in the Official Gazette, no. 22.

The first grounds for revocation of citizenship—the acquisition of a foreign nationality without permission—is controversial. The law requires an Egyptian citizen wishing to acquire foreign citizenship to obtain prior permission from the interior minister; otherwise, they continue to be considered Egyptian in all respects and under all circumstances, unless the Cabinet decides to revoke their citizenship. If permission is granted, their Egyptian citizenship is automatically dropped by law unless the permission explicitly allows them to retain it.<sup>29</sup>

In some cases, dissidents residing abroad may wish to renounce their Egyptian citizenship, whether to obtain citizenship in a country that does not permit dual citizenship or to evade politically motivated sentences issued against them in Egypt for acquiring citizenship in another country. This is impossible, however, because the Interior Minister may refuse to issue permission for naturalization. The applicant thus remains Egyptian under the law and is subject to arrest upon their return at any time, even if they have already acquired foreign citizenship.

In a 2021 judgment by the Administrative Court, a citizen requested permission to acquire Austrian citizenship in order to renounce his Egyptian citizenship. However, he obtained Austrian citizenship before permission was granted, and no decision was issued to revoke or strip him of his Egyptian citizenship. He appealed the passive decision to refrain from revoking his Egyptian citizenship with the Administrative Court, but the court denied his appeal, ruling that he should have waited for the interior minister’s authorization. The court clarified that his failure to wait did not automatically strip him of his Egyptian citizenship, nor did it compel the Cabinet to revoke it; rather, the decision was at the Cabinet’s discretion.

In its judgment, the court explained that the petitioner sought to renounce his citizenship to escape a military court sentence. Since the Cabinet had not revoked his citizenship, he would have still been considered Egyptian in all respects, and acquiring a foreign citizenship would not have allowed him to elude punishment. In other words, he would have been arrested upon his return even traveling under his foreign passport, as he would still be considered Egyptian under Egyptian law.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Article 10 of Law 26/1975.

<sup>30</sup> Administrative Court, 1<sup>st</sup> circuit, unpublished rulings, ruling no. 52486/74JY, session of December 25, 2021.

Other grounds for the revocation of citizenship set forth in Article 16, such as a conviction for a crime damaging to state security from abroad or accepting employment with a foreign government or a foreign or international organization, are relevant to many cases of transnational repression. Political crimes enumerated in the Penal Code, the counterterrorism law, and other laws are used to impose sentences on many dissidents, politicians, and human rights activists abroad following trials held in absentia. The vague wording of Article 16 allows for the use of the revocation of citizenship as a form of transnational repression. Here no judicial ruling is required, but only security reports of “joining a foreign organization whose objectives include working to undermine the social or economic order of the state by force or any other illegitimate means.” This phrasing contains numerous broad, subjective terms that can be applied to people working in human rights organizations, foreign newspapers, or legitimate and lawful political movements in countries of exile

At the same time, giving the Cabinet and Interior Ministry broad authority to revoke citizenship contradicts the principle of the rule of law and undermines the right to nationality and the principle that the state is bound by the law. The latter principle dictates that legislation enacted by the authorities to govern individuals’ relations with the state must not infringe the core tenets of democratic states, which aim to protect the rights, dignity, and integrity of the individual. Among these inherent constitutional rights is the right to permanent or temporary migration and the right to live under the protection of the state to which one belongs, within a legal framework that safeguards the individual’s rights and the community’s ability to maintain its security.

While those stripped of their citizenship can always appeal the decision with the Administrative Court, reasoned decisions to revoke citizenship are terse, allowing the administrative body, represented by the Cabinet and interior minister, to overstep its bounds and arbitrarily use its powers under the citizenship law to undermine and negate the right to citizenship. Such appeals are frequently rejected by the Administrative Court due to the broad powers the law vests in the administrative body, including the power to restore citizenship to those stripped of it by unilateral decrees of the interior minister or the president.<sup>31</sup> This demonstrates the extent to which the law, which should regulate the right to citizenship, has effectively undermined and emptied it of meaning.

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31 Article 18 of Law 26/1975.

Internationally, Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the right of every individual to a nationality and prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of nationality or the denial of the right to change it. This text is a bulwark against the legal deprivation of national belonging, and it lends support of the principle in international jurisprudence that citizenship is not a political gift, but a legal right protected against arbitrary action. Article 8 the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness also upholds the principle that no one may be deprived of their citizenship if it would render them stateless, except in narrow circumstances pertaining to serious wrongful conduct and under strict procedural conditions.

## **Legalizing transnational repression: prosecution and trials in absentia, terrorism designations, extradition requests**

Prosecution in trials convened in absentia that lack even the most basic fair trial standards has become a chief tactic employed by the state against dissidents beyond its borders. It utilizes legal tools and unconstitutional legislation, enacted for political purposes, to bring its opponents abroad to heel by criminalizing them, impugning their criminal status, and undermining their legal status in host countries.

The common denominator that brings together prosecution, trials in absentia, and inclusion on terrorism lists is the law: the regime claims its actions are based on a sound legal foundation, represented by a battery of laws that purport to combat terrorism, which can be easily marketed abroad. The impact of this type of repression is not limited to Egypt, but has grave implications for the international legal status of those targeted, from international arrest warrants, extradition requests to host countries, asset seizures, travel bans, and the denial of documents—all based on sham criminal prosecutions conducted by the Public Prosecution and criminal court judges.



In carrying out prosecutions, trials in absentia, and inclusion on terrorism lists, the Egyptian state relies on a set of criminal and procedural laws, as well as newly enacted exceptional legislation, most importantly, the Penal Code,<sup>32</sup> the Code of Criminal Procedure,<sup>33</sup> the counterterrorism law,<sup>34</sup> and the law regulating terrorist entities.<sup>35</sup>

Taking the Penal Code first, the legal rationale for charges levelled against dissidents abroad typically rests on vague, ill-undefined provisions, such as disseminating false news from abroad,<sup>36</sup> inciting the overthrow of the government, joining a group established in violation of the law, and other crimes enumerated in Chapter One, Book Two of the Penal Code, titled “Felonies Harmful to Government Security from Abroad,” which do not precisely define the material and moral elements of the crime. This statutory ambiguity contravenes the constitutional principle of legality of offenses and penalties<sup>37</sup> in criminal legislation, which presupposes that crimes and penalties are clearly written to allow individuals to predict lawful and unlawful conduct, thereby preventing criminal statutes from becoming traps set to ensnare defendants. In reality, these statutes are deployed to criminalize conduct that falls within the scope of freedom of expression and political affiliation, which undermines the legislative philosophy of criminal law and makes it into a tool for political punishment and prosecution.

Regarding trials in absentia, under the Code of Criminal Procedure, the accused should be legally notified of their trial<sup>38</sup> and have the right to contest or appeal the judgment. In fact, however, such trials are conducted without proper notification, and the accused is deprived of their right to contest the charges because they face arrest upon their return to Egypt.

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32 Penal Code, Law 58/1937, issued on July 31, 1937, published on August 5, 1937, in Egyptian Chronicles, no. 71; entered into force on October 15, 1937.

33 Code of Criminal Procedure, Law 150/1950, issued on September 3, 1950, published on October 15, 1951, in Egyptian Chronicles, no. 90; entered into force on November 14, 1951.

34 Law 94/2015 on the suppression of terrorism, issued on August 15, 2015, published on August 15, 2015, in the Official Gazette, no. 33(bis).

35 Law 8/2015 on the regulation of the lists of terrorist entities, issued on February 17, 2015, published on February 17, 2015, in the Official Gazette, no. 7(bis)(g). See the unofficial English translation of MENA Rights Group, <https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-11/EGY%20-%20Law%20of%202015%20-%20Organizations%20lists%20of%20terrorist%20entities%20and%20terrorists%20-%202002.2015%20%28EN%29.pdf>.

36 Article 80 of the Penal Code.

37 Article 95 of the 2014 constitution.

38 Article 387 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Absentia trials thus become a final, unappealable sentence, constituting a serious deviation from procedural norms and an arbitrary denial of the right to an in-presence trial and defense, which is the most basic requirement of a fair trial. Additionally, Article 390 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states that, following a conviction in absentia, the defendant is prohibited from disposing of or managing their assets.

The counterterrorism law and the law regulating terrorist entities complement the use of exceptional trials. These laws have come in for heated criticism from civil society organizations and human rights groups for their infringement of constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms. Most importantly, they have been critiqued for the use of vague, overly broad terms that could be applied to any conduct opposing state policies, the failure to observe the principles of criminal justice in maintaining proportionality between crime and punishment, the encroachment on personal freedom, and their breach of the principle of the hierarchy of legal rules.

Both laws are shot through with constitutional irregularities, primarily procedural in nature, since they were both enacted in the absence of parliament. The constitution does not give the president wide latitude to enact laws, imposing restrictive conditions on his lawmaking powers. For example, any such law must be necessary to address urgent situations requiring immediate action, and any law so enacted must be subject to a detailed discussion in parliament within fifteen days of its convening. These conditions were not applied to the counterterrorism law and the law regulating terrorist entities. There was no legislative vacuum necessitating their issuance. On the contrary, the Egyptian Penal Code (Law 58/1937) contains an entire chapter on combating terrorism, titled “Felonies and Misdemeanors Harmful to the Government from Within,” which provides for deterrent penalties to limit terrorist crimes. Similarly, the emergency law (Law 162/1958) outlines the measures to be taken to address exceptional circumstances facing the country. Accordingly, there was no need to enact the aforementioned laws with such haste, which has resulted in constitutionally flawed provisions as well as statutory duplication.

The legal characterization of terrorism in national legislation requires a legal definition adopted by the legislature that specifies the elements of the crime in accordance with the principle of the legality of offenses and penalties, while adhering to the constitutional framework for criminalization and punishment, which is defined by necessity and proportionality.

The counterterrorism law adopts an expansive definition of the concept of a terrorist act, using imprecise and ambiguous phrasing that is open to multiple interpretations—“public disorder,” “harming national unity and social peace,” “damaging the environment”—as well as terms that do not specify the material element of the crime (“preventing,” “obstructing”). This is flatly inconsistent with the principle of the legality of offenses and penalties and the presumption of innocence, both fundamental to personal freedom. Penal statutes require precise, unequivocal wording to eliminate any doubt about their constitutionality.<sup>39</sup>

The SCC has affirmed that penal provisions must not contain vague language, but must be clear, precise, and unambiguous to ensure the principle of the legality of penalties

The legislator must always strike a delicate balance between, on one hand, the interest of society and the preservation of its security and stability and, on the other, the liberties and rights of individuals. It is also established that penal provisions must be drafted clearly and precisely, leaving no room for obscurity or ambiguity. These provisions should not be traps or snares set by the legislator, hoping with their breadth or subtlety to catch those who fall in them or set a foot wrong. They are safeguards whose purpose is to ensure that those addressed by penal provisions are fully aware of their true nature, so that their conduct is not contrary to them, but rather consistent with and in compliance with them.<sup>40</sup>

Law 8/2015 on terrorist entities is the most serious prop for this type of legal repression. Lists of designated terrorist entities are compiled by the Public Prosecution in cooperation with security agencies, either based on investigations or following final criminal judgments against those designated. The public prosecutor then submits a request for inclusion to a specialized criminal circuit at the Cairo Court of Appeal, sitting in chambers.

The specialized circuit rules on the request within seven days of its submission, without notifying the designated individual or enabling them to present a defense. A designation decision is valid for a period of five years, renewable at the request of the Public Prosecution. The decision is published in the Official Gazette, whereupon it has automatic, immediate effects: the individual is deprived of their passport, their assets are frozen, and they are barred from holding public office or participating in politics.

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<sup>39</sup> Article 2 of Law 94/2015.

<sup>40</sup> SCC, case no. 13/37JY, session of June 3, 2017.

Inclusion on the lists is also used to justify extradition requests and international prosecution. The law provides for no effective mechanism to appeal these decisions, except for an appeal filed with the Court of Cassation within sixty days of the designation, after the consequences have already taken effect.<sup>41</sup>

A designation decision has several consequences, set forth in Article 7 of the law, particularly for individuals, among them inclusion on travel ban and arrival watch lists; the revocation or cancellation of passports, or the denial of a new passport or renewal; the loss of the status of good character and reputation, which is necessary to hold public, parliamentary, or local positions; and asset freezes. These and other consequences erode the status of the individual residing abroad. Perhaps the most serious consequence stipulated by the law lies in the use of these decisions to coordinate with foreign countries for the extradition of individuals and the transfer of convicted persons. Other countries are also notified of these designation decisions pursuant to judicial cooperation agreements with Egypt.<sup>42</sup>

Constitutionally, absentia trials and designation decisions constitute a grave violation of the requirements of a fair trial, foremost among them the right to litigation and the right to defense. The Court of Cassation has consistently ruled that trials in absentia lack legal validity if the fundamental guarantees of confrontation and defense are not observed. This is not true of these political cases, in which hundreds of individuals, many residing abroad, are sentenced without regard for their ability to defend themselves and without protecting their right to a fair trial. Moreover, designation decisions are based chiefly on security investigation reports, which are unsupported by any material evidence or judicial inquiry and are conducted without notifying the individual concerned or guaranteeing their right to a defense. While the law allows these decisions to be contested, in practice, the Court of Cassation rarely accepts or considers such appeals, thus completely disregarding the principle of the presumption of innocence enshrined in Article 96 of the constitution, which states that the accused is innocent until proven guilty in a fair and legal trial that guarantees the right of defense.

Sentences issued in absentia in Egypt contravene Article 14 of the ICCPR, which obligates states to guarantee the right of every accused person to a fair and public trial, which presupposes the principles of confrontation, defense, and appearance before a judge. In practice, many absentia trials are conducted without notifying the accused and without guarantees of legal representation or a defense. After the fact, the defendant cannot appeal the judgment because they would be immediately arrested upon their return to Egypt.

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41 Articles 2–7 of Law 8/2015.

42 Article 9 of Law 8/2015.

Additionally, inclusion on terrorism lists absent a fair trial or a fully formed judicial ruling is a direct violation of Article 15 of the ICCPR, which requires a clear legal definition of offenses and penalties and prohibits the criminalization of acts based on political or vague terms. These rulings and designations are used to support extradition requests to countries of residence, often through the issuance of Interpol Red Notices or bilateral requests based on international or regional agreements. This contravenes the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture, which obligates states not to extradite any person to a country where they are likely to be subjected to torture or an unfair trial.

## Security Cooperation Tools

Regional and international security cooperation mechanisms are a key tool used by the Egyptian regime to extend its repression beyond the country's borders. In recent years, the authorities have increasingly used Interpol Red Notices and decisions of the AIMC to justify the security and legal pursuit of political dissidents and human rights activists residing abroad.

## Interpol

The International Criminal Police Organization, known as Interpol, is an international system for the exchange of information among criminal police forces to combat transnational organized crime. Interpol's constitution bars it from intervening in matters of a political, military, religious, or racial nature,<sup>43</sup> but Egyptian authorities have issued Red Notices for the extradition of individuals relying on terrorism designation decisions, without mentioning the political nature of the cases. Red Notices have been issued in hundreds of politically motivated cases, based on sham criminal charges such as “incitement to overthrow the regime,” “joining a terrorist group,” or “harming national security”—charges that are political in essence, though phrased in criminal terms.

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<sup>43</sup> Article 3 of the constitution of Interpol.

International organizations have documented numerous cases of Egyptian dissidents who were detained in foreign countries pursuant to Red Notices, only to be released after legal reviews by the authorities of those countries, who found the requests to be politically motivated and ascertained that the Egyptian judicial system does not provide fair trial guarantees. These incidents exemplify the gap between the political nature of the cases and Interpol’s administrative procedure for issuing notices, which at times fails to do a preliminary vetting for political motives.<sup>44</sup>

So-called Diffusions and Blue Notices are also used.<sup>45</sup> The latter are international requests to locate or obtain information about a person as part of a criminal investigation, whereas diffusions—which are more serious and more widely used in this context—enable member states to send direct requests to arrest or locate a person to specific states or to Interpol’s databases, often bypassing the rigorous pre-screening and vetting mechanisms required of Red Notices by Interpol’s General Secretariat. This procedural loophole allows the Egyptian authorities to quickly add the names of dissidents to international airport watch lists with minimal international oversight, making this technical mechanism an effective tool for silent repression and the restriction of freedom of movement.

## Arab Interior Ministers Council

To circumvent the complexities of Interpol’s statutes, the Egyptian authorities resort to the AIMC, which comprises the interior ministers of all Arab states under the umbrella of the Arab League, to facilitate the extradition of activists and political dissidents between Arab countries. Member states, including Egypt, signed the 1998 Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, which provides for the exchange of information and arrest warrants among member states and facilitates the extradition of wanted persons. Despite its ostensibly coordinating purpose, the convention lacks a precise, objective definition of terrorism, and member states have absolute discretion in determining who is considered a terrorist. Egypt has exploited this ambiguity to include dozens of political dissidents and journalists on the so-called Arab terrorism or wanted lists.<sup>46</sup>

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44 Michelle Estlund, “INTERPOL Red Notice, Egypt’s Red Notices and the Muslim Brotherhood: Part 3 of 3,” *Red Notice Law Journal*, September 20, 2022, <https://www.rednoticelawjournal.com/2022/09/interpol-red-notice-egypts-red-notices-and-the-muslim-brotherhood-part-3-of-3/>.

45 Interpol, “About Notices,” <https://www.interpol.int/en/How-we-work/Notices/About-Notices>.

46 MENA Rights Group, “The AIMC Must End Its Role in Transnational Repression, Say NGOs,” February 17, 2025, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/aimc-must-end-its-role-transnational-repression-say-ngos>.

Article 41 of the Riyadh Arab Agreement for Judicial Cooperation explicitly prohibits the extradition of individuals for politically motivated crimes, but in the absence of an effective mechanism to prevent the abuse of its provisions, the agreement has become a ready tool that enables Arab states to extradite individuals wanted in political cases without adhering to international human rights standards, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in Article 3 of the UN Convention Against Torture, which states that individuals should not be extradited to a country where they may face torture.<sup>47</sup>

The core problem is that international criminal cooperation, whether through Interpol or the AIMC, assumes an impartial judiciary and a justice system that adheres to fair trial standards. This is precisely what the Egyptian judicial and legislative system lacks. In this context, any arrest or extradition requests issued by the regime are automatically suspect and constitute a flagrant violation of the rights of individuals prosecuted for political reasons.

## **Surveillance, hacking, and media defamation as tools of transnational repression**

In the context of transnational repression, violations are not limited to official legal tools, such as prosecution or terrorism designations, but extend to unofficial and unlawful practices that have even graver implications for privacy and personal safety. Foremost among these practices are field surveillance, digital surveillance, hacking, espionage, and orchestrated media defamation. These operate as parallel mechanisms to legal repression, but rely on modern technology and media with the goal of breaking down victims psychologically, dismantling their legal support structures, and undermining their sense of security in exile.

Through its electronic and media arms, the Egyptian security apparatus seeks to expand the climate of police repression beyond the country's geographical borders. It does so by hacking the phones of dissidents using sophisticated spyware, monitoring their online activities, tracking their movements on the ground, secretly filming them in their homes or public spaces, and then using all of this in smear campaigns managed by state-affiliated media platforms. These practices are not isolated incidents, but rather part of a holistic strategy to exert total control over dissidents, even after they have left the country.

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<sup>47</sup> Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "The AIMC Must End Its Role in Transnational Repression, Say NGOs," February 17, 2025, <https://cihrs.org/the-aimc-must-end-its-role-in-transnational-repression-say-ngos/?lang=en>.

Importantly, this type of repression lies largely beyond the reach of any legal process and accountability, operating in gray areas outside the scope of traditional law and within technical security surveillance structures. Nevertheless, they constitute grave violations of several fundamental rights enshrined in national constitutions and international conventions, including the right to privacy, the right to personal security, the right to reputation, the right to be free from harassment, and freedom of expression and communication.

Article 57 of the 2014 Egyptian constitution explicitly guarantees the inviolability of private life and postal, telegraphic, electronic, telephone, and other communications, ensuring their confidentiality and prohibiting their confiscation, access, or monitoring except pursuant to a reasoned judicial order and for a defined period. Security agencies' practices of digital surveillance, hacking, and media defamation demonstrate a near-total disregard for constitutional guarantees and a systematic violation of the digital and personal rights of dissidents, particularly those abroad. This violation is carried out absent any legal basis or independent judicial oversight.

Field surveillance of dissidents is practiced by tracking them in their countries of residence, secretly filming them in public and private gatherings, and then leaking this material through state-affiliated media platforms or social media accounts. This contravenes Article 54 of the Egyptian constitution, which guarantees the right to personal freedom, and Article 99, which criminalizes attacks on personal freedom and the sanctity of private life, considering them crimes not subject to a statute of limitations and mandating compensation for victims.

Law 175/2018 on combating cybercrimes<sup>48</sup> contains provisions prohibiting unauthorized access to data or information systems, but the state does not enforce the law against those who carry out hacking and espionage operations. In fact, it appears that the chief perpetrators are state-affiliated agencies themselves, which turns these laws into tools that can be selectively deployed against citizens, rather than protect them.

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<sup>48</sup> Law 175/2018 on the suppression of cybercrimes, issued on August 14, 2018, published on August 14, 2018, in Egyptian Chronicles, no. 32(bis)(c); entered into force on August 15, 2018.

More serious are the coordinated smear campaigns broadcast from channels affiliated with or operating under the supervision of sovereign bodies, or through networks of fake or semi-official accounts on social media. These campaigns aim to morally discredit dissidents or delegitimize their political and legal status by fabricating recordings or publishing personal information, private photos, or fabricated communications without legal repercussions. Although Article 309 (bis) of the Egyptian Penal Code provides for the imprisonment of anyone who violates the privacy of citizens by eavesdropping, recording, or transmitting conversations held in a private place or via telephone, or by taking a photograph of any person in a private place—and specifically provides for the punishment of public officials who commit such acts by virtue of their position<sup>49</sup>—the authorities take no action against these media outlets.

The conduct is a clear violation of Article 17 of the ICCPR, which prohibits any arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, personal life, family affairs, or correspondence, or attacks on one's reputation. This protection extends to online life and electronic communications. These practices also contravene the principles of international law regarding the protection of journalists and human rights defenders. The UN General Assembly, in Resolution 68/167 of 2013, affirmed that the right to privacy must extend to digital contexts and that states must refrain from unlawful digital surveillance or targeting individuals in exile or their places of residence. Human Rights Council Resolution 34/20 of 2017 also states that the unlawful electronic surveillance of human rights defenders constitutes a violation of the rights to freedom of expression and privacy, and must be investigated and its perpetrators punished.

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<sup>49</sup> Article 309(bis) of the Penal Code.

**Table 3. Statutes used to legalize transnational repression**

Type of repression	Statute
Denial of identity documents	Law 143/1994 on civil status, issued on June 7, 1994, and published in the Official Gazette on June 9, 1994, no. 23ff
Denial of consular services	Law 145/1982 on the diplomatic and consular corps, issued on June 21, 1982, and published in the Official Gazette on June 26, 1982, no. 25(bis)
Denial of a passport	Law 97/1959 on passports, issued on May 3, 1959, and published in the Official Gazette on May 16, 1959, no. 99; entered into force on May 16, 1959
Revocation of citizenship	Law 26/1975 on Egyptian citizenship, issued on May 21, 1975, and published in the Official Gazette on May 29, 1975, no. 22
Absentia trials	Code of Criminal Procedure (Law 150/1950), issued on September 3, 1950, and published in Egyptian Chronicles on October 15, 1951, no. 90; entered into force on November 14, 1951
Charge of publishing false news abroad Felonies harmful to government security from abroad	Penal Code (Law 58/1937), issued on July 31, 1937, and published in Egyptian Chronicles on August 5, 1937, no. 71; entered into force on October 15, 1937
Charge of terrorism	Law 94/2015 on the suppression of terrorism, issued on August 15, 2015, and published in the Official Gazette on August 15, 2015, no. 33(bis)
Inclusion on the terrorism lists	Law 8/2015 regulating the lists of terrorist entities, issued on February 17, 2015, and published in the Official Gazette on February 17, 2015, no. 7(bis)(g)
Hacking and surveillance	Law 75/2018 on the suppression of cybercrimes, issued on August 14, 2018, and published in the Official Gazette on August 14, 2018, no. 32(bis)(c); entered into force on August 15, 2018

## Tools of repression: Dismantling the state's transnational arsenal

In the Egyptian case, transnational repression is multi-pronged, with authorities employing an integrated system of tools that operate in tandem to place a total siege on their targets. Data collected for this report shows that these tools are not isolated incidents but rather a systematic policy. Consular repression and targeting of families are the most common practices, reported by over 60 percent of our survey participants, followed by direct threats and legal harassment and prosecution, which affected approximately 40 percent of respondents. This section analyzes this architecture through four key tools: legal repression, consular siege, punishment by proxy through targeting relatives within Egypt, and digital and physical targeting.



The concept of transnational repression has become increasingly established in human rights literature in recent years as a particular threat to freedom of expression and the sovereignty of countries hosting Egyptians abroad. Dozens of incidents are recorded annually around the world, with a notable escalation in 2024 and 2025, according to Human Rights Watch and Freedom House.<sup>50</sup> In the case of Egypt, transnational repression is multi-pronged. Authorities employ legal and procedural tools to legally stigmatize critics abroad by adding their names to arbitrary terrorism lists, charging them in politically motivated cases, and handing down judgments in absentia after show trials. These judgments are later invoked by host countries to restrict the movement and freedom of victims outside Egypt.

<sup>50</sup> Freedom House, “New Data: Mass Incidents Mark Dramatic Year of Transnational Repression, as 23 Governments Silence Exiles,” February 6, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-data-mass-incidents-mark-dramatic-year-transnational-repression-23-governments-silence>.

During 2024–2025, in absentia judgments were issued against opposition figures and media professionals residing abroad. In some cases, defendants received lengthy sentences, up to and including life in prison, particularly human rights defenders and journalists because of their work.<sup>51</sup> Such judgments magnify the perception of legal danger and are invoked to detain them at foreign airports and to restrict their residency and asylum applications in host countries.

At the same time, terrorism lists, established by Law 8/2015, are used to broaden the scope of arbitrary targeting. The inclusion of activists and critics, both domestic and foreign, on terrorism lists triggers automatic consequences, including travel bans, visa restrictions, passport revocation or cancellation, and the freezing of assets allegedly linked to criminal activity. These measures are felt beyond national borders and directly affect the rights to documentation, freedom of movement, and employment. The law also permits judicial and informational cooperation with foreign authorities, further reinforcing the transnational nature of these measures.<sup>52</sup>

Subsequent human rights reviews reveal the breadth and arbitrary nature of these lists. For example, in November 2024, 716 names were removed from one list after years of inclusion, further raising concerns about the criteria for inclusion and the fairness of the process.<sup>53</sup>

The second prong used by the Egyptian authorities is consular and administrative. They empower diplomatic missions abroad to obstruct and deny consular services and the issuance of essential documents for journalists, activists, human rights defenders, and government critics. These documents include passports, national identity cards, birth certificates for newborns, and other official documents. The authorities withhold these documents absent written orders or any legal justification. Reports by human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, based on interviews with dozens of activists in Turkey, Germany, Malaysia, Qatar, and elsewhere, have documented these violations.<sup>54</sup> Such practices may render Egyptians abroad stateless and exacerbate their legal and social precariousness in their host countries.

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51 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Egypt Sentences Detained Journalist to 25 Years; Accused of Threatening 2nd Journalist,” November 13, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/11/egypt-sentences-detained-journalist-to-25-years-accused-of-threatening-2nd-journalist/>.

52 Law 8/2015.






53 Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, “Removal of Citizens from Terror Lists Is Positive, But Arbitrary Designations Are Product of Poisonous Tree,” November 2024, <https://eipr.org/en/press/2024/11/removal-citizens-terror-lists-positive-arbitrary-designations-are-product-poisonous>.

54 Human Rights Watch, “Egypt: Dissidents Abroad Denied Identity Documents,” March 13, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/13/egypt-dissidents-abroad-denied-identity-documents>.

At the regional level, the authorities are increasingly relying on Arab security cooperation channels, particularly the AIMC, to exchange lists of wanted individuals without providing legal evidence or enforceable court rulings. This facilitates the deportation of Egyptians abroad for political reasons, a practice highlighted by international human rights organizations as cooperation grows among Middle Eastern and North African governments to carry out this type of transnational repression.

More recently, the authorities have weaponized Egyptian diplomatic missions to pressure activists outside embassies and consulates abroad.<sup>55</sup> These tactics are complemented by digital and media tools that tarnish the image of victims and justify subsequent legal actions. At times, diplomatic missions themselves are weaponized to pressure and harass activists outside their own premises. Data from the survey and database shows that the Egyptian authorities employ a variety of methods of transnational repression, ranging from legal and administrative measures to direct threats and the targeting of families. Table 4 outlines the most significant types of violations reported in the survey and database.

**Table 4**

Type of violation		No. of times reported in the survey	% of respondents who reported it	No. of cases in the database
	Denial of identity documents	26	76.5	33
	Targeting of family in Egypt	25	73.5	6
	Denial of consular services	24	70.6	3
	Absentia trials	14	41.2	18
	Surveillance or hacking	10	29.4	-
	Inclusion on terrorism lists	8	23.5	29
	Defamation in media or online	8	23.5	1
	Attempted arrest or extradition	8	23.5	12
	Direct threat (phone, visit, letter)	17	50	4

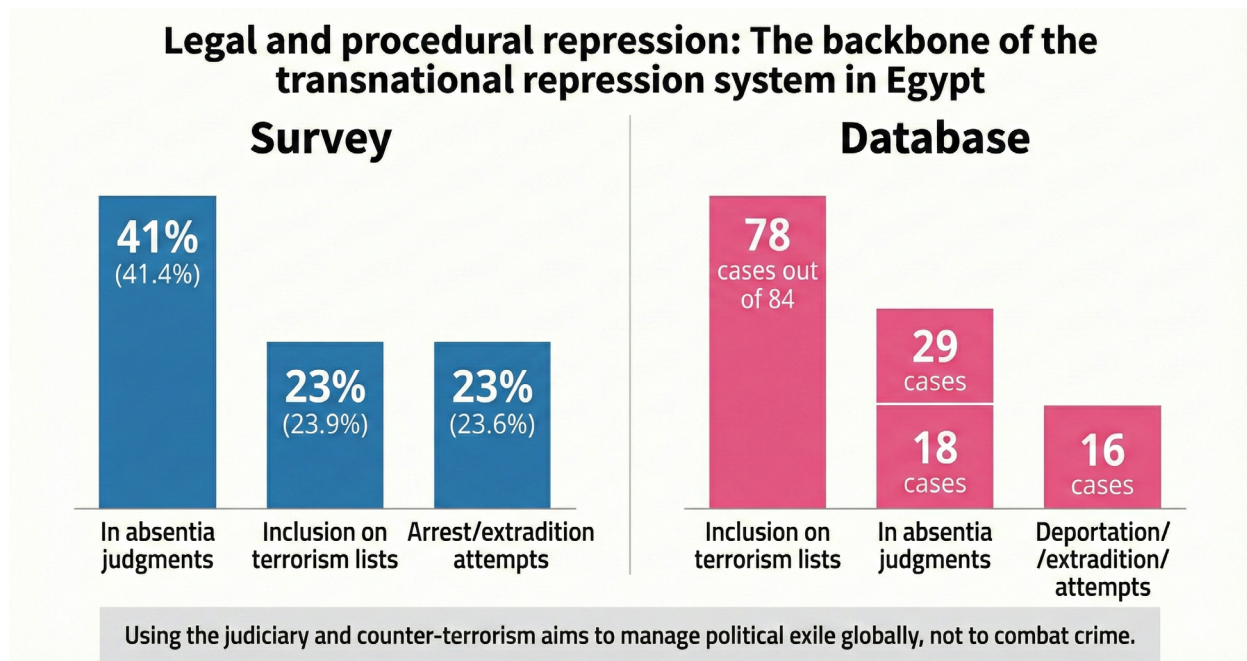
<sup>55</sup> FairSquare, “Egypt Must End Weaponisation of Diplomatic Missions,” September 8, 2025, <https://fairsq.org/egypt-must-end-weaponisation-of-diplomatic-missions>.

## Legal and procedural repression

This type of repression transforms seemingly legal tools into instruments of pressure whose effects extend beyond national borders. The goal is not merely to punish a specific individual, but to manufacture a file that follows the target when obtaining visas and residency permits, coming and going in airports, and interfacing with official bodies in their host country and around the world.

Data from the survey and database show that legal and procedural repression forms the backbone of Egypt's system of transnational repression. In the survey, some 41 percent of respondents reported receiving in absentia judgments, while 23 percent reported being placed on terrorism lists and 23 percent reported arrest or extradition attempts outside Egypt related to these cases.

In the database, 78 of 84 cases fall in the category of legal and procedural repression, including 29 instances of inclusion on terrorism lists, 18 cases of in absentia judgments, and approximately 16 cases of deportation and extradition, or attempts thereof. These figures demonstrate that the use of courts and counterterrorism statutes is primarily aimed at managing Egyptian political exiles around the world, rather than controlling or combating crime as one might expect.



## Terrorism lists

The Egyptian authorities have used lists of terrorist individuals and entities as a key tool to prosecute dissidents abroad and criminalize their activities from afar. The designation triggers a wide array of measures, among them asset freezes or the closure of bank accounts, the disruption of business transactions, the obstruction of travel and visa issuance, and the denial of access to essential documents and consular services. Security vetting systems at banks, companies, and diplomatic missions in host countries are also informed when an individual is included on the list.



Bassem, an Egyptian journalist living in Turkey since 2019, recounts that he was first named in a political case in 2021 on charges of joining a terrorist group and spreading false news and then in 2022 placed on the designated terrorist list. Since then, he has been unable to renew his passport or extend his tourist visa in Turkey. In 2024, he went to the Egyptian consulate in Istanbul to renew his passport, but diplomats who knew him because of his journalism and political activism told him outright that he would receive no document unless he returned to Egypt.

“I was asked to fill out a security query form to be sent to Egypt, and the employee told me they would get back to me within 48 hours about whether I could renew my passport,” Bassem says. “Months later, the embassy contacted me to inform me that my passport renewal had been denied and that I would only be able to obtain a one-time travel document allowing me to return to Egypt to complete my paperwork there.” The consulate provided no written reason for the rejection, with staff simply stating that the matter was “under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior and the security services.” Since Turkish authorities require a valid passport to renew a tourist residence, Bassem lost his residency when his passport expired in 2024. He was only able to regain a modicum of stability in the fall of 2025 when he received a humanitarian residency permit with restrictions on his movement, work, and travel.



In another case, Ali, a journalist and businessman living in the UK, says that his inclusion on a terrorism list in 2017 was a turning point in his professional and personal life. Months after the decision, an international bank closed his accounts in Egypt. He recounts: “The employee in charge of my account told me that the bank’s security check found my name had appeared in an article published on the website of a pro-government, online Egyptian newspaper, which triggered the closure of my accounts and a decision to end all dealings with me.” The impact did not stop at Egypt’s borders. Ali says that his US visa was revoked, apparently after a routine security check by the US State Department found that he had been included on Egypt’s terrorism list.

These designations do not affect only the individual. Ali’s wife was also added to the list, delaying her and their three children’s permanent residency and subsequent British citizenship for three years without any clear justification other than the Egyptian security alert picked up by the authorities in London.

## Absentia trials and harsh sentences

Trials in absentia are another tool used by Egyptian authorities against activists abroad. Since 2013, hundreds of sentences have been issued in absentia against politicians, journalists, and activists who left the country after July 2013, many carrying long years of imprisonment and even death. These trials typically involve vague charges such as joining a banned group, spreading false news, or misusing social media, and they are often based on written security reports unsupported by sufficient material evidence.

The usual sequence of events begins with a public appearance, article, or media statement, after which a case is opened against the individual or their name is added to an existing case in Egypt. A judgment is then issued in absentia without enabling the defendants to attend or defend themselves. Even if the judgment is recorded only in the Official Gazette or court files, it has a very real effect, becoming a legal black mark that follows the individual wherever they go. Border officials question them about the case; employers hesitate to renew contracts after their names appear in security vetting systems; and applications for residency or citizenship in their country of asylum become a series of interviews and endless questions about their conviction.

Several dissidents in Egypt and abroad have been convicted in politically motivated cases of a similar nature. Activist Alaa Abdel Fattah and others were given heavy sentences, even though Alaa was already imprisoned when the case was heard, while other defendants were living abroad. In another case, actors Amr Waked and Khaled Abol Naga were sentenced in absentia by military courts to eight and ten years in prison, respectively, on charges of spreading false news and insulting state institutions after criticizing the regime from abroad.

These convictions were issued absent the most basic guarantees of a fair trial and are often later used to justify other measures such as asset seizures and terrorist designations. The Egyptian authorities also turn to judicial cooperation mechanisms with other countries to obstruct the movement of people convicted in absentia or pressure authorities in their countries of residence to interrogate or harass them.

## Politically motivated investigations and ongoing security scrutiny

In addition to terrorism lists and absentia judgments, Egyptian authorities open protracted investigations and security enquiry against activists abroad, on the basis of which they issue opaque directives to institutions, banks, and administrative bodies both inside and outside Egypt. These investigations rely on the same broad set of accusations, but they do not necessarily culminate in a court judgment. Rather, they are open-ended security cases that are invoked whenever a person undergoes a background check or deals with a financial or commercial institution in another country.



In Ali's case, these confidential investigations affected his job prospects. He says he secured a job offer with a global pharmaceutical company, and after passing the technical and financial evaluation and obtaining the necessary technical approvals, the company informed him that he had failed the due diligence check. This check, he was told, revealed that he was wanted by Egyptian authorities, although no formal criminal charges had been filed against him and his name had not appeared in any published judgments.



Nader, a journalist and activist residing in a European country, had a similar experience. He had previously been arrested in Egypt, then released and allowed to travel. After his release, however, he was surprised to find he could not access his bank accounts in Egypt. When he contacted the bank, he was informed that he could not reactivate his accounts or update his information unless he personally visited the bank branch in Cairo, "pursuant to directives from the Ministry of Interior." This condition meant, in essence, that he had no access to his money without returning to Egypt, which would likely mean imprisonment. In this way, administrative procedures were turned into an effective tool of political pressure.

As is clear, politically motivated investigations do not remain within the confines of the prosecution office and courts in Egypt. They reverberate throughout banking and corporate vetting and compliance networks in foreign countries, hindering the movement of dissidents and their ability to work and live with dignity and keeping them in a state of constant peril even absent a final judicial ruling.

## International and regional police cooperation channels

### Interpol

The Egyptian government has sought to utilize international law enforcement channels, such as Interpol, to pursue dissidents globally by circulating Red Notices containing the criminal charges against them. As a result, several Egyptians abroad have been temporarily detained before the political nature of the cases became apparent to the host state authorities.

A Red Notice is Interpol's most powerful tool. It is a request to law enforcement agencies worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition or similar proceedings. It is not an international arrest warrant, but is based on an arrest warrant or court order issued by the authorities of a member state, which is reviewed by Interpol's General Secretariat before publication. While the use of Red Notices globally reached record levels in 2024—some 15,548 notices issued—this growth is partly offset by an increase in rejections and cancellations by Interpol, which reflects the persistent attempts by some countries to push politically motivated requests through international police channels.<sup>56</sup>

One of the most prominent cases during the period under review occurred in August 2023 when Bahraini authorities arrested two Egyptian activists residing in the country pursuant to Egyptian arrest warrants circulated through Interpol.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Red Notice Monitor, "A Numbers' Game Part 2: The Numbers Keep Growing," <https://rednoticemonitor.com/a-numbers-game-part-2-the-numbers-keep-growing>.

<sup>57</sup> Egyptian Front for Human Rights, "al-Jabha al-Misriya li-Huquq al-Insan Tu'arrib 'an Qalaqaha min Ihtimaliyat Tarhil Misriyin Mu'aridin Mawqufin fi Dawla al-Bahrayn," August 2, 2023, <https://egyptianfront.org/ar/2023/08/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%82/>.

Mohammed Mahmoud Agez and Mohammed al-Iraqi Saad Hassanein had both been sentenced in absentia in Egypt on politically motivated charges—one to 15 years in prison and the other to life imprisonment—and were detained pending extradition. Despite appeals from human rights organizations, Bahrain handed them over to Cairo, where they faced additional charges of leading a terrorist group. According to their lawyer, who spoke to the Egyptian Front for Human Rights, al-Iraqi and Agez were not brought before any investigative body, and their deportation was based on a local Interpol warrant issued by Egypt for their extradition due to pending cases in Egypt. In previous years, human rights organizations have suspected that Egypt has used Interpol warrants to request the arrest and extradition of Egyptians in various countries. In April 2019, Malaysian authorities arrested six Egyptians before deporting them to Cairo in ambiguous circumstances after holding them incommunicado for weeks.<sup>58</sup>

In January of the same year, Turkish authorities arrested Egyptian opposition figure Mohammed Abd al-Hafiz, whom the Egyptian authorities accused of involvement in the assassination of Public Prosecutor Hisham Barakat in the summer of 2015. He was extradited to Egypt, where he was disappeared for weeks before reappearing in a severely debilitated state before a judge for a retrial, having previously been sentenced in absentia to death.<sup>59</sup>

Another example is the attempted arrest of Dr. Mohammed Mahsub, a former minister residing in Europe, in the summer of 2018. Italian police detained him for several hours at Egypt's request before releasing him following a solidarity campaign and political pressure to prevent his extradition. Authorities in Germany, Austria, and Turkey have also detained Egyptian activists for short periods in recent years based on Egyptian Red Notices, but most were released after the political nature of their cases was established.

It is likely that Egyptian authorities are abusing other international police tools against Egyptian activists and dissidents. This includes the misuse of Blue Notices, which are requests to locate or collect information about an individual, and Diffusions, which are police requests sent directly between countries for the arrest or tracking of individuals. Diffusions represent a serious loophole because they are less formal and typically bypass the rigorous pre-screening procedures required for Red Notices by Interpol's General Secretariat.

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58 Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Deported Dissidents Missing," April 4, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/04/egypt-deported-dissidents-missing>.

59 Ibid.

The Egyptian government exploits this loophole to silence its opponents abroad by bringing political cases and then converting them into Blue Notices to facilitate the arrest of activists in exile. This is combined with the use of parallel regional channels, such as the AIMC, creating confusion for third-country authorities and increasing the risk of arbitrary extradition and deportation. Egypt has successfully used Interpol to extradite individuals it considers dangerous dissidents from countries with more flexible human rights standards. According to Freedom House, as of late 2023, at least ten Egyptian activists had been forcibly returned from various countries, including Sudan, Jordan, Malaysia, and Turkey, thanks to direct security coordination or through Interpol channels.

## The Arab Interior Ministers Council

The AIMC plays a pivotal role in the regional architecture of transnational repression. A ministerial body of the Arab League based in Tunis, the council coordinates among Arab interior ministries to disseminate arrest warrants and extradition notices, drawing on legal frameworks such as the Riyadh Arab Convention for Judicial Cooperation and the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism. The AIMC serves as a parallel, low-transparency regional channel for the dissemination of notices and the exchange of security data.



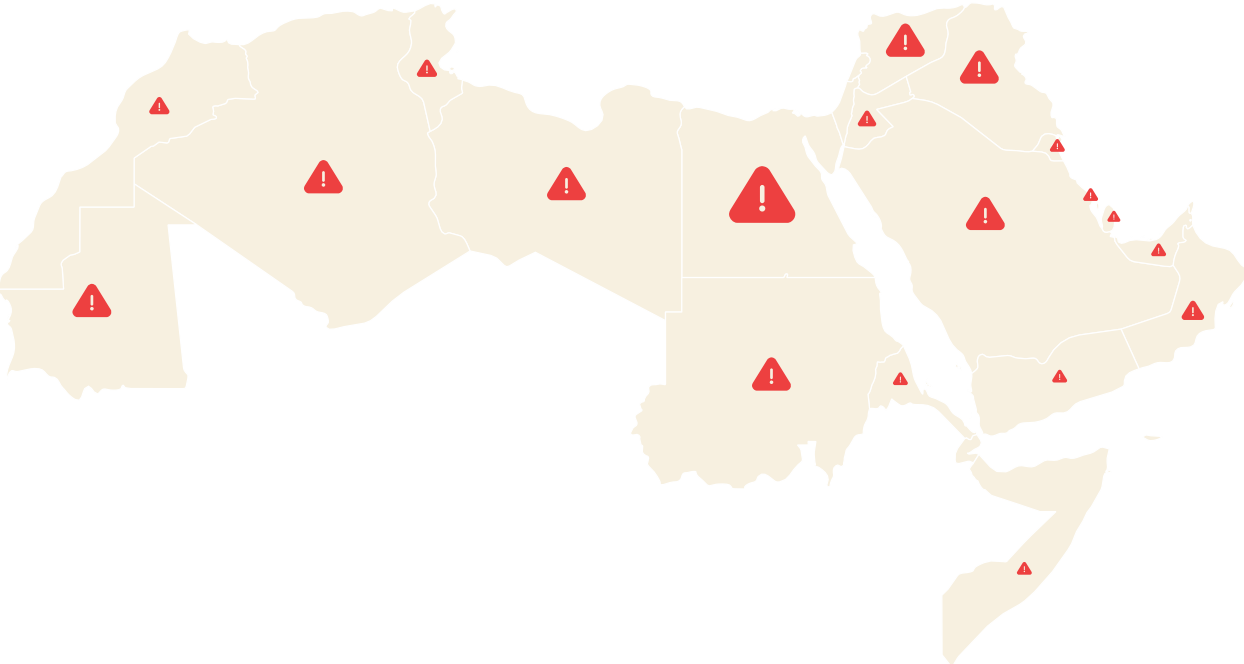
Unlike Interpol, the AIMC lacks a transparent mechanism for individual appeals or an independent review body to vet requests for political bias. It maintains internal databases, broadcasts, and bulletins that circulate rapidly among member states, facilitating the arrest of activists in exile and creating serious risks that threaten the principle of non-refoulement. Memorandums of understanding between Interpol and the AIMC also facilitate the technical exchange of information, increasing the likelihood of integrated regional and international channels and thereby amplifying their enforcement impact, even when Interpol rejects a request on human rights grounds. These structural loopholes have been documented by MENA Rights Group in a detailed analysis of AIMC's structure, tools, and relationship with Interpol.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> MENA Rights Group, "Understanding the Arab Interior Ministers' Council and Its Role in Transnational Repression," August 17, 2023, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/aimc>.

Egyptian authorities and their allies exploit the loopholes in Arab judicial cooperation to circumvent Interpol oversight procedures. Although Article 41 of the Riyadh Arab Agreement for Judicial Cooperation prohibits extradition for politically motivated crimes, some states evade this requirement by classifying charges related to peaceful opposition as terrorism or state security offenses. Arrest warrants issued by the AIMC have become the ideal tool for political persecution, as individuals cannot even determine if they are on these arrest warrants or challenge their extradition.<sup>61</sup>

Egyptian activists have warned that no Arab country is safe for them anymore; even transiting through or traveling to an Arab country now carries the risk of immediate arrest. There are flagrant examples of this from several Arab countries, among them Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon. On November 3, 2024, Moroccan authorities arrested Egyptian physician Abd al-Baset Imam, a former professor at al-Azhar University’s Faculty of Medicine and a Turkish citizen, upon his arrival at the Casablanca airport on a tourist visit. His arrest was based on a warrant issued by Egyptian authorities through regional security cooperation channels, likely via the AIMC, seeking his extradition on politically motivated charges.



61 Inès Osman, “Op-ed: After Qaradawi Case, No Arab League State Is Safe for Dissidents,” MENA Rights Group, January 21, 2025, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/op-ed-after-qaradawi-case-no-arab-league-state-safe-dissidents>.

Imam, a 62-year-old who suffers from hypertension, was sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment in Egypt on politically motivated charges, according to his family, who also reported that his extradition would pose an imminent threat to his life due to the likelihood of torture or ill-treatment. The case raised widespread concerns among human rights organizations, which urged Morocco not to extradite him, citing Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture that obligates state parties not to extradite anyone to a country where they are likely to face torture.

Imam was released in December after nearly six weeks of detention without being extradited to Egypt. He was able to return to Turkey thanks to diplomatic intervention and intense human rights pressure. His case clearly demonstrates the danger of the misuse of regional arrest warrants to target Egyptian activists abroad and underscores the crucial role of international solidarity and human rights advocacy in preventing deportation.

In February 2025, 15 human rights organizations called on the AIMC to stop facilitating arbitrary extraditions and bring its legal framework into alignment with international human rights law.<sup>62</sup> In its periodic reports, Freedom House has discussed how governments in the Middle East and North Africa have strengthened their cooperation to carry out transnational repression.

The problem is not limited to Egypt. In May 2023, Jordan extradited prominent Emirati dissident Khalaf al-Romaithi to Abu Dhabi absent any transparent judicial process. Amman justified its action by citing an Interpol request, but the warrant likely came through the AIMC, not Interpol. Al-Romaithi has been forcibly disappeared since his arrival in the UAE. In February 2023, Morocco arrested Saudi citizen Hassan al-Rabi and swiftly extradited him to Riyadh at the request of the AIMC, despite an urgent appeal from the UN Committee Against Torture to suspend his extradition. These cases and others demonstrate that Arab security services are cooperating more closely than ever to pursue wanted individuals, bypassing traditional judicial channels.

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62 Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) “The AIMC Must End Its Role in Transnational Repression.”

## Exemplary cases

**Abdul Rahman Yusuf:** Lebanese authorities arrested the Egyptian poet and Turkish citizen Abd al-Rahman Yusuf al-Qaradawi on December 28, 2024, and extradited him to the UAE on January 8, 2025, in an unprecedented move based on accusations related to freedom of opinion and expression. International organizations called for a halt to his deportation and demanded information about his whereabouts. News reports documented the Lebanese government's agreement to the extradition despite the risk of repression, showing the willingness of some states to disregard their international obligations to appease regional allies.<sup>63</sup>



**Sherif Osman:** An Egyptian-American citizen, Osman was arrested by the Emirati authorities in Dubai in November 2022 before being released some two months later without being extradited to Egypt. Human rights organizations and media outlets documented the case. Osman was initially informed that his arrest was based on an Interpol notice, but it later emerged that it was based on a warrant from the AIMC.<sup>64</sup> Osman's case demonstrates that Western citizenship may offer relative immunity from repression; the UAE backed down from extraditing him to Egypt under international pressure. But in most other cases, particularly for citizens of countries in the region, pressure rarely works quickly enough, and extradition occurs before the voice of human rights is heard.



<sup>63</sup> Amnesty International, "Lebanon: Poet Abdul Rahman Al-Qaradawi must not be extradited to Egypt or UAE," January 7, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/01/lebanon-poet-abdul-rahman-al-qaradawi-must-not-be-extradited-to-egypt-or-uae>.

<sup>64</sup> Reuters, "Fiance of U.S. Citizen Detained in UAE Fears He Will Be Extradited to Egypt," December 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/fiance-us-citizen-detained-uae-fears-he-will-be-extradited-egypt-2022-12-04>.

## Consular blockade: weaponizing documents and consular services

Aside from victims who have been added to the terrorist lists or charged in politically motivated criminal cases for alleged membership in a terrorist group or the dissemination of false news, Egyptian diplomatic and security authorities use consular services to punish activists abroad even when they lack a basis under Egyptian law, such as inclusion on terrorist lists, prosecution in politically motivated cases, or an absentia conviction.

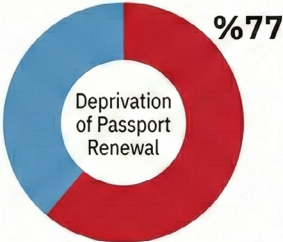
Using this tool, Egyptian consulates abroad obstruct or deny passport renewals, disregard applications for national ID cards and birth and marriage certificates, and refuse to certify documents. Often no written, appealable decision is issued.

The result is administrative and legal paralysis for Egyptians in their countries of residence: residency applications are suspended; bank accounts are affected; and travel within and outside the country becomes fraught with risk. At times, a “solution” is proposed: return to Egypt to complete a simple review. In fact, this exposes individuals to risks they cannot assess or control.

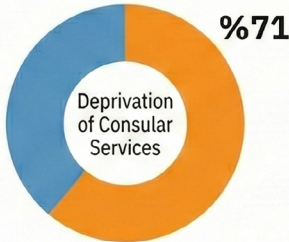


In the survey, 26 of 34 participants (some 77 percent) reported being denied official documents, and 24 (about 71 percent) reported being denied consular services. Testimonies indicate that several preschool children, despite being born to Egyptian parents, lack any Egyptian documentation because consulates refuse to issue birth certificates or passports.

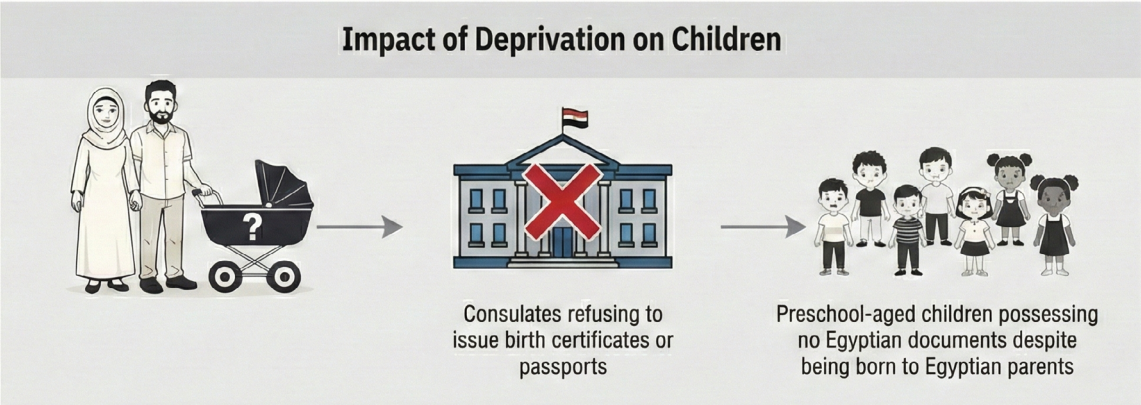
### Survey Results: Deprivation of Identification Documents and Consular Services



26 out of 34 people (about 77%) reported being subjected to this



24 out of 34 people (about 71%) reported being subjected to this



The database contains at least four cases of direct consular harassment (refusal to issue documents or renew or issue passports), along with one documented case of the revocation of citizenship and a complete severing of legal ties with the state. These indicators demonstrate that the denial of consular services is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a systematic policy designed to create legal precarity for Egyptians abroad and their families.

These figures reflect the use of documents as a tool of silent collective punishment targeting activists and their families, preventing them from living with dignity or achieving stable legal status.



Faisal, an Egyptian journalist living abroad, says he officially left Egypt in 2019 after receiving his exemption from military service and his university degree; he was not under a travel ban at the time. His public activism began in 2019–2020, when he began speaking about letters from detainees and participating in television coverage of protests. Faisal connects his activism to the pressure his family began to face inside Egypt, which culminated in a raid on their home in Alexandria. As a result, his father, who is in his late 50s, had to flee the country temporarily.

After Faisal’s father returned to Egypt and attempted to obtain an official document from a police station, he was arrested and detained for nearly 20 days without being brought before a prosecutor. The focus of the interrogation was Faisal’s activities abroad. Indeed, from the second day onward, the father was addressed as “Abu Faisal” (Faisal’s father) and asked to discuss what “his son is doing abroad,” specifically Faisal’s work with opposition media outlets. The father was informed that his son had been convicted in absentia and, under pressure, he was forced to disavow his son’s activities. He was then ordered to report to the police station approximately every two weeks.

At the same time, Faisal faced consular harassment at the Egyptian embassy in his country of residence. He was asked to fill out a “security inquiry” form to renew his passport, even though it was valid. His request was met with delays, and he was refused any documentation clarifying his status. Embassy officials told him that it all “came down from Egyptian security” and that he was being treated as if he were on the terrorism lists. Practically speaking, Faisal could not authorize political or legal powers of attorney, except to his mother, effectively leaving him without full consular services.

After appearing on a television program, his father was arrested again and disappeared for several days before it was revealed that he had been transferred to a prison. During the interrogation, he conveyed an indirect message to his son: “Give my warmest greetings to Faisal”—a clear indication that his arrest was punishment for the son’s activism abroad. The father himself did not engage in political or human rights activities. Faisal was then forced to seek assistance from international human rights organizations to document the case and lobby for his father’s release. This experience illustrates how consular harassment intersects with proxy punishment and the use of family as hostages to silence dissenting voices in exile.

According to the Egyptian Human Rights Forum’s database, an Egyptian citizen residing in Berlin since 2014, working as an engineer for a telecommunications company, stated that in August 2023 he applied to renew his passport, which had expired a year prior. After repeated follow-ups, he was told that his name was “not on the system” and that he had to return to Egypt. He received no written notification. He lost his permanent employment contract as a result because the renewal of residency in Germany requires a valid passport.



“My life became a legal quagmire,” he said. “I can’t open a new bank account or travel to business conferences. When I go to the consulate, they tell me: ‘The matter is with security.’”

In another case, an Egyptian-American university professor residing in New Jersey since 2012 applied for a power of attorney for his lawyer in Cairo, to enable the latter to appeal an absentia judgment against him. The consulate refused to authenticate the power of attorney without providing a written reason. The professor was later informed by phone that “the instructions from Cairo are not to deal with him.” He said that this refusal hindered his right to defend himself before the Egyptian courts.

The bureaucratic intransigence does not stop with the living, but extends even to the rights of the deceased and their families during their most painful moments. In April 2025, Dr. Essam Heggy, an Egyptian space scientist at NASA, faced severe bureaucratic hurdles at the Egyptian consulate in Los Angeles while attempting to obtain a power of attorney to finalize the procedures for transporting the body of his mother, who had passed away during a visit to him in the US. Consulate staff refused to complete his request, citing his expired passport and national ID card. The consul declined to meet with him to resolve the urgent humanitarian crisis, instead instructing him to send an email. Although the crisis was later resolved through the direct, exceptional intervention of the foreign minister, the incident reveals how political will can transform administrative rules meant to guard citizens' rights into instruments of psychological punishment, exacerbating the hardship of exiles and turning their natural right to bury their loved ones into a battle requiring high-level intervention.

Similarly, a digital media activist residing in London stated in the survey that she was unable to register her newborn at the Egyptian consulate due to a “delayed security response,” despite all her documents being in order. This left her child without an Egyptian national ID number, meaning the loss of his right to citizenship.



“I was verbally told I was on a watch list and that I could register my son if I returned to Egypt in person, which is impossible,” she said.



Even worse is the case of Yosri, a human rights researcher. While living in the US in 2020, he was unable to register his marriage to a Saudi woman because the Egyptian consular authorities refused to issue a criminal background check for him to present to the Saudi authorities. This situation became more dire after the birth of his daughter, who was unable to obtain any Egyptian identification documents.

Bassem, the journalist residing in Turkey, also confirmed that he was unable to obtain a birth certificate for his son, who was born in Turkey. His wife was forced to use a one-time travel document to go to Egypt, where she endured months of government obstruction and refusal to issue a birth certificate for their son because of his father's journalistic and political activism.

Nader, the Egyptian activist and journalist residing in an EU country, said that the Egyptian consul in his host country's capital, in violation of consular and legal norms, demanded from his wife that Nader be present in person to complete the procedures for obtaining a travel document that would allow his wife (who is Egyptian) and their newborn daughter to travel to Egypt to obtain a birth certificate and passport. This could expose him to direct threats and potentially cost him his asylum status if he issued any document from the consulate.

The case of former judge Walid Sharabi exemplifies how political rivals, even those within state institutions, are purged and then prosecuted even in exile. Sharabi was targeted after the ouster of President Mohammed Morsi in 2013, when he was dismissed from the judiciary due to his outspoken political views and participation in the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in. After seeking refuge in Turkey, the prosecution against him continued.

In 2019, a Cairo criminal court sentenced him in absentia to seven years in prison on charges of unlawful gains, in addition to two years for failure to submit a financial disclosure statement. These judgments demonstrate how political dissidents are turned into corrupt figures or fugitives from justice in official and judicial discourse. His conviction did not remain confined to paperwork in Egypt, but had direct repercussions for his life in exile. He faced immense difficulties renewing his residency in Turkey and was barred from leaving the country, prompting him to stage a sit-in and hunger strike in October 2025 and appealing to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to intervene and resolve his predicament.

The database and survey are filled with other publicly reported incidents, such as that of journalist Salim Azzouz in Britain, who applied to renew his passport in July 2024 and received no response until it expired in February 2025. Similarly, researcher Saif al-Islam Eid in Qatar had his passport renewal application denied for the third time despite unofficial promises to resolve the matter, effectively rendering him a citizen without rights.

## Child and family victims

The children of dissidents are often as gravely affected by the consular blockade as their parents. Survey data reveals that several respondents have children, some as young as four, who lack any Egyptian documentation because consulates refuse to issue birth certificates or passports to them. One mother of a child born in Turkey said that her son “has no birth certificate and his name is not in the Egyptian system at all,” while another respondent indicated that authorities have denied his child any official documents since 2022.

This deprivation violates the right to nationality, as enshrined in Article 6 of the Egyptian constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the right to education. In many countries, school registration depends on the submission of valid documents and passports. In other cases, immigration authorities in the host country threaten to revoke the family’s permanent residency when their Egyptian passports expire and they cannot renew them, placing children at real risk of being cut off from education or deportation. Through these practices, the consular blockade becomes a systematic process of creating multi-generational legal precarity, affecting not only dissidents but also their innocent children, whose only fault is their parents’ political affiliation.

The policy of withholding documents and consular services undermines the right to legally form and dissolve a family. In many countries, the documentation of marriage, divorce, or child custody for Egyptians residing abroad depends on valid Egyptian documents (passport, national ID card, marriage or divorce certificate issued in Egypt, or powers of attorney authenticated by embassies and consulates). When consular missions refuse to provide these services for political reasons, families find themselves trapped in a legal vacuum, unable to register a new marriage, finalize an existing divorce, or amend child custody arrangements.

This situation opens the door to domestic violence as well. An abusive partner may exploit the impossibility of registering a divorce or enforcing custody rulings, using the other party’s need for documents or consular certifications as a means of blackmail and coercion. In particular, abused women effectively lose access to justice in Egypt or their country of residence when their documents are invalid or when the consulate refuses to authenticate powers of attorney necessary for litigation.

From this perspective, the consular blockade is inseparable from a broader system of gender-based violence. The denial of documents and services becomes not only an instrument of punishment, but a structure that perpetuates abusive relationships and prevents victims from accessing justice or rebuilding their family lives on a secure foundation.

## Digital and informational repression

This type of repression turns cyberspace into a fully integrated theater of operations encompassing surveillance, targeting through technology, the stigmatization of opponents through coordinated smear and disinformation campaigns, and the restriction or blocking of content, typically undertaken in close coordination with repressive legal and consular measures.<sup>65</sup>

Although surveillance, hacking, and media defamation are cited in the survey relatively infrequently—ten respondents reported experiencing surveillance or hacking, while eight reported some form of media and online defamation—an analysis of the qualitative cases in the database and reports from international organizations reveals that these tools operate in parallel to and complementing legal and consular repression. In several documented cases, media defamation campaigns or digital harassment preceded or accompanied prosecutions, turning media platforms and technological tools into unofficial enforcement arms of the Egyptian security apparatus abroad. It is worth noting here the lack of reporting mechanisms for this type of violation due to the difficulty of proving it or the fear of publicizing it. The database shows multiple instances in which digital targeting coincided with consular or procedural pressure, occurring within the same weeks. Research findings, victim testimonies, and documented information confirm that these tools are not merely an afterthought to transnational repression, but rather a structural component in the deterrence of dissidents abroad. Tactics range from phishing and hacking to mobilizing supportive accounts and coordinating with state-owned traditional media.

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<sup>65</sup> Freedom House, “The Digital Transnational Repression Toolkit, and Its Silencing Effects,” 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/digital-transnational-repression-toolkit-and-its-silencing-effects>.

## Technological targeting and surveillance with commercial spyware

Credible technical investigations confirm that Egyptian politicians and journalists have been targeted with sophisticated hacking attempts using commercial spyware. The Canadian organization Citizen Lab, headquartered at the University of Toronto, documented the targeting of opposition figure Ahmed Tantawi with malicious messages and links tied to Predator spyware after he announced his intention to run in the 2024 presidential elections. These attacks combined text messages and network injections.<sup>66</sup>

Although this incident occurred within a domestic electoral context, Tantawi was targeted while he was abroad, demonstrating the transnational applicability of the same commercial capabilities and tools against critics in exile. International media coverage has shown that state authorities or their proxies are responsible for this type of repression.<sup>67</sup>

The case of Ayman Nour, a former presidential candidate and one of the most prominent figures in the liberal opposition, reflects a significant evolution of the Egyptian state's repressive strategies. Under President Hosni Mubarak, repression relied on more traditional and direct methods. In 2005, Nour was arrested and imprisoned on charges widely described as politically motivated. His case at the time drew significant international pressure, particularly from the US and the European Parliament, which contributed to his temporary and later permanent release. Physical imprisonment was the chief tool used to neutralize him politically.



66 Citizen Lab, "Ahmed Eltantawy Targeted with Predator Spyware After Announcing Presidential Ambitions," September 22, 2023, <https://citizenlab.ca/2023/09/predator-in-the-wires-ahmed-eltantawy-targeted-with-predator-spyware-after-announcing-presidential-ambitions>.

67 Evan Hill and Joseph Menn, "Egyptian Opposition Figure Was Targeted with Predator Spyware, Apple Closes Gap Used in Attack," *The Washington Post*, September 23, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2023/09/23/predator-egypt-hack-spyware-iphone>.

Today, in his residence in Turkey, the tools of repression have become more sophisticated and covert. Instead of imprisonment, Nour has become the target of transnational digital surveillance. In December 2021, a report by Citizen Lab revealed that Ayman Nour's phone had been hacked with two spyware programs simultaneously: Pegasus, an Israeli program, and Predator, developed by a European company. A rare and complex case, this dual targeting indicates a determination to monitor one of the most prominent Egyptian dissidents abroad.

Many instances of digital surveillance begin with a seemingly innocuous message from someone claiming to be a journalist or researcher requesting an interview or inviting the target to a seminar. This is followed by a short link or attached file, which, when clicked would allow the device or account to be hacked. Also common are attempts to hijack accounts through access codes, repeated use of authentication methods, or requests for fake security confirmations.

Egyptian activists have had their devices searched at airports in Arab and Western countries and have been forced to unlock their phones or laptops for security officers in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and even Germany and the US, generating a pervasive sense that digital and real-world repression are converging. This type of targeting requires daily, debilitating effort from activists and human rights defenders, who must constantly change passwords, disconnect devices, and monitor login locations, while exacerbating their legitimate fear for the safety of their families and acquaintances.

The findings of a study by the European Parliament, published in June 2025, revealed that the Egyptian authorities rely on a vast surveillance system and the purchase of commercial spyware, including Pegasus. The study recommended enhancing readiness and response measures for defenders and those targeted outside their countries.<sup>68</sup> This conclusion demonstrates that the technological capability exists and that its impact is transnational, touching dissidents abroad or human rights defenders in Europe and elsewhere.

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<sup>68</sup> European Parliament, "Transnational Repression in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood," EXPO STU(2025)754475, February 2025, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2025/754475/EXPO\\_STU\(2025\)754475\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2025/754475/EXPO_STU(2025)754475_EN.pdf).

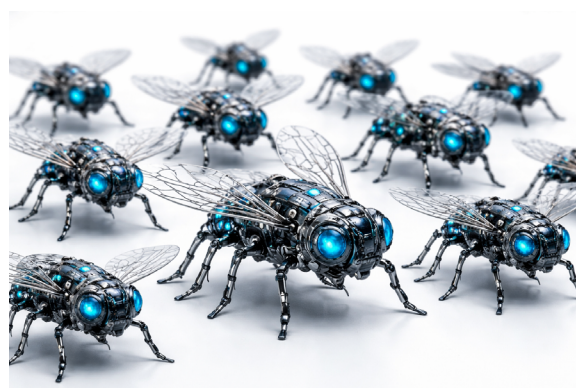
## Content control and restriction of access

The Egyptian authorities and their supporters rely on several common tactics to undercut the impact of critical content. Online patterns can be discerned in coordinated mass reporting, which leads to the deletion of posts or the closure of accounts. Malicious complaints have also been sent to hosting platforms, while fake websites and pages are created that impersonate individuals and mislead the public. Additionally, indirect pressure is applied through employers or universities in the country of residence via orchestrated smear campaigns, making the professional cost of public appearances high enough to silence the individual.

The fact that social media platforms maintain headquarters in Arab cities like Riyadh or Dubai makes many creators of human rights and political content, and even the accounts of human rights defenders and political activists, vulnerable to the scrutiny of regimes that support the Egyptian regime and attempt to suppress dissenting voices.

Investigations published by The New York Times indicate that Egypt and the UAE employ covert, organized social media campaigns to promote authoritarianism and bolster military rule in the region.

A 2019 story reveals that governments like those in Egypt and the UAE rely on specialized companies and groups to recruit individuals who create fake accounts to disseminate content that promotes the official narrative while attacking and discrediting political opponents. This is typically carried out by



producing targeted media content and designing online campaigns with specific messages, exploiting the lax oversight of these digital platforms. At times, the authorities collaborate with digital marketing firms linked to security or military entities.<sup>69</sup>

The campaign discussed in the story is part of a broader strategy to bolster the authoritarian regimes in Egypt and the UAE. Their efforts are not limited to the domestic sphere, but extend regionally to several Arab countries, targeting activists and critics of regimes both at home and abroad. Such campaigns create the illusion of widespread popular support for rulers' policies and use troll armies to silence dissenting voices and promote pro-regime rhetoric.

<sup>69</sup> Declan Walsh and Nada Rashwan, "We're at War': A Covert Social Media Campaign Boosts Military Rulers," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/06/world/middleeast/sudan-social-media.html>.

Nader, the journalist based in Europe, who founded a news website outside Egypt, said that his website was blocked in Egypt for publishing political analysis by Egyptian writers and covering events in Egypt outside the security pressures faced by independent media platforms in the country. In its 2020 report on digital repression, Freedom House spotlights these tools and the way they are used to silence critics, describing how authorities and their allies erect a wall of verbal abuse and cyber harassment to reduce the political cost of its subsequent actions.<sup>70</sup>

## Coordinated incitement and smear campaigns

Deploying friendly influencers and traditional media outlets, the authorities work to shape a narrative that is antagonistic to activists abroad. Activists are often accused of treason or terrorism, have old videos of their republished out of context, and are the target of unreliable or fabricated “leaks” about foreign funding. These campaigns go beyond mere character assassination. They serve as social and political cover for arbitrary investigations or a prelude to direct consular denials, or facilitate arrest in a third country. Female journalists and activists often face gender-based incitement that combines moral defamation with threats, amplifying the psychological impact and shrinking their support networks.

The European study cited earlier documented the targeting of journalist Basma Mostafa after she left Egypt, which entailed a series of incidents of transnational harassment and threats in Germany, Switzerland, and Kenya, coupled with digital attacks and gender-based abuse. Her case exemplifies how online incitement can be paired with on-the-ground targeting in the host country, thus magnifying the psychological and security costs.



Masoud, a human rights activist who has lived in the UK since 2020, said that he was subjected to orchestrated smear campaigns that coincided with the publication of human rights reports by the organization he runs, which documented various forms of violations in Egypt. Masoud, who was granted political asylum in Britain, said that the chorus of defamation from pro-government influencers in Egypt was loud and coordinated.



“One influencer close to the Egyptian regime posted a picture of my underage daughters on Facebook as part of the smear campaign,” he said.

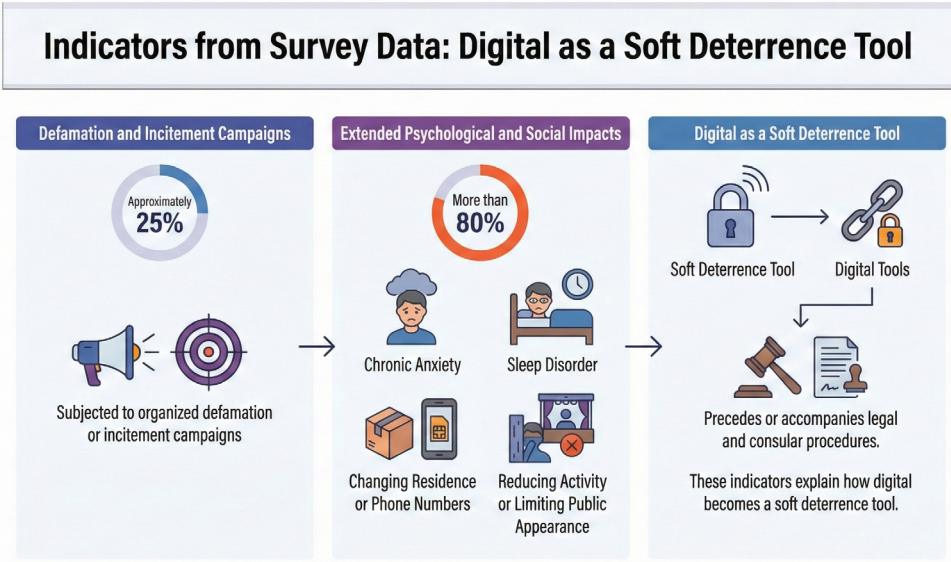
<sup>70</sup> Freedom House, “The Digital Transnational Repression Toolkit.”

In other cases, multiple factors overlap to facilitate transnational repression. Writer and activist Abdelrahman ElGendy, a former political prisoner who spent more than six years in Egyptian prisons, stands out as a sophisticated, indirect form of transnational repression. After his release from prison, he moved to the United States as a student and writer, where he continued his human rights activism and his writings critical of the Egyptian regime and supportive of the Palestinian cause.

His activity made him a target of Canary Mission, a US-based NGO that creates blacklists and dossiers on students, professors, and activists it deems anti-Israel. The inclusion of ElGendy’s name on the organization’s lists (doxxing) was not merely an online smear; it created a real, tangible threat of deportation. In the current political climate in the US, these lists may be used by immigration authorities as a pretext to revoke his visa or arrest him for deportation to Egypt, where he faces the risk of life imprisonment.

ElGendy’s case is a more complex form of repression in which the Egyptian state need not act directly. Instead, it exploits political contexts and domestic tensions in the host country, as well as the activities of non-state actors, to achieve its repressive goals. The activist is besieged not only by his own state but also by the laws and policies of the country to which he has fled. It is a different kind of repression by proxy, in which the Egyptian regime uses the systems of another state to punish its critics, making self-defense more difficult and the threat more insidious.

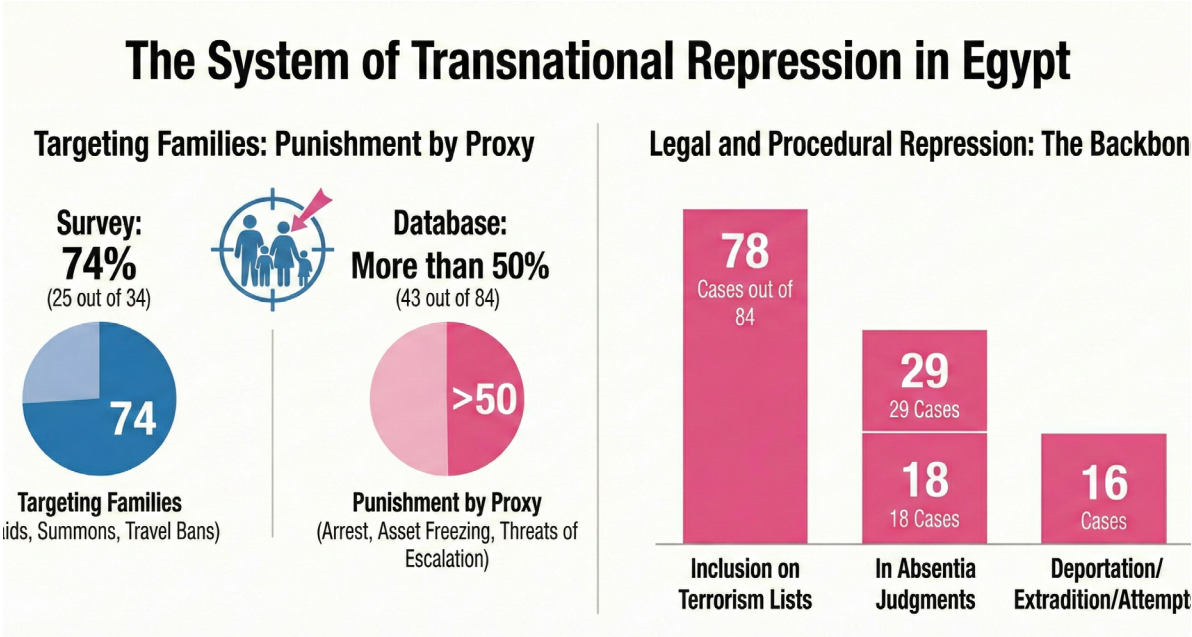
Indicators from the survey data: Some 25 percent of participants reported experiencing organized smear campaigns or incitement, while over 80 percent of the sample reported prolonged psychological and social effects, including chronic anxiety, sleep disorders, the need to change residences or phone numbers, and reduced activity or public appearances. This illustrates how the digital sphere is becoming a tool of soft deterrence that precedes or is coupled with legal and consular action.



Evidence shows that online defamation and incitement are often a prelude to transnational legal or security action, or consular action such as the denial of documents. For example, Sharif Osman faced a smear campaign because of his posts on social media platforms prior to his arrest in the UAE, where he was detained for 44 days and subjected to multiple abuses before being released and deported to the US.<sup>71</sup> This sequence illustrates the link between the digital sphere, regional security cooperation, and the disruption of daily life in exile.

## Proxy punishment and the targeting of families

The targeting of families is central to the abuses of transnational repression. In the survey, 25 respondents (some 74 percent) reported that family members inside Egypt had been harassed or targeted because of the respondents’ activism or opinions, in the form of security raids, summonses, or travel bans. In the database, more than half of the documented cases (about 43 of 84) involve some form of proxy punishment, ranging from arrest and pretrial detention to asset freezes and the constant threat of escalation. The targeting of families is clearly a key regime tool of transnational repression, serving as a means of instilling fear, severing family ties, and forcing dissidents into silence or compromises.



<sup>71</sup> Middle East Democracy Center, “In the Shadows of Authoritarianism,” April 17, 2023, <https://mideastdc.org/publication/in-the-shadows-of-authoritarianism>.

This tactic closes the circle of repression by targeting the families of activists inside Egypt, in a form of collective punishment designed to deplete their moral and material resources in exile and restrict their social networks in their host countries.

Recurrent tactics include detaining relatives, summoning them for questioning, banning them from travel, forcing them to make public statements against their relatives, and at times bringing criminal charges against them on flimsy pretexts. The aim is not to punish the family itself, but to underscore the high price that a person with a voice abroad must pay if they wish to continue their political, human rights, or media activism. Research and reports by the European Parliament and human rights organizations have documented this type of repression in the Egyptian context as a systematic practice, not isolated incidents.



Yosri, a human rights researcher, said that the Egyptian authorities raided his home in Egypt after he participated in an event in Washington, D.C., commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution. Security forces stormed the house and searched it before confiscating his father's phone and ID card. In July 2022, a National Security force arrested his father without cause.



“For five months, my father wasn't interrogated even once,” he said. “The one time he was questioned by National Security, the questions focused on my human rights and journalistic activism, my place of residence, and how I communicated with my family.”

Ultimately, Yosri's father was released without charge in November 2022 following numerous human rights and UN interventions.

His is not an isolated case. Nader, the journalist based in Europe, said that Egyptian authorities arrested his father in the summer of 2023 after Nader launched his news website. He was detained for a full month without any investigation, only being questioned about his son's work, sources of income, and details of his life in Europe. Shortly before his release, an official contacted Nader to warn him against continuing his journalism or his family would pay the price.



“They released my father, but the fabricated case they arrested him in connection with is still pending, which means he remains a hostage in Egypt,” Yosri said.

Around the same time, the Egyptian authorities arrested Alaa al-Din al-Adly, the father of Egyptian-German activist and physician Fagr al-Adly, on charges of spreading false news and joining a terrorist group. During a hearing on his detention, Alaa inquired about the reason for his imprisonment but received no answer from officials. He was released two months later, in October 2023, following human rights appeals and German diplomatic intervention.

More recently, in the Netherlands, the area surrounding the Egyptian embassy in The Hague witnessed a series of protests criticizing Cairo's stance on the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and the continued closure of the Rafah crossing. In July and August, Dutch and Egyptian activists chained the embassy gates shut as a symbolic action. Among the most prominent figures present was activist Anas Habib, whom independent platforms documented again chaining the gates on August 15, 2025. The action provoked angry reactions from regime supporters and diplomatic staff, who, according to documented statements, were seen verbally abusing the protesters. At the same time, human rights organizations reported the arrest of relatives of Anas Habib inside Egypt on charges of financing and joining a terrorist group.

Less than 24 hours after the first incident, on July 22, 2025, security forces raided the home of Habib's uncle, Mukhtar Tayel, age 68, in the Beheira governorate and arrested him. Days later, Habib's cousin was also interrogated, and both were named in a state security case on charges of joining and financing a terrorist group. The timing of the arrests leaves no doubt that they were a direct act of reprisal for Habib's activism in the Netherlands.<sup>72</sup>

This incident reflects the politicization of diplomatic space in an EU member state and shows how civil protest in The Hague may have a price tag attached paid by the family back in Egypt. It similarly underscores the need for Dutch authorities to be vigilant against any intimidation or aggression by members of a foreign mission against peaceful demonstrators and to establish channels of communication and proactive protection for event organizers, especially when there is a risk of subsequent reprisals against relatives in Egypt.

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<sup>72</sup> Egyptian Front for Human Rights, "SSSP Detains Vlogger Anas Habib's Uncle and Son on Charges of Joining and Funding a Terrorist Group," August 19, 2025, <https://egyptianfront.org/2025/08/sssp-detains-vlogger-anas-habibs-uncle-and-son-on-charges-of-joining-and-funding-a-terrorist-group>.

The case of Dr. Salah Soltan, a prominent academic with permanent residency in the US, offers a stark example of the Egyptian authorities' strategy of transnational repression. Soltan was arrested in September 2013 and sentenced to life imprisonment in a mass trial that failed to meet the most basic standards of justice, prompting the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to deem his detention arbitrary and demand his immediate release. For years, Soltan remained a prisoner of conscience, one of thousands of others, but his case took a tragic turn when he was transformed from a political prisoner into an instrument of reprisal against his activist son abroad.

A pivotal turning point in Salah Soltan's case came on June 1, 2020, when his son, Egyptian-American human rights activist and former political prisoner Mohammed Soltan, filed a lawsuit in a US federal court against former Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem El Beblawi, accusing him of being responsible for his own torture. The Egyptian authorities' response was swift and brutal. Just two weeks later, on June 15, 2020, Salah Soltan was removed from his prison cell and forcibly disappeared to an unknown location, while five of Mohammed Soltan's cousins were arrested. International human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have described this measure as a clear, direct act of reprisal aimed at forcing Mohammed to drop his lawsuit. Indeed, family members were explicitly informed that their relatives' release was contingent on the withdrawal of Mohammed's case.

During his enforced disappearance, which lasted for more than a year, Salah Soltan was subjected to conditions amounting to torture and ill-treatment. He was held in prolonged solitary confinement and deprived of his most basic human rights. After his reappearance, the authorities used deliberate medical neglect as a form of retaliation, inflicting a slow death. Although Salah suffers from serious chronic illnesses, including heart disease, diabetes, and hepatitis, the authorities systematically refuse to provide him with necessary medical care or vital medications. This deliberate neglect caused a critical deterioration in his health, to the point where he is unable to support his own weight and requires two guards to carry him during visits, prompting doctors and human rights organizations to warn that he faces "the risk of sudden death."

According to human rights reports issued in July 2025, Dr. Soltan is facing a “life-threatening medical crisis” and a heightened risk of sudden death in Badr 1 Prison due to the continued and deliberate denial of adequate medical care. This medical neglect coincided with a new wave of prosecution. On June 24, 2025, a terrorism court in Cairo sentenced Salah and his son, Mohammed Soltan (in absentia), to life imprisonment in a new case, no. 1766/2022. This judgment can be seen as a direct act of reprisal in response to Mohammed’s international advocacy for his father’s release, further demonstrating Dr. Sultan’s status as a hostage held by the state to silence his son abroad.

Arrest and detention are not the only tools deployed. Travel bans are imposed on relatives, including those with foreign citizenship, and they are denied identifying documents, effectively turning the household in Egypt into a permanent hostage to control the activist abroad. In 2023, the Freedom Initiative documented instances of travel bans were imposed on relatives of activists residing in the US, including a minor, although they were traveling on US passports, reflecting the widening scope of administrative pressure placed on families due to the activism of a single individual abroad. Testimonies reveal that some families are subjected to harsh and degrading treatment when the exiled individual continues their public activism.<sup>73</sup>

For example, in the case of former minister Mohammed Mahsoub, the authorities have not only detained his sister for over six years, but have systematically denied his two daughters their fundamental right to travel. This practice, ongoing since approximately 2018, constitutes a form of bureaucratic violence whose goal is to increase the pressure on their father.

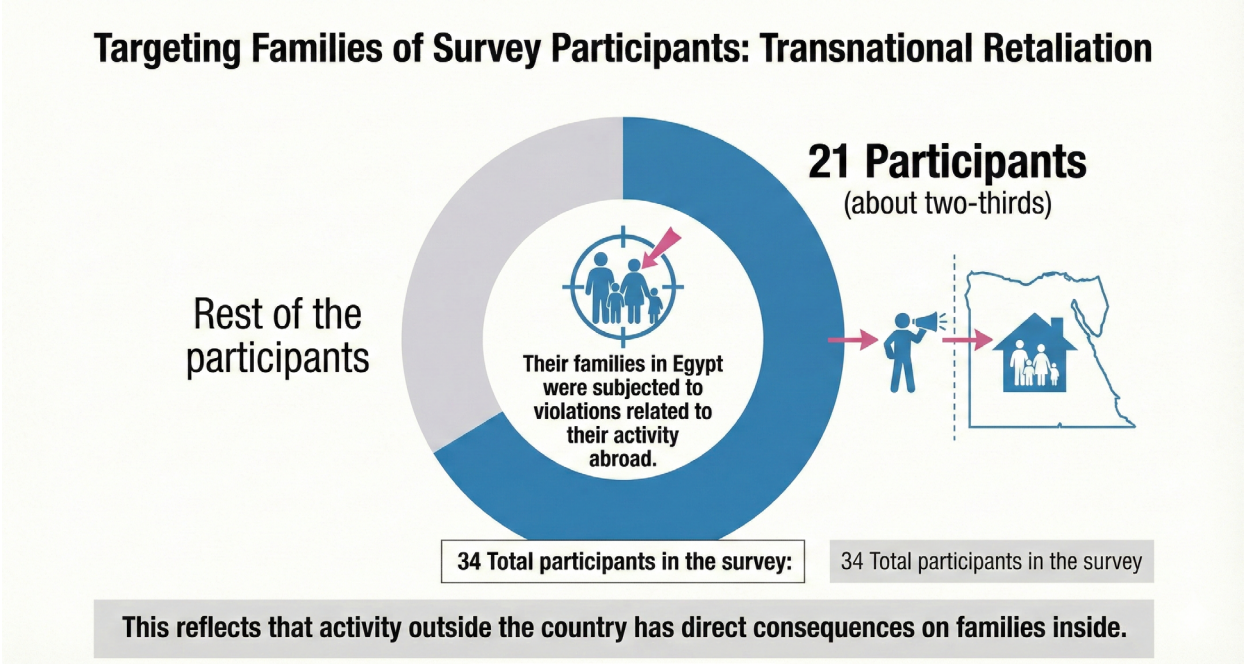
On May 2, 2022, Mahsoub revealed that his daughters had once again been prevented from traveling. This was not the first time, he said, but a recurring pattern “for the past four years.” The procedures at the airport were clearly arbitrary: they were verbally barred from travel unsupported by a judicial order; their passports confiscated, and they were told outright that “any other passport issued will also be confiscated.”

These are not mere symbolic measures; they had a concrete impact on his daughters’ lives. One was prevented from completing her doctoral studies at the University of Paris, while the other was denied the right to visit her father. In this way, Egyptian airports have become sites of punishment, and travel documents have been turned into weapons used to punish entire families because of the opinions of one of their members.

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73 Middle East Democracy Center, “In the Shadows of Authoritarianism.”

In the survey conducted by the Egyptian Human Rights Forum found, 21 participants, or nearly two-thirds of respondents, reported that their families in Egypt had faced violations that they believe are directly related to their activism abroad.



## Physical attacks on activists abroad

Egyptian diplomatic missions abroad, or their staff and supporters, at times become instruments of physical and legal intimidation turned against government critics in exile. These practices range from physical assault to the abuse of diplomatic immunity to the retaliatory harassment of activists' families inside Egypt and even the revocation of citizenship, all to silence dissenting voices abroad.

[In a video leaked](#) on August 14, 2025, purportedly showing a video conference between Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and Egypt’s ambassador to the Netherlands, Emad Hanna, the minister is heard reprimanding the ambassador over protests at the embassy in The Hague, demanding a “zero tolerance” approach and harsher measures to deter demonstrators. Independent press reports indicated that the conversation included directives to use force to protect the missions, including by apprehending and “restraining” protesters inside embassies, in clear breach of the principles of personal inviolability and the jurisdiction of host countries.



Days after the video was released, incidents of violence against protesters outside the Egyptian embassy in The Hague, including against a minor, were documented. The padlocking of the gate of the embassy seemed to have angered the minister, and the punitive tone he used with diplomats at Egyptian consulates in the video suggests the weaponization of diplomatic missions as a tool of transnational repression against activists and those sympathetic to Gaza.

On August 20, 2025, two Egyptian-American brothers were assaulted by Egyptian government employees outside an Egyptian diplomatic building in Manhattan during a protest related to Gaza. Video footage shows the two brothers being dragged into the building and beaten, choked, and whipped with a metal chain. Based on the account of the Egyptian officials, who enjoyed diplomatic immunity, the New York Police Department initially arrested the brothers on criminal charges.

The prosecutor later reduced the charges against the older brother and then dropped them entirely in September 2025 after his lawyers presented video evidence of the assault by the Egyptian officials. The question of accountability for the perpetrators, given their diplomatic immunity, remains open. The incident is reminiscent of similar cases involving violence perpetrated by foreign personnel against protesters on American soil.

The incident illustrates how diplomatic immunity can be used to obstruct justice for victims and underscores the need for clearer protocols for the New York Police Department and prosecutors in dealing with threats of violence at diplomatic premises. These protocols should preserve the right to peaceful protest and prevent the politicization of immunity. It also demonstrates the danger of repressive tactics moving from within Egypt to abroad, particularly when retaliatory measures are subsequently taken against the participants or their families in Egypt.

In late August 2025, London police arrested a pro-Egyptian government figure known as Ahmed Abd al-Qader (Mido) after videos circulated online showing him threatening Egyptian activists with a knife near a protest against Egyptian policies toward Gaza. British and Egyptian media reports were sharply polarized in their accounts. While official and pro-government Egyptian media portrayed Mido as a “hero” confronting “Brotherhood incitement in Europe,” independent platforms and social media posts documented his arrest and alleged attempted assault.

This incident highlights the need for prior coordination between police in host countries and organizers of Egyptian community gatherings, rapid communication channels, institutional alerts against recurring threats, and a serious approach to incitement coming from media platforms that fuel violence against activists abroad.

## Egyptian communities under the watchful eye of security

The social and security dimensions intersect outside Egypt in attempts to infiltrate expatriate communities, gather information on activists, and fuel smear campaigns that socially isolate activists from their surroundings abroad. Reports document the arrest of informants or collaborators with Egyptian security services in Germany and the US who were collecting information on Egyptian diaspora communities, which magnifies the deterrent effect and makes exiles feel that they are not in a socially neutral space.



Murad, a human rights defender, was asked to work as a “source” for security services in some of the human rights organizations he works with, but after leaving Egypt for Tunisia in March 2021, he found himself caught in a web of repression that extended across borders. Despite having a residency permit that expires in December 2025, his legal status remains precarious and its renewal uncertain; meanwhile, his application for resettlement in Canada remains unanswered.

Consular actions have been a key part of his repression. The Egyptian embassy in Tunisia refused to issue a passport for his son, born in March 2023, without him returning to Egypt, denying his family their fundamental rights to identity and freedom of movement. This coincided with attempts to hack his accounts, particularly in 2021, indicating that the surveillance of him continues beyond Egypt’s borders.

These violations have had severe psychological, social, and economic consequences for Murad’s family. The eldest child suffers from psychological disorders and delayed speech and has therapy sessions four times a week. Murad himself feels increasingly depressed and isolated now that most Egyptian human rights defenders have left Tunisia.

Another hidden but dangerous aspect of this transnational campaign of repression is the infiltration of Egyptian expatriate communities by planting informants and spies to gather information on activists and their movements. Egyptian security agencies, primarily the General Intelligence Directorate and National Security Agency, are working to establish surveillance networks within Egyptian communities abroad by recruiting members of the community through enticement or intimidation, or by sending agents under diplomatic or economic cover to monitor opposition activities.

A 2020 report by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the domestic intelligence agency, revealed that an Egyptian employee working in the German chancellor's press and media office had been spying for Egyptian intelligence for years.<sup>74</sup> The employee, identified only as "Amin K.," is believed to have used his position to report on the activities and affairs of the Egyptian community in Germany, and possibly to provide Cairo with information on asylum applications from activists there.

The report found that Egyptian intelligence activity in Germany focuses on monitoring alleged members of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as members of the Coptic diaspora, some of whom Cairo considers to be linked to the opposition. The report demonstrated the extent to which Egyptian intelligence has infiltrated the immigrant community and its attempts to monitor even those not directly involved in politics, such as Coptic activists concerned with issues of sectarianism and religious discrimination.

In the United States, *The Washington Post* reported in 2021 that American security agencies were concerned about attempts to recruit double agents within the Egyptian community to monitor activists there, particularly after a former Twitter employee was accused of spying on dissidents for Saudi Arabia. In Turkey and Qatar, where the largest number of Egyptian activists and dissidents reside, there are indirect indications of reciprocal intelligence activity.

These countries—especially before the recent rapprochement—tolerate the presence of Egyptian citizens active in the media, but this has not prevented infiltrations and attempts at spying. Some activists in Istanbul reported that they suspected that colleagues had secretly contacted the Egyptian embassy, or that spyware had been planted on computers in the offices of opposition channels.

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<sup>74</sup> Deutsche Welle, "Germany Charges Egyptian with Spying While Working in Merkel's Press Office," November 13, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-charges-egyptian-with-spying-while-working-in-merkels-press-office/a-55618075>.

Another tactic employed by Egyptian intelligence is sending agents—who are not publicly identified as diplomats—to attend conferences and symposiums attended by Egyptian dissidents abroad. These agents enter the halls like any other attendee, recording the sessions, jotting down the names of attendees, and photographing them with their phones. Activists in Britain and France have alerted organizers of some symposiums to the presence of “unfamiliar faces” taking photographs without permission, believed to be affiliated with the embassy.

In one incident in London in 2019, an Egyptian human rights activist objected to someone filming him during a symposium at the British House of Lords about the situation in Egypt, only to discover that the person was an employee of the Egyptian Cultural Office who had been assigned to monitor the event.

The information gathered by these spies can be used in numerous ways against activists. It can be exploited to create security files that justify convictions in absentia, or to harm their families in Egypt, by identifying the individual’s activities abroad and thus targeting their relatives. The photos and videos captured can also be used to smear individuals in Egypt. More seriously, the information could help Egyptian intelligence track the movements of a dissident, with the aim of kidnapping or physically harming them if the opportunity arises in a country with poor security.

Proxy punishment has a double effect: the exile may either sever ties with their family and community of origin, or scale back their public activity, or operate clandestinely under a pseudonym—all of which undermine freedom of expression and public activism. The European Parliament study recommends recognizing this as a separate category of transnational repression. It suggests that host countries’ responses include psychological and legal support programs and easier pathways for family reunification to mitigate the risks of that family will be extorted.

## The psychological and social toll of transnational repression

The impact of transnational repression does not stop at travel bans and document confiscations. It permeates the daily lives and psyche of Egyptian activists abroad. Living in a new place, many find themselves trapped in a digital and social cycle of fear, where surveillance and threats are ever-present. Field interviews, survey results, and database information indicate that the majority of targeted exiles suffer from chronic stress, sleep disorders, and persistent anxiety, triggering panic when faced with even simple details like checking email or passing through an airport.

Some respondents in the survey spoke of a constant feeling of being pursued, saying that the security they were promised in exile has proven fragile and conditional.





This feeling is reflected in their family circle. Family ties are unravelling due to the pressure and threats faced by their loved ones back home, leading many exiles to sever contact with their relatives to avoid doing them harm.

Socially, transnational repression fosters a sense of collective isolation within Egyptian expatriate communities. The pervasive climate of fear makes trust a rare commodity, and suspicion and stigma tend to lead to the closure of social circles and a decline in public activities and political discourse. Several respondents also recounted losing jobs or educational opportunities due to organized smear campaigns or consular interference, exacerbating their feelings of precarity and giving them the sense of living in suspended animation, or on the margins of life.

These psychological and social dimensions of transnational repression cannot be separated from its political framework. The Egyptian state has not only silenced voices within its borders but has also transformed the diaspora itself into an extension of its prison, where control is exercised through fear, stigma, and the denial of fundamental rights.

This human dimension underscores that transnational repression is not merely a violation of sovereignty and the rule of law, but an assault on the very idea of security, one of the most fundamental and essential human rights.

The data shows that transnational repression causes multiple negative impacts on victims beyond their legal ramifications, among them psychological, social, and economic. Table 5 details the most common impacts of these violations based on the survey.

	<b>Impact of violation</b>	<b>No. of reports</b>	<b>% of respondents who reported it</b>
	Legal difficulties	29	85.3
	Declining mental health	24	70.6
	Ending or reducing public activities	18	52.9
	Loss of job or income	17	50.0
	Change in residence or communication device	16	47.1
	Confiscation of property and bank accounts	1	2.9

With this in mind, we turn to deconstructing this architecture: how do the authorities manage an environment of transnational repression, from arbitrary prosecution to the regional diffusion of wanted lists, which undermines the freedom of movement of targets, to consular paralysis, which deprives them of their basic rights in their country of residence.

## Conclusion and recommendations

This report shows that transnational repression is not an isolated or exceptional practice in Egyptian politics, but rather a structural extension of security governance inside Egypt. In this sense, geography is no longer an obstacle to state control, but a new arena for expansion. While the public sphere at home buckles under the weight of exceptional laws and a tight security grip, the instruments of control expand beyond borders to encompass legal, consular, diplomatic, and even digital spaces. This network allows the state's boundaries to stretch beyond its geographical borders to besiege its citizens wherever they may be, in clear violation of the principle of state sovereignty and universal human rights.

The documented cases indicate that the aim of these practices is not merely to punish specific individuals, but to create a climate of collective deterrence that quashes any independent political or human rights activity abroad. It is thus a multi-pronged system that combines legal, administrative, digital, and social elements, rendering the lives of activists in exile precarious—a life without documentation, stability, and psychological or legal security.

The responses of host countries and international institutions remain inadequate to the scale of the threat. The lack of specialized reporting mechanisms, poor coordination among national agencies, and the lack of a comprehensive UN mechanism to combat transnational repression have allowed the phenomenon to expand with impunity. This institutional vacuum enables offending states to reengineer their tools abroad without fear of accountability. However, some positive experiences, such as the British Parliament's inquiry, the European Parliament's stances, and growing awareness in the US, suggest the possibility of building a systematic global response that redefines the boundaries of legal and moral responsibility for these violations. Even so, these initiatives remain fragmented and are still insufficient to build an effective global deterrence policy.

Confronting transnational repression accordingly requires a three-dimensional alliance: a legislative dimension at the state level, a human rights dimension at the level of organizations, and a solidarity dimension at the level of civil society and expatriate communities. The issue is no longer just about émigré victims; it touches the very core of the international system that ostensibly guarantees every human being the right to safety and dignity, wherever they may be.

## Recommendations

These testimonies show that transnational repression should not be measured by the number of its victims, but by the magnitude of the circle of fear it draws around anyone who dares to speak. Breaking this circle requires more than verbal condemnation. It necessitates integrated legal and institutional responses that restore the right to security and dignity to activists abroad and hold states responsible for countering this kind of growing repression.

In light of this report's findings of systematic violations and types of repression, a set of practical recommendations is offered below to the Egyptian government, host states, and international organizations.

### To the Egyptian government:

- Establish an independent, national commission or instrument with broad powers and an inclusive array of members, among them legal experts and representatives of independent civil society organizations from in and out of Egypt, with the mandate to monitor and assess cases transnational repression, particularly the arbitrary denial of consular services and identity documents, advise the government, and conduct a periodic, unbiased threat assessment.
- End the abuse of judicial and security cooperation, both with Interpol and the AIMC, and guarantee that activists will not be prosecuted for their political opinions.
- Put an end to punitive consular practices that deny citizens passports or other basic documents and adopt a transparent, non-discriminatory process for document renewal.
- Review the terrorism lists, remove individuals designated on political grounds, and guarantee the right of appeal and independent judicial review.
- Stop targeting families and relatives of dissidents abroad, which constitutes an internationally proscribed form of collective punishment.



- Involve civil society in the drafting of human rights policies and comply with Egypt's obligations under the Convention Against Torture and the ICCPR.
- Guarantee the immediate release of all people detained arbitrarily because of the activities of their relatives abroad and investigate cases of detention motivated by retaliation.

## **To host states and governmental bodies in Europe and North America:**

- Create designated national contact points to receive reports of transnational repression and coordinate the police and legal response.
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- Enhance training for police and prosecutors on the nature and risks of transnational repression and ensure the sensitive and timely treatment of reports.
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- Require compulsory judicial screening and cooperation for all extradition requests or politically motivated security warrants and stringently adhere to the principle of non-refoulement.
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- Guarantee that asylum and naturalization procedures are not impacted by warrants, political prosecutors, or administrative obstacles issued by offending states.
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- Offer psychological and legal support to victims and family reunification programs to mitigate the impact of the proxy punishment of families.
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- Apply targeted sanctions regimes, such as the EU Magnitsky Act or its American equivalent, against Egyptian officials or bodies implicated in acts of intimidation or threat outside of Egypt's borders.



## To the UN and international and regional governmental organizations:

- Establish a dedicated UN instrument or special rapporteur for transnational repression, the collection of data, and the coordination of international responses.
- Incorporate the subject into the universal periodic review and the reports of the special rapporteurs on freedom of expression and human rights defenders.
- Launch a common global database to document cases and link them to offending states to facilitate accountability.
- Support programs for legal protection and emergency shelter for human rights defenders and exiles while providing consistent funding to local rights initiatives.
- Strengthen cooperation between regional human rights instruments (African, European, and American) to adopt a common set of standards to combat transnational repression.



