

DEMOCRACY & HUMAN RIGHTS

Women in the Arab Spring Uprisings: Egypt

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In this research series, we analyze women's role in the Arab Spring uprisings since 2011 and how their participation in the protest movements of the last decade impacted their gender role status. We use case studies from Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, and Sudan to analyze women's activism and the current debate on women's rights and status in the region. All case studies were derived from secondary sources. Egypt is the fourth case study in our research series. Here, we analyze Egyptian women's civil and political activism since the 2011 January Revolution and the challenges the women's movement faces.

Egypt experienced significant change during the Arab Uprisings in 2011, which were mainly the result of Egyptians' dissatisfaction with President Hosni Mubarak, who became president after the [assassination](#) of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Throughout his presidency, Mubarak angered younger generations of Egyptians due to his continuous [violation](#) of human rights and lack of economic opportunities. At the beginning of Mubarak's presidency, he also implemented [a state of emergency](#) that continued until he was ousted. This state of emergency [restricted](#) many Egyptians' basic rights such as freedom of the press and expression, and gave significant power and control to security forces. The growing dissatisfaction among Egyptians eventually led to the ousting of Mubarak in [18 days](#) after 30 years in power.

While Mubarak created laws that limited the rights of Egyptians in multiple aspects, he also made decisions that gave women more rights than they previously had. In 2003, Mubarak [appointed](#) the first female supreme court judge, Tahani al-Gebali. Al-Gebali's appointment to the supreme court reflected a positive, forward movement in women's political activism and their right to have positions of power within the government. In addition, in 2005, Mubarak [amended](#) the Egyptian Child Custody Law. Before the amendment, child custody was

transferred to the father after a specified age. However, following Mubarak's amendment, children could [choose](#) at the age of 15 which parent would have custody of them. Finally, in 2009, Mubarak created a [parliamentary quota](#) for women. While Mubarak's decisions to implement these laws appeared to reflect his support for women's rights and political activism, Egyptians also [reported](#) that these laws were not actively respected, nor followed. Mubarak's support for women's rights and political activism in Egypt, thus, was only to garner support from the public. In fact, during the Arab Uprisings in 2011, women of all backgrounds took to the streets to [protest](#) Mubarak's presidency.

It is important to discuss the Muslim Brotherhood and its activity in Egypt, as they played a significant role in the country's history before, during, and after the Arab Uprisings in 2011. The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest and largest Islamist organization in Egypt, and its [goal](#) is to implement Islam into society through the creation and implementation of religious laws, values, and morals. The group was founded in 1928 and was first banned in Egypt in 1954 after it was suspected that a member of the group [attempted](#) to assassinate the leader of the Free Officers, Gamal Abdel Nasser. While the group remained banned following the beginning of Mubarak's presidency, he did [recognize](#) the Brotherhood as a religious organization in 1984. Due to the group's inability to be registered as a political organization, members of the Muslim Brotherhood [ran](#) for political positions as independents. The Muslim Brotherhood is a significant part of the history of Egypt due to the support it gained following Mubarak's ousting during the Arab Uprisings in 2011, with a member of its group becoming Egypt's [first](#) freely elected president in 2012. However, while the group received significant support in 2012, Egyptian female activists actively criticized the group's stance on women. Reham Afifi, Projects Manager of Free Egyptian Women's Speak Up Group, [stated](#) in 2013 that the "Muslim Brotherhood has long had a desire to curtail rights that Islam actually guarantees women." While feminists publicly criticized the Muslim Brotherhood, the group would continue to consolidate power and support from Egyptians until the overthrow of its president later that year -reflecting that some Egyptians supported limited women's rights and political activism in the country.

Egyptian Revolution

Egypt's protests began on January 25th, 2011, on National Police Day. The demonstrations later became known as the January 25th Revolution because they succeeded in ousting

President Hosni Mubarak on February 11th, 2011. The catalyst for Egypt came after two police officers beat [Khaled Said](#) to death in 2010 at a cybercafe in Alexandria. Khaled Saeed's photos were shared online through social media and caught mass attention. [Wael Ghonim](#), a prominent revolutionary figure, helped organize a Facebook page and utilized social media to rally protesters. Social media became the primary tool for managing and motivating Egyptians to rally together from all political parties and religious beliefs.

The prominent figures in the Egyptian revolution were Wael Ghonim, Salma el Tarzi, Layla Marzouq Al Sayed, and Gigi Ibrahim. Wael Ghonim was a Google Executive living in Dubai when he created the Facebook group "We are all Khaled Saeed." Wael Ghonim's group helped rally millions of Egyptians for change, and even Wael protested in the streets of Egypt alongside followers. Salma el-Tarzi was a film director in Egypt before the revolution and became one of the leading voices of hope for a democratic Egypt where the people have power. Gigi Ibrahim became the face of the revolution as a journalist and activist, and was one of the 17 Egyptians featured in [Time Magazine](#). Layla Marzouq Al Sayed is the mother of Khaled Saeed, killed by the two police officers, which led to the January 25th revolution.

Social media advanced the movement beyond the protests and led Mubarak to step down. The announcement of former President Mubarak's resignation came from Omar Suleiman, Intelligence Chief, and Vice President. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) released a six-month schedule to draft constitutional amendments and elect a new government. After SCAF released this plan, the Muslim Brotherhood quickly announced that they were forming their [political party](#), the Freedom and Justice Party.

Although many Egyptians had no experience running social movements or political parties, women were one of the significant actors who led Egypt forward. The initiatives set forth by women even led to the creation of an app, [Harass Map](#), to help identify and stop sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The major issues women's efforts focused on were equal rights, protection from sexual harassment and violence, and women's representation in politics. However, some women's organizations were hindered in 2013 due to the government's crackdown on social media. The women's movement also regressed due to losing women's representation in offices. In 2010, women made up [60 of the 508 parliament seats](#). Compared to 2011-2012, in their first democratic election, women won [8 of the 508](#)

[seats](#). This issue allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to seize enough temporary support moving forward.

The Freedom and Justice Party was formed in May 2011 and promised Islamic principles while maintaining a civil state instead of military or theocratic rule, guaranteeing freedom of expression, and [supporting women's rights by passing legislation that criminalizes favoritism towards men](#). The Muslim Brotherhood's party also promised freedom of belief and worship for Muslims and non-Muslims. Between November 2011 and January 2012, the [new party won 45%](#) of the elections in the lower house of the Egyptian parliament.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood promised they would not have a presidential candidate in 2011, Mohammed Morsi ended up running for president in 2012, defeating Ahmed Shafiq in mid-June of 2012. A portion of the public supported the victory, however, the Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court called for the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood People's Assembly. The Supreme Court [stated](#) that the elections failed to follow procedures requiring that 1/3 of the seats are for independent candidates.

The Muslim Brotherhood's victory was short-lived as they finished drafting Egypt's constitution. Morsi's critics rallied protesters and [attacked](#) offices of the Muslim Brotherhood. The protests didn't stop the constitution being finalized. However, on June 30th, 2013, protests erupted calling for Morsi's resignation. On July 1st, General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi issued an ultimatum for Morsi to resign if he could not quell the protesters. Two days later, the military removed Morsi and arrested many Muslim Brotherhood leaders, including shutting down TV stations associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

The removal of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood by General Sisi led to larger protests and government crackdowns. On July 8th, 2013, security forces killed at least 50 people protesting outside a military base in Cairo. On July 26th, 2013, Sisi asked Egyptians to "[confront violence and terrorism](#)." Estimates released state that hundreds of thousands of Egyptians rallied to the streets on behalf of Sisi. In response, security forces killed around 100 Muslim Brotherhood supporters.

Crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and Protestors

Since July 2013, when the government initiated an extensive campaign to dismember the Muslim Brotherhood's formidable network of social services, [street activism has become the lone vehicle for Brotherhood mobilization](#). The 2013 coup sought to eliminate sources of the group's power and resilience. [Events first kicked off](#) with an aggressive anti-Brotherhood media campaign designed to impair the performance of President Morsi and his government, isolate the Brotherhood from its social base, and remove any excuse the general populace may have had to maintain sympathies with the organization. Eliminating the Brotherhood's social base required eliminating their civil and economic organizations. [It is reported](#) that the assets of 1,370 individuals were confiscated, along with the assets of 81 companies, including 19 currency-exchange companies. A total of 1,125 associations, 105 schools, and 43 hospitals were confiscated, in addition to the Brotherhood's medical association, which has 27 branches. The campaign against the Brotherhood also included a widespread campaign of arrests, resulting in the apprehension of over 40,000 prisoners. This campaign occurred alongside a vengeful security crackdown, which included acts of torture, public killings, and sexual assault. The violence of the campaign against the Brotherhood made violence and protests an easier justification to counteract the campaign.

The Brotherhood was left with no other option but to protest in a climate characterized by exclusion. Violence, whether from the state or armed militias, has become the dominant political language in the nations that experienced the Arab Spring revolutions, and Egypt was no different. [However, it is argued](#) that the likelihood of the Muslim Brotherhood resorting to violence in Egypt is less than what many observers believe. [This, however, is not inconsistent](#) with the increased possibilities that a not-insignificant segment of members and supporters may have resorted to responding to the state's violence with violence, whether on an individual, decentralized level, by joining more violent groups such as "Sinai Province" or "Al-Murabiteen," or by joining the ongoing wars in Syria and Iraq. [Up until 2018](#), Egyptian authorities continued to increasingly use counterterrorism and state-of-emergency laws and courts to unjustly prosecute journalists, activists, and critics (including the Muslim Brotherhood) for peaceful criticism. The 2015 counterterrorism law that was issued increased the detention of journalists and activists who may be part of opposition parties or are just journalists and human rights activists.

Mass Trials and Mass Death Sentences

The years after the Revolution saw increased human rights violations. Egyptian courts have sentenced thousands of men and women to prison or death at politicized mass trials. One case alone included more than 100 women, such as Hend Nafea. Hend Nafea is an activist that protested various governments and rural society. [For it, she has been beaten and tortured by army officers, imprisoned at home by her family, and judged as being a shameful woman by her society.](#) In 2015, she was sentenced to life in prison by an Egyptian judge known for his harsh rulings. [In Nafea's case](#), 229 others were sentenced to life in prison, including the well-known activist Ahmed Douma, for protesting outside a government building in 2011 and demanding an end to military rule. Two days before that, 183 people were sentenced to death. While both men and women are victims of these mass trials, life in prison sentences, and death sentences, women seem to be victimized more as they are often shamed in their own homes and brutalized by security forces.

[Amal Fathy's](#) case is another example of repression against women. She is a women's rights defender who was arrested in May 2018 after posting a video on her Facebook page in which she criticized the Egyptian authorities' failure to protect women from sexual harassment and criticized their wider crackdown on human rights. She was sentenced to two years in prison, which was upheld on appeal, and she was released on probation in December 2018. Though her sentence was not as long as others, individuals should not be arrested and charged for simply speaking about the inaction of the Egyptian government on protecting women, especially when the government has a national human rights strategy praising their efforts to protect women's rights.

Amal Fathy and Hend Nafea are not the only women or individuals in Egypt to be grossly imprisoned for speaking out against the Egyptian government and calling for more protection. [Ruthless prison and death sentences](#) were handed down around 2018 after unfair mass trials stained the reputation of Egypt's highest appeals court and cast a dark shadow over the country's entire justice system. A number of these death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment and most of these sentences were handed down via terrorism court. Since he was elected as President, [many human rights organizations](#) continue to urge Sisi to commute some of these death sentences and direct his government to halt Egypt's escalating use of the

death penalty.

2018 Elections

[President Sisi](#) won re-election in 2018 and tightened his grip on the country, making him arguably the country's most autocratic leader since it became a republic in 1953. His consolidation of power, marked by wide-scale repression and targeting of opponents, continued to grow in his second term. After the election, Egypt's election commission [officially confirmed](#) that in an election where President Sisi arrested or pushed out all of his credible challengers, he won 97% of all valid votes. Voter turnout in the 2018 elections was only 41% — six points lower than in the 2014 presidential election. Voter participation dropped despite a campaign by Sisi loyalists, business executives, and local authorities to get Egyptians to go to the polls [with offers of cash, food, and services](#). Prior to the election, [Sisi courted Egyptian women, saying](#), “There has been increased interest in women since I became president, as they now constitute 15% of the parliament and 20% of the government,” compared to 12.7% in the 2010 parliament and 1.7% in 2012. The progress over the years indicates an increase in women's political activism and empowerment, however, barriers to winning seats in parliament still exist including dominant societal culture, the lack of women qualifications, and the dominance of the Islamists rule.

[Women make up 25 million eligible voters](#) in Egypt, 48.5% of the overall voter population, yet, the lower voter turnout for the 2018 elections means less women were represented in the total overall voter percentage than in 2014. [In 2014, women's participation reached 55%](#), and 54% of all votes cast settled the presidential race of 2014 in favor of Sisi. However, much changed in Egypt between 2014 and 2018, including the mass sentences handed down to women and other activists, which could explain the low turnout women in the 2018 elections.

2019 - Increased Government Repression

In early 2019, Egyptians voted [88.83% in favor](#) of the constitutional referendum. However, the voter turnout was only [44% of all eligible voters](#). The approval for the referendum allowed Sisi to change the constitution, extending the term length of the presidency from 4 to 6 years. The most concerning changes made were articles 185 and 204. Article 185 allows the president to directly appoint the heads of all judicial bodies and serve as the chairman of the Supreme

Judicial Council. Article 204 paragraph 2 expanded the role of the armed forces, granting military jurisdiction to prosecute civilians who “carried out crimes in buildings and facilities protected by the armed forces.” According to [Human Rights Watch](#), these constitutional amendments allowed the government to use the guise of fighting terrorism to torture, arrest, and kill citizens who were against the President.

Egypt’s leadership brought more protests after the constitutional amendments due to the abuse and mass arrests of citizens by security forces in September 2019. The abuse from security forces stemmed from President Sisi’s continued state of emergency decree from 2017, giving security forces unchecked powers. The other major factor in the protests was the accusation of government corruption and the wasting of millions of dollars on palaces, villas, and hotels. Egyptian actor and construction worker Mohamed Ali called on people to protest President Sisi. Ali posted a video that circulated on social media and led the government to accusing him of “[high treason and spreading false news to mislead public opinion.](#)” Ali’s videos reached over 1.7 million views on Facebook and led thousands to call for President Sisi’s resignation.

The protests initially led to an estimated 500 arrests, including the [arrest](#) of human rights lawyer Mahienour al-Massry after she represented five of the detainees. The US intervened shortly after, and Egyptian authorities released three activists and three journalists, including Mahienour al-Massry and Esraa Abdel-Fattah. Esraa Abdel Fattah became a political target to Egyptian authorities due to her past activism, which was crucial to Hosni Mubarak’s overthrow. Due to Ali’s accusations and the government attempting to charge him for treason and spreading false news, he fled to Spain. On October 2019, it was reported that the authorities had [arrested 2300 people, including 111 children.](#)

2019 brought about dramatic reform to Egypt, including strict laws on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the country. The new NGO law went into effect in August of 2019. The law prohibits NGOs from conducting field research, surveys, or opinion polls without government approval. [Human Rights Watch states](#), “It also prohibits cooperating with foreign organizations or experts, or participating in any ‘political’ activities or activities perceived to undermine national security.” The law goes further to give one million Egyptian pounds fines for NGOs operating without a license. The NGO law is only one example of the continued

oppression by Sisi. The government continued arresting human rights activists and journalists, cracking down on freedom of expression. Further, over 600 news, political, and human rights websites, social media sites, and secure communication applications were banned

Women's movements were a significant factor in the 2019 protests. The massive reforms gave the president the power to crack down on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) groups and other groups addressing violence against women, including female genital mutilation (FGM). A law created in 2013 banning ten or more people from gathering without government approval hindered the advancement of women's rights. [Two prominent figures](#) for women's rights were Mozn Hassan, who was the head of Nazra for Feminist Studies, and Azza Soliman, who led the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance. The draconian laws, constitutional amendments, and atrocious human rights violations went as far as banning both Mozn Hassan and Azza Soliman from leaving the nation and prosecuting them. In the cases of many others, the government would allege that political activists were joining terrorist groups like ISIS.

The 2019 protests were unlike the 2011 January 25th revolution in Egypt, where Muslim Brotherhood members and women's rights groups fought to oust Hosni Mubarak. From 2013 to 2019, over [60,000 people were arrested or detained](#) for being members of the movement. The Muslim Brotherhood had less power under Sisi because he saw them as a direct threat to the regime. He ensured the political group could not participate in much of the protesting, and thus, many Muslim Brotherhood members allegedly disappeared or were killed.

2020 - Egypt and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Sisi's authoritarian practices heightened in 2020. Thousands of opposition members, journalists, and human rights defenders remained imprisoned on political charges. Government authorities frequently detained peaceful activists on terrorism charges and harassed their relatives abroad. As an integral part of the crackdown operations, The Interior Ministry's security forces and National Security Agency (NSA) forcibly disappeared, arbitrarily arrested, mistreated, and tortured opposition members, including women and [children](#). Efforts to suppress free speech further widened the detention campaign. Shaima' Samy was one of the female journalists that was [arrested and held incommunicado](#) for charges of "spreading false news on COVID-19 pandemic."

The COVID-19 outbreak, which started in February in Egypt, worsened the already deplorable detention conditions. The government [cut off](#) all means of communication for detainees, including with lawyers. Insufficient healthcare and mental health care resulted in the death of dozens of political detainees. Women were also impacted by the exacerbated conditions. In particular, the burden of unpaid work in the home has increased dramatically. Growing responsibilities regarding elderly care, childcare, and household chores posed challenges for women. Because of the gendered gap in labor, women were exposed to job losses more than men. Considering that female labor represents a disproportionate share of the informal economy in Egypt, about [25 percent of the labor force](#), millions of women already lacked essential protections and employment benefits. With COVID-19 severely hitting the informal sector, the livelihood of female informal workers was disrupted.

The pandemic interrupted access for women to support services and shelters for intimate, domestic, and gender-based violence victims as well. Thus, the measures implemented during the lockdown and economic hardships increased women's vulnerability to domestic abuse. One study conducted by Moawad et al. (2021) found that there was been a [surge](#) in gender-based violence during the pandemic, including emotional abuse and physical and sexual violence. The most common offender was the [husband](#) with 43.9%, followed by a male family member with 25.1%. However, regarding women's responses, nearly half of them (53.8%) did not take any action

Meanwhile, grassroots feminists, particularly young women, invented new forms of activism to draw attention to domestic and sexual violence. In August, a feminist initiative, [The Speak Up Initiative](#), was launched by Gehad Hamdy, a 27-year-old dentist, in response to a rise in sexual harassment and violence. The initiative has garnered much attention from across the country and now has nearly 60,000 followers on Twitter and over 450,000 followers on Facebook. With a motto of "Girls Support Girls," Speak Up exposes sexual abusers, rapists, and culprits of other crimes and encourages victims to speak up and provides legal and emotional support when needed. Its platform has become the number one destination for victims of gender-based violence in Egypt to turn to for perpetrator exposure, psychological support, and legal guidance - which eventually [resulted in](#) arrests and accountability. Another example of such an initiative is the Instagram page [Assault Police](#), with over 330,000 followers. Founded by

Nadeen Ashraf, a university student, the page is full of testimonies of young girls and women who share their stories of sexual assault.

The posts and testimonies of victims and survivors of sexual violence online, particularly women who were abused at a [scandal at the the Fairmont Hotel](#), triggered a new wave of the Egyptian #MeToo movement, which led to a number of arrests by authorities. In September, Sisi [approved](#) a law that guarantees anonymity and protection of the identities of victims who disclose sexual assault and harassment. The law was approved as part of a national campaign to combat sexual violence and encourage women to report sexual crimes without fearing retaliation. The National Council for Women has [urged](#) victims and witnesses to cooperate, however, lawyers [voiced concerns](#) that the law did not provide protection for witnesses.

On the anniversary of the 2019 mass protests, September 20, a wave of protests [sparked flame](#) to demand the end of the Sisi regime. The protests attracted national attention with over thousands of protestors demonstrating in several cities. With the purpose of challenging the government, Arabic hashtags, translated to [#WeDon'tWantYou](#) and [#GoOutOn20September](#), were trending on Twitter. Known as the "[Friday of Rage](#)," protests continued for a few weeks over issues such as unstable economy, human rights violations, and mishandling of the pandemic. The government responded with brute force including batons, birdshots, and live ammunition to disperse the protestors and [arrested](#) nearly 1,000 people including 71 children, some as young as 13. [Laila Soueif](#), an academic and activist, and her daughter Mona Seif were among the many women who were arrested as well. However, despite this challenging environment, Egyptians, and women in particular, remained committed to creating a space to voice their concerns and experiences.

2021-2022: Sisi's Harsh Authoritarian Grip Deepens

Throughout 2021 and 2022, prison conditions in Egypt continued to worsen. On July 25th, 2021, 69-year-old Abd al-Moniem Abu al-Fotouh, the detained leader of the Strong Egypt Party, [said he had suffered symptoms](#) resembling a heart attack the night before while in solitary confinement in Cairo's notorious Tora Prison. Abu al-Fotouh suffers from several serious and chronic medical pre-detention conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes. He also developed a herniated vertebral disc in prison. Abu al-Fotouh's case is emblematic of the

reprisals meted out to those who dare to speak out against Egypt's autocratic government, which includes the vindictive and unlawful deprivation of detainees' rights to adequate medical care.

[Other stories of prisoners](#) in Egypt detail sicknesses and inhumane conditions, such as 3 people assigned to a 6 by 9 foot poorly ventilated cell, food out of plastic bags, and no laundry. The lack of health care in Egypt's prisons shows the concerning inhumane conditions, far from being a question of resources or management. It is simply a question of human and political will. [In January 2022](#), it was revealed that Egypt was highlighting prison reforms and human rights strategy. Supporters of Sisi say moves to improve jail conditions, alongside the creation of a five-year human rights strategy, reflect Egypt's growing confidence as it emerges from threats of Islamist militancy and political upheaval. [Assistant Interior Minister Tareq Marzoug told](#) reporters that the government pushing through prison reforms reflected "the extent of progress and modernization" in Egypt.

[Judges have also dropped investigations](#) into some groups and activists in a case probing foreign funding of NGOs, and some liberal prisoners were freed from pre-trial detention. [However, some activists state](#) that these were cosmetic steps for media consumption and not for the improvement of the state of human rights in Egypt. [This statement is based](#) on evidence of organizations, such as the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, having to shut down and halt activities due to growing pressure from authorities, including human rights violations and police harassment. Today, [activists continue to be arrested and jailed](#) for speaking out against security forces and the government.

[In November 2022, the COP27 climate summit](#) will take place in Egypt. COP27 is expected to bring together state parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as thousands of experts, journalists, and representatives from businesses and non-governmental groups. However, statements by Egyptian government officials are leading to concerns about the government restricting activism. [In May 2022, it was announced by Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Soukry](#) in an interview with The Associated Press that his government is planning to designate "a facility adjacent to the conference center" in Sharm El-Sheikh where the meeting will be held and where activists can hold protests and voice their opinions. He also said that the government will provide participants "access, as is traditionally done on one day

of the negotiations, to the negotiating h[all] itself.” [Organizations are concerned](#) about the implications of Shoukry’s comments on the right to peaceful activism at the COP27. Given existing restrictions on protest and assembly in Egypt that amount to their effective criminalization, the Foreign Minister’s comments imply that the Egyptian authorities will not tolerate protest outside this “government-designated” space. These statements indicate that generally there continues to be heightened restrictions on freedom of expression from activists and journalists.

Women have continued to fight for equality and rights throughout 2021 and into 2022, but also continue to be arrested and jailed for doing so. [In 2021](#), Egyptian courts sentenced at least four women social media influencers to two and five years in prison for morality-related offenses for their online videos and posts. [In March 2022](#), women launched the social media campaign #GuardianshipIsMyRight to oppose proposed amendments to the Personal Status Law by the government, which would have added to deeply entrenched discrimination against women.

Conclusion

Women have been on the frontlines of the 2011 revolution and the protest movements after that, calling for social justice and equality. Today, Egyptian women enjoy the highest levels of political representation in parliament ([28%](#)). However, women’s struggle in improving gender sensitivity levels of political institutions continues. Hundreds of women’s organizations and civil society groups continue to work on enhancing the status of Egyptian women in multiple spheres of life and narrowing the existing socio-economic gender gaps.

Egypt has made substantial gains in terms of gender equality by the ratification of international gender equality standards throughout the years. Conformity with these standards, however, falls behind. [Laws are still behind](#) when it comes to protecting women from violent men. While some protection laws may exist, sometimes there is also an unwillingness from authorities to prosecute these crimes. Serious gaps remain in Egypt’s Code of Criminal Procedure regarding sexual violence and the treatment of survivors, including a [weak definition of rape](#) and the absence of comprehensive violence against women legislation. [The UN Development Program](#) ranked Egypt 108 out of 162 nations about gender inequality

based on health, economic opportunities, and empowerment. For the law to catch up, society must be more vocal about women's rights.

Currently, parliament does not have a specific committee dedicated to gender equality but establishing one could enable oversight of initiatives and legislation over gender issues and contribute to empowerment of women. Political parties are also yet to fully commit to the promotion of equal representation. Gender-focused and gender sensitive institutions, therefore, are needed to achieve social justice and gender equality. Sisi, on the other hand, moves to restrict women's rights even further. The government eradicated nearly all venues of civic and political engagement, limiting women's movement. Nevertheless, Egyptian women continue to find alternative venues, such as the iconic #MeToo movement's social media presence. As the eleventh anniversary of the January 2011 uprising approaches, September's protests should remind the government that repression cannot guarantee stability.

The future of the Egyptian women's movement is not all rosy, but it is not entirely gloomy either. Defiant female voices are definitely in the air, and they are much louder than they were prior to the 2011 uprisings.

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