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Academic Freedom in Egypt

Ilyas Saliba

1. Summary

After a small period of improvement between 2011 and mid-2013, academic freedom in Egypt has deteriorated since the military coup in June 2013. Most of the gravest violations of academic freedom – such as violent crackdowns on students protesting against the coup and arrests of scholars critical of the military regime – occurred between mid-2013 and mid-2014. These events are also reflected in Egypt's Academic Freedom Index (AFi) scores, as compiled by the V-Dem Institute.¹ After rising from 0.26 in 2011 to 0.31 in 2012² (indicating an improvement in academic freedom due to tendencies toward liberalization after President Mubarak was ousted), Egypt's AFi score fell dramatically – from 0.31 in 2012 to 0.09 in 2013 – due to the violent crackdowns on student protests as well as to increasing political control of the academic sector.

Although student protests have died down and the scale of violent repression has consequently also abated since 2014, the situation in recent years has not improved with regard to any other facet of academic freedom. The martial law in place since 2017 has entailed the expansion of military jurisdiction to events on and around campuses. Furthermore, reinstated presidential prerogatives and regular intrusions into universities by the security services have crippled the freedom to research and

¹ The data analysis tool is available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/>.

² 0.00 is the worst possible score, and 1.00 is the best possible score.

teach, institutional autonomy, campus integrity, and the opportunity for international academic exchange. In line with this situation, Egypt's 2016 AFi score reached its lowest point since World War II: 0.05. It has remained at a similarly low level since then. For comparison, the global average AFi score for the same period is between 0.62 and 0.63. As the following case study shows, the AFi rightly categorizes Egypt as one of the world's lowest-scoring countries with respect to academic freedom.

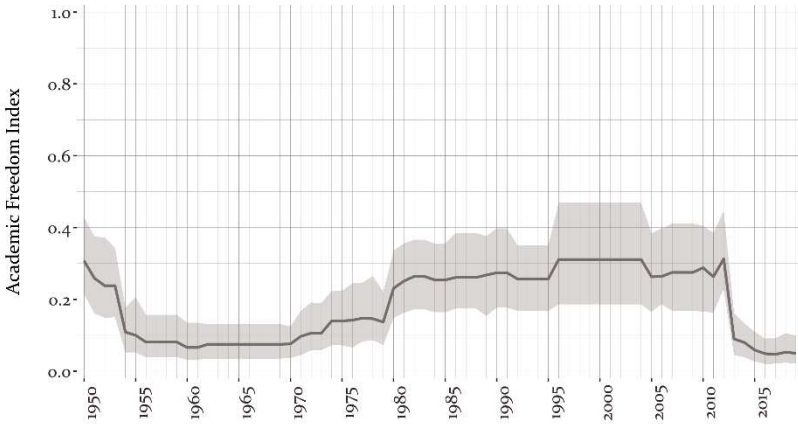


Figure 1: Academic Freedom Index Scores, Egypt 1950–2019³

After the initial, overtly repressive response to student mobilization and political activity on campus – especially in Cairo – in the first two years after the 2013 military coup, the Al-Sisi regime has adopted a subtler way of setting the boundaries of academic freedom in Egypt since 2015, relying mostly on legal and bureaucratic measures as means of control.

³ Source: V-Dem": V-Dem Institute, "V-Dem dataset - Version 10," 2020, dataset available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-10/>.

2. Methods, Sources, and Scope of the Study

There is little secondary literature on the subject of academic freedom in Egypt, particularly when it comes to the last five years. Hence, I had to rely primarily on grey literature in the form of reports by human rights organizations, press reports, and interviews with experts on the matter.

For the purpose of this case study, I reviewed relevant changes to the Egyptian Constitution as well as legislation and regulations affecting the higher education sector, academic freedom, and life on campus over the last seven years. Furthermore, I also took into account security services practices and relevant court case rulings. My analysis of these is mainly based on secondary sources, such as reports by Egyptian and international human rights groups and unions, as well as research papers that provide significant insights into the current or recent status of academic freedom in Egypt.

Moreover, I also conducted five semi-structured expert interviews with Egyptian social scientists as well as country experts from outside Egypt who work on issues related to higher education policy, academic freedom, or human rights issues. For safety reasons, I consciously refrain from using their names or any descriptions that could disclose their identity. The interview transcripts are anonymized and safely stored offline. The audio recordings were deleted in order to avoid any identification of the respondents should these recordings fall in the wrong hands. The experts were purposefully selected from various disciplinary and professional backgrounds. They include social scientists and higher education researchers as well as legal scholars and human rights researchers who investigate different aspects of academic freedom at Egyptian universities and could draw on their own experiences as well as those of their colleagues. Additionally, I conducted less formalized background conversations with practitioners in administrative roles involving international higher education cooperation who could draw on their

experiences of working with Egyptian universities and the Egyptian Ministry for Higher Education and Research. What is missing in this sample is a first-hand account by a natural scientist conducting research and teaching in Egypt. However, the many individual incidents and cases described in the main analyses of this study reflect a number of examples of violations against natural scientists.

Unfortunately, conducting a large-n survey among academics would pose a risk to respondents under the current political circumstances and was thus beyond the scope of this case study.

INTERVIEW	PROFESSION & EXPERTISE	CONDUCTED
1	Professor of social sciences at a renowned Egyptian public university	April 2020
2	Professor of sociology at a renowned Egyptian private university	April 2020
3	Researcher specializing in European–Egyptian research & higher education cooperation	June 2020
4	Researcher at Amnesty International specializing in Egypt	May 2020
5	Researcher specializing in the Egyptian higher education system	June 2020

Table 1: List of Interviews

Last but not least, this case study is informed by my own experiences as a political scientist conducting fieldwork in Cairo for around 16 months between 2013 and 2016, which involved repeated, longer fieldwork trips. Throughout this period, I personally experienced indirect institutional censorship regimes at work. The killing of the Italian researcher Giulio Regeni, who was in Cairo conducting fieldwork for his PhD research at the same time, heavily impacted my personal sense of safety as well

as that of many other researchers in Egypt.⁴ In the light of Regeni's murder, I considered leaving Egypt, but I decided to stay and to employ a set of risk mitigation strategies in order to avoid trouble with the security services during my trip.

However, my own experience very much centered around conducting research and intellectual exchanges in Cairo. In the same vein, most of the expert interviewees have been working and living primarily in the capital and in Alexandria, Egypt's second-largest city. The scope of the following analyses is thus biased toward insights from these two large metropolises, and the experiences of scholars and students at peripheral universities or higher education institutions in more rural areas are likely underrepresented.

3. Characteristics of the Higher Education Sector

Governance

The governance of the higher education sector in Egypt is highly centralized: the Ministry of Higher Education, the Higher University Council, and the Higher Research Council are the central institutions at the top.⁵ The Higher University Council consists of all the university presidents in the country and is headed by the minister of higher education. Student or researcher unions are not represented in the Higher University Council, nor are these groups invited to participate in national-level policymaking on higher education and research in any meaningful way. The minister of higher education usually suggests candidates for appointment as university presidents,

⁴ Jannis J. Grimm, Kevin Köhler, Ellen M. Lust, Ilyas Saliba, and Isabell Schierenbeck, *Safer Field Research in the Social Sciences. A Guide to Human and Digital Security in Hostile Environments*, London: SAGE, 2020, pp. xv–xviii.

⁵ Information taken from interviews 3, 4, and 5.

and these are referred to the presidential palace and officially appointed by presidential decree. Since the coup in 2013, competitive elections for the posts of university presidents, which were briefly introduced, have eroded and have been replaced by this nomination procedure, which was also prevalent during Mubarak's reign. Governance within universities is similarly centralized, with the university president at the top.

Funding Structure

Egypt has a sizeable number of private and international universities. Private universities raise funds with tuition fees, whereas public universities are funded by the state. The pressure to gain third-party funding in public universities is mainly based on the financial benefits for the successful applicant, who can increase their income up to tenfold by receiving grants.⁶ Increasing government pressure on public universities to raise student numbers has led to rising admissions with no increased investment in resources or staff. As a result, the quality of higher education at public universities has deteriorated.⁷ The ratio of students to teachers is over 200:1 in some colleges.⁸

The first international universities were set up based on partnership agreements with the US and Japanese embassies.⁹ Since a relevant law was passed in 1992, other private universities

⁶ Mohsen E. Said, "Cairo University: The Flagship University of Egypt," in *Flagship Universities in Africa*, ed. D. Teferra, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 57–90.

⁷ According to the CIA Factbook, over 53% of Egypt's population is below the age of 25. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>.

⁸ Said, "Cairo University: The Flagship University of Egypt," p. 58.

⁹ Mohsen E. Said, "Differentiated postsecondary systems and the role of the university: The case of Egypt," in *Responding to Massification. Differentiation in Postsecondary Education Worldwide*, eds. Philip G. Altbach, Liz Reisberg, and Hans de Wit, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2017, pp. 29–38.

(both non-profit and for-profit) have been legal in Egypt (Act 101, 1992). However, the private and international education sector is not large in terms of student numbers, as high tuition fees mean that access is effectively restricted to the upper classes. In 2016, 4.4 percent of all students were enrolled in private universities.¹⁰ Despite this, such universities remain important due to their reputation and the high quality of the education they provide.

Size and Access

The higher education sector in Egypt today is made up of more than 50 universities and around 3 million students in higher education institutions, accounting for around 2 percent of the population.¹¹ In 1993, 471,000 students began their studies at public universities in Egypt. In 2013, that number had already more than doubled.¹²

Admission to study programs at public universities is centralized at the national level by means of admission exams and is mainly merit-based, but the system nevertheless reinforces structural societal inequalities. Tuition fees at public universities are uncommon; high tuition fees are very common at private universities, however, which leads to class-based selectivity.

Financial Security

Egyptian public university professors' salaries were fixed in a 1972 Sadat-era law and never adapted to inflation or rising costs of living.¹³ Despite a major salary increase for academics

¹⁰ Said, "Differentiated postsecondary systems and the role of the university," p. 37.

¹¹ See https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_egypt_2017.pdf.

¹² Said, "Cairo University: The Flagship University of Egypt," p. 65.

¹³ See <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2014/01/the-economic-struggle-of-public-university-professors/>.

employed at public universities,¹⁴ introduced in a bill in April 2013,¹⁵ the salary of an average researcher employed at a public university in Egypt rarely suffices to finance a decent standard of living.¹⁶ In November 2015, the ministry of higher education and research revoked the tax exemptions on professors' salaries, reducing faculty income by around one-quarter.¹⁷ At the beginning of the 2019 academic year, thousands of faculty members at Egyptian public universities started a campaign to change the law specifying the salaries of university employees and demanded pay increases.¹⁸

Many researchers or professors at public universities work in the private sector in addition to their university jobs.¹⁹ Some also take on additional teaching jobs at private universities.

Discrimination and Misconduct

According to the interviews conducted for this study, corruption does not seem to be a major issue, although nepotism does play a role in the academic system and undermines recruitment processes, particularly at public universities.

Universities are primarily concentrated in larger urban centers. In the southern regions, only a few tertiary education institutions exist. Among the student body, gender distribution is relatively equal. Among academic staff, women remain underrepresented. This gender disparity increases with the level of seniority.

¹⁴ Said, "Cairo University: The Flagship University of Egypt," pp. 72–73.

¹⁵ See <https://www.ft.com/content/16abo414-a830-1e2-8e5d-00144feabdco>.

¹⁶ Said, "Cairo University: The Flagship University of Egypt," p. 69.

¹⁷ See <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2015/11/egyptian-finance-ministry-gives-professors-a-pay-cut/>.

¹⁸ See <https://themedialine.org/by-region/egyptian-educators-protest-over-wage-stagnation-lack-of-benefits/>.

¹⁹ Benjamin Geer, "Autonomy and Symbolic Capital in an Academic Social Movement: The March 9 Group in Egypt," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 17 (2013): p. 13.

Politicization

Compared to the era of Nasser's and Sadat's rule, student mobilization, both on campus and beyond, took place only sporadically during Mubarak's reign.²⁰ Under Mubarak, students' rights to organize politically and to protest were severely restricted. According to Mohamed Nagy, a researcher at the Egyptian NGO AFTE, ²¹ "[n]o collective action or organization of any kind was accepted, nor was there any real opportunity for student representation."²²

In recent years, the politics of higher education governance has been critically impacted by contentious and at times violent political and societal conflicts in Egypt. Students were one of the main societal groups participating in the 2011 Arab Spring protests, which eventually removed the autocrat Mubarak from office, and universities often served as starting points for protest marches. After mass protests against President Mohamed Morsi in the summer of 2013, the military staged a coup and removed Morsi from office. Subsequently, students who support Morsi have been at the forefront of protests against the military takeover.²³

²⁰ Hatem Zayed, Nadine Sika, and Ibrahim Elnur, "Activism and Contentious Politics in Egypt: The Case of the Student Movement," unpublished manuscript on file with the authors.

²¹ AFTE stands for the Organization for Freedom of Thought and Expression; see the information available at: <https://afteegypt.org/en/>.

²² AFTE and SAR, "Joint submission to 34th Universal Periodical Review of the Human Rights Council on Egypt," 2017, p. 10, www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Scholars-at-Risk-AFTE-Egypt-UPR-Submission-1.pdf.

²³ Florian Kohstall "From Reform to Resistance: Universities and Student Mobilisation in Egypt and Morocco before and after the Arab Uprisings," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 1 (2014): pp. 59-73.

4. Current State of Academic Freedom and Key Developments in the Recent Past

4.1 Legal Protection of Academic Freedom

Egypt ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1984 without raising any reservations or commenting on articles 13, 14, or 15 of the covenant, which include a number of references to academic freedom and access to education.²⁴

Under the monarchy, the Egyptian Constitution included a reference to academic freedom until 1956. Nasser and his followers then removed this reference from Egypt's 1956 Republican Constitution. In 2014, the guarantee of academic freedom was reintroduced. Article 21 of Egypt's current constitution guarantees institutional autonomy, and Article 23 asserts: "The state grants the freedom of scientific research." Accordingly, *de jure* constitutional protection of academic freedom is rather strong. However, the state of emergency – continuously in place since April 2017 – and additional counter-terrorism legislation have been extensively used to target university students and staff in the past, thus undermining these constitutionally guaranteed rights of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.²⁵ With regard to the higher education sector, the president has used his emergency law prerogatives to appoint heads of universities by presidential decree and to criminalize certain student unions. Moreover, the security services have used their extended powers to arrest and persecute researchers and students, often on trumped-up charges or

²⁴ See https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF-Dateien/Pakte_Konventionen/ICESCR/icescr_en.pdf.

²⁵ Sherif. M. Eldeen, "Egypt Back Under Emergency Law," 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/69886>.

allegations of having committed acts criminalized under the new counter-terrorism legislation.²⁶

The rights of students and researchers were further eroded as a result of the vast increase in military court jurisdiction to include the vicinity of all public buildings. Consequently, many students and some academics have been sentenced by military courts. AFTE has documented at least 65 military trials of students between mid-2013 and mid-2016.²⁷ Furthermore, a 2015 presidential decree broadened the basis on which tenured faculty could be fired to include any political activism on campus as well as vague ethics violations.²⁸

As mentioned above, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research develops and oversees higher education policy. On the national level, in addition to the General Supreme Council of Universities, there are four specialized executive bodies regulating tertiary education in Egypt and overseeing the implementation of the ministry's policies in private universities, the Islamic Al-Azhar University, and technical education institutions.²⁹ The councils consist of the respective university presidents and representatives from the ministry. Each supreme council is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the ministry's higher education policies. In addition, the General Supreme Council of Universities – on which all university presidents and some additional public figures are represented –

²⁶ Amy A. Holmes and Sahar Aziz, "Egypt's Lost Academic Freedom," *SADA*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78210>.

²⁷ AFTE and SAR, "Joint submission to 34th Universal Periodical Review of the Human Rights Council on Egypt," p. 5.

²⁸ See <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/631252>.

²⁹ For public universities, this is the Supreme Council of Public Universities. For private institutions, this is the Supreme Council of Private Universities. For technical higher education institutions, this is the Supreme Council of Technical Institutes. For religious higher education, this is the Supreme Council of Al-Azhar University.

headed by the minister of higher education, oversees the general implementation of higher education policies.

All in all, despite constitutional guarantees, the legal protection of academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions in Egypt have been eroded in recent years by various legislative and regulatory changes, as well as by the ongoing state of emergency.

4.2 Institutional Autonomy and Governance

During a brief period between 2011 and 2013, public university presidents in Egypt were elected by the respective university faculty in an open, competitive process. The Morsi government “allowed faculty to elect their own deans and presidents. [...] In 2014, Al-Sisi issued a decree reversing course.”³⁰ After grabbing power, President Al-Sisi reinstated the presidential prerogative to appoint university presidents. They are usually nominated by the Ministry for Higher Education and Research and subsequently appointed upon confirmation from the presidential palace. The president has also made regular use of his authority to fire undesirable university presidents in recent years.³¹ One of the experts interviewed for this study concluded that the main achievements of the 2011 uprisings with respect to university autonomy and self-governance “have been fully reversed by the regime since the 2013 military coup.”³²

Public university administrations cannot make changes to departmental structures or study programs on their own authority; such changes need to be accredited and approved by the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation for Education (NAQAAE).³³ NAQAAE has to confirm all new

³⁰ Holmes and Aziz, “Egypt’s Lost Academic Freedom.”

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Information taken from Interview 1.

³³ Founded in 2006 under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education, NAQAAE is responsible for accrediting higher education institutions and their

departmental structures and new study programs.³⁴ Given its limited resources and the growing number of higher education institutions and study programs in Egypt, the accreditation of new programs has slowed down in recent years.

Despite this centralized executive system of higher education governance, universities enjoy a certain level of autonomy in terms of their internal regulations and community service, and to some extent in their financing and fundraising. Public funding for universities is usually earmarked for specific budget lines, whereas funds raised by the university itself can be freely managed by the institution in accordance with its own standards and strategic goals. Thus public institutions that raise more funds, independent of the public funding they receive, have more room to maneuver when it comes to their own financial governance.³⁵

Universities themselves are centrally organized; the office of the university president sits atop this hierarchical structure and makes most of the executive decisions without consulting faculty or students. Consequently, departments do not have much latitude for self-governance. One of the experts interviewed for this study argued that universities “do not enjoy any financial, administrative, or pedagogical autonomy.”

During and after the 2011 January Revolution, many new and independent student unions emerged, and their members were elected as university- and national-level student union representatives. However, just two years later, most of the newly

programs according to national standards. On this point, see Said, “Differentiated postsecondary systems and the role of the university,” pp. 40–41.

³⁴ Tariq H. Ismael, “Does Egyptian universities’ disclosure on social responsibility enhance sustainable development?,” *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2020): pp. 82–84.

³⁵ European Commission, “Egypt: Overview of the Higher Education System,” Brussels: 2017, p. 8, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_armenia_2017.pdf.

established independent student unions were disbanded and banned from participating in subsequent elections for the national student union. Since 2013, elections for student and researcher unions have been fully controlled by the state, although elections are still formally held at most universities. Some private universities (including private universities with international ties, such as the British University in Egypt and the German University in Egypt) have reportedly banned student unions altogether. In 2015, “Sisi issued a decree authorizing the intelligence services to regulate public universities and their faculty’s intellectual life.”³⁶

During recent elections for student union representatives, interference took place in the form of excluding several student groups from the ballot. Such measures particularly targeted student groups that seemed to be close to the banned Muslim Brotherhood or the April 6 Movement.³⁷ At least one student union representative was charged with terrorism for his political work and received a prison sentence.³⁸ At public universities in Egypt today, students are not consulted and do not play a role in the governance of either their university or the Ministry of Higher Education. In fact, since the brutal crackdown on student protests in 2013/2014, students’ extra-curricular involvement at universities is usually limited to volunteer activities with no significant influence on university governance.³⁹

All the experts interviewed for this study agreed that while most promotions within the Egyptian academic system are largely based on merit and fulfill certain formal requirements (such

³⁶ Holmes and Aziz, “Egypt’s Lost Academic Freedom.”

³⁷ This movement spearheaded the 2011 January Revolution. On this point, see AFTE and SAR, “Joint submission to 34th Universal Periodical Review of the Human Rights Council on Egypt.”

³⁸ See https://aftegypt.org/en/academic_freedom/2018/07/11/14007-aftegypt.html.

³⁹ Information taken from interviews 1 and 2.

as years of academic experience and a target number of publications), appointments to prestigious positions also reflect political considerations, and loyalty to the regime plays a major role. One of the experts interviewed went even further, claiming that “universities have direct channels to the security services when prolonging contracts or approving research projects, although often these processes remain absolutely obscure for faculty members.”⁴⁰ Such practices increase the instability of academic jobs at Egyptian public universities.

In 2020, the Egyptian Parliament took action against the growing influence of the country’s most important religious higher education institution, Al-Azhar University. A new bill aims to end Al-Azhar’s control of Dar al-Ifta, the institution which regulates the lives of Egypt’s Muslims, giving the Egyptian president instead of the university the right to appoint Dar al-Ifta’s mufti, Egypt’s top Islamic jurist. Lawmakers have rejected strong condemnations of this move as well as claims that such a change would undermine Al-Azhar’s institutional autonomy.⁴¹

4.3 Freedom to Research and Teach

In the years since 2013, many topics can no longer be researched or discussed at universities for fear of repercussions for students or researchers. The red lines have shifted and are less clear than they were before. Researchers in Egypt suffer from restrictions on and sometimes the criminalization of their research. Research on the role of the Egyptian army in the state and in society, on political Islam in Egypt (especially on the Muslim Brotherhood organization, which has been criminalized), or on any other topic which the government deems inappropriate or unpatriotic is off limits and may entail serious consequences for the researcher. In several cases, researchers have been arrested

⁴⁰ Information taken from Interview 5.

⁴¹ See <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-azhar-stripped-power-parliament-reforms>.

and prosecuted on terrorism charges or for supporting terrorism due to their research on the Muslim Brotherhood or on the fight against ISIS in Sinai. A few researchers who are working on the protests, the Muslim Brotherhood, or issues related to national security – such as the military – have left Egypt due to the risks associated with conducting such research there.⁴²

Like no other case before or since, the brutal killing of the Italian Cambridge University researcher Giulio Regeni – likely perpetrated by the Egyptian security services – highlighted the fact that research on politically contentious issues can end in death for researchers in Egypt, no matter their nationality. Regeni was investigating the role of independent unions after the 2011 revolution in Egypt, and one of his most trusted interlocutors tipped off the security services.⁴³ The ways in which the Egyptian judiciary and security services have been obstructing the ongoing Italian investigations into Regeni's death in recent years indicates that neither the security services nor the state prosecutor have any interest in holding the responsible people to account.

Although Giulio Regeni's murder is the best-known case internationally, it is not the only case of a scholar being persecuted or harmed by the Egyptian security services. After speaking on current developments in Sinai at a public conference organized by a think tank in Berlin, Ismail Alexandrani – a prominent Egyptian researcher with the Woodrow Wilson Center⁴⁴ and an independent journalist – was arrested upon his return to Egypt. Alexandrani spent more than

⁴² Information taken from Interview 1. See also AFTE, “Universities Without Academic Freedoms. A Report on Freedom of Teaching and Research at Egyptian Universities,” 2020, p. 11, https://afteegypt.org/en/academic_freedoms/2020/07/27/19745-afteegypt.html

⁴³ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/egypt-murder-giulio-regeni>.

⁴⁴ See <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/person/ismail-alexandrani>.

two and a half years in pre-trial detention and was charged in 2018 with belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood and spreading information that could harm national security; he received a ten-year prison sentence. Paradoxically, in previous interviews and in his own writings, Alexandrani had been very critical of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁵

There are also many less-visible instances of Egyptian students and researchers being persecuted and jailed for issues related to their scholarly work. In less drastic cases, several students or researchers have been disciplined by their universities⁴⁶ or have been denied an academic qualification or a promotion.⁴⁷

Turning from cases of individual scholars to more structural forms of restrictions on the freedom to research, it is important to point out that larger research projects conducted at public universities require security clearance before being approved. This security clearance is usually granted by a security services

⁴⁵ See <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-military-court-sentences-sinai-journalist-10-years>.

⁴⁶ AFTE documented one case involving an arts student who was suspended by her university for participating in demonstrations against ceding the Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia in 2016; see https://afteegypt.org/en/breaking_news-2/2018/10/30/16213-afteegypt.html. In another case, Al-Azhar changed the titles of several MA and PhD theses, stating that the previous titles were not consistent with its moderate ideas and constituted a threat to national unity. The faculty member supervising these theses was later suspended from teaching both undergraduate and graduate classes, and from supervising graduate students in the future.

⁴⁷ In 2014, Al-Azhar University in Cairo refused to grant a PhD candidate the doctoral degree he had earned due to the fact that in his thesis, he described the events of June 30, 2013 as a military coup; see https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_egypt/details/2015/10/29/684721/-الغاء-إلغاء-مناقشة-رسالة-دكتوراه-بالأزهر-و. In another case at Suez Canal University, both a PhD and an MA thesis investigating issues surrounding the Muslim Brotherhood were dismissed because they allegedly disturbed public order and challenged Egyptian court rulings designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group; see <https://alwafd.news/-القناة-تلقي-1001485-وتقارير-جامعة-الإخوان> أخبار-وتقارير-1001485-جامعة-الإخوان-القناة-تلقي-رسالتين-علميتين-حول-الإخوان

representative who is placed in the university administration. All the experts interviewed for this case study agreed that the level of scrutiny involved in security clearances for research projects differs greatly between disciplines – that it most heavily impacts the social sciences and the humanities, less so the natural sciences.⁴⁸ Although no sophisticated system of state control over research topics exists, university-level security personnel or university administrations usually interfere if they fear sanctions or negative consequences as a result of certain research projects.

Some of the experts interviewed pointed out that the security services are increasingly scrutinizing the topics of bachelors, masters, and doctoral theses as part of research approval processes, and censorship of students and faculty has expanded as a result.⁴⁹ However, the most frequent form of censorship is self-censorship. According to the interviews conducted for this study as well as AFTE reports based on interviews with faculty members at Egyptian public universities, many faculty members and students practice forms of self-censorship in order to avoid getting into trouble with their university administration or the security services.

The freedom to teach has also come under pressure. Teaching is increasingly limited due to heightened surveillance on campus, mainly via informants recruited from the student body. Together with highly publicized persecutions of academics based on their teaching,⁵⁰ this situation has likely increased individual and departmental self-censorship at Egyptian universities. Many researchers have shifted to researching other issues which they deem less controversial and are censoring themselves in class for fear of being reported. Furthermore, two

⁴⁸ Information taken from interviews 1–5.

⁴⁹ Information taken from interviews 1, 3, 5, and AFTE, “Universities Without Academic Freedoms,” p. 7.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the coverage of the above-mentioned Ismail Alexandrani incident: <https://www.dailynewssegypt.com/2017/01/01/607705/>.

of the interviewees indicated that their superiors at their institutions had asked them to implement changes to the content of their teaching curricula or readings lists in order to avoid trouble with the authorities. Such instances were reported by interviewees at public and private universities alike.

According to a recent AFTE study, several faculty members at Egyptian universities have received directives from the Ministry for Higher Education and Research instructing them not to discuss any issues related to territorial integrity or the so-called Tiran and Sanafir crises⁵¹ in their classes.⁵²

In one concrete example, a European professor teaching social sciences at an Egyptian public university told me that she never discusses Egyptian examples (not even historical examples) and avoids comparing developments in other countries to those in Egypt for fear of reprisals against her or her students.⁵³ Two of the researchers interviewed for this study said they did not dare to speak about the Egyptian army, political Islam, or any religious affairs in their seminars.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, according to the interviews conducted for this study, the level of self-censorship and surveillance in teaching differs between faculties and universities.⁵⁵ As with the restrictions on research funding, censorship in teaching likely occurs more regularly in the humanities and the social sciences due to the potentially more sensitive issues addressed in these disciplines. Self-censorship is not only common at public universities; in private conversations on the topic, three lecturers at private universities in Egypt also

⁵¹ Jannis J. Grimm, "Egypt is not for sale! Harnessing nationalism for alliance building in Egypt's Tiran and Sanafir island protests," *Mediterranean Politics* 24, no. 4 (2019): pp. 443-466.

⁵² AFTE, "Universities Without Academic Freedoms. A Report on Freedom of Teaching and Research at Egyptian Universities," p. 12.

⁵³ Information taken from Interview 1.

⁵⁴ Information taken from interviews 1 and 2.

⁵⁵ Information taken from interviews 1, 2, and 5.

reported adjusting their wording and the topics they addressed in lectures or seminars.

A survey-based study of 800 university students, which investigated perceptions of academic freedom among students enrolled at public and private universities in Egypt in 2014, found that “security-oriented administrations often interfere in student academic life in areas such as student admissions, student research, student conduct and choice of curricular materials.”⁵⁶ The survey also indicated that students evaluated their freedom of expression on campus and in seminars as limited.⁵⁷

However, it seems that faculty at private universities usually enjoy considerably more freedom in teaching and research compared to their colleagues at public universities. This is because private and international universities in Egypt enjoy financial independence and a different legal status, which means they are less likely to experience direct governmental interference or pressure, security services’ access to campus is limited, and they are less vulnerable to the governmental prerogatives or pressure which are often used to limit freedom of research and teaching.⁵⁸

In sum, both the freedom to research and the freedom to teach have increasingly come under attack in Egypt since the military coup in 2013. Whereas a more open and at times vivid debate among students and academics evolved after the 2011 January

⁵⁶ Mouhammd M. Zain-Al-Dien, “Student Academic Freedom in Egypt: Perceptions of University Education Students,” *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 4, no. 2 (2016): p. 435.

⁵⁷ Zain-Al-Dien, “Student Academic Freedom in Egypt: Perceptions of University Education Students,” p. 436. Despite the fact that the sample was not randomized, the results of this survey provide a rare perspective on the perceptions of students studying in Egypt after the coup.

⁵⁸ See <https://www.aaup.org/article/neoliberal-coup-american-university-cairo#.XzpKsC2w124>.

Revolution that ousted Mubarak, persecutions of unwelcome researchers and self-censorship among faculty and students for fear of reprisals have once again taken hold at universities throughout the country under President Al-Sisi.

4.4 Exchange and Dissemination of Academic Knowledge

The publication and dissemination of research results is not usually systematically or pre-emptively restricted, beyond the general restrictions on research topics outlined above. The prominent case of the renowned economist Abdel Khalik Farouk – who was arrested shortly after publishing his latest book, *Is Egypt Really a Poor Country?* – is one example of how targeted restrictions on publications occur after the work is made public.⁵⁹ Mr. Farouk was released after spending ten days in custody, but the Egyptian authorities banned his book. One of the experts interviewed for this study pointed out that publications in Arabic are more likely to be censored by the Egyptian authorities than publications in English.

Although physical libraries often lack copies of contemporary scientific literature and journals, online access to most scientific journals for students and staff is provided through an online platform by a network of universities under government auspices. It is thus more difficult to find Arab-language publications, which often appear only in printed series and are less likely to be found online. However, one issue mentioned by the experts interviewed was access to national public databases. As one interviewee pointed out: “Many Egyptian professors don’t get access to national data” because public authorities do not cooperate. In addition, according to Emad Abo Ghazy, a professor at Cairo University, restrictions on conducting

⁵⁹ See <https://www.euromesco.net/news/egyptian-economist-abdel-khalik-farouk-arrested-over-critical-book>.

surveys, collecting data, and accessing archives have increased in recent years.⁶⁰

As a policy, Egyptian universities aim to increase their faculty members' participation at international conferences where they can present their research.⁶¹ In practice, however, support for international travel is often limited by the university's lack of resources. Well-funded public universities such as Cairo University provide travel funds for their faculty. At other public institutions, financial support for travel is less available, or at least less generous. Private universities in Egypt usually have separate budget lines for faculty travel funds.

The presence of security services personnel in administrative roles at Egyptian higher education institutions – both universities and ministries alike – since the 2013 coup has enabled the security services to keep an eye on the international trips researchers make. According to two of the experts interviewed, the university security officer – who is officially assigned a role in university management but is allegedly placed in that role by the intelligence services – screens all international conference travel applications and decides whether to approve them. Even the fact that researchers have to obtain permission from their university administration as well as from the Egyptian Foreign Office before undertaking any international travel in relation to their work can be seen as an unnecessary administrative burden and an instrument of political control.

Similarly, foreign researchers who want to teach or conduct research in Egypt need to apply for permission from the Foreign Office. Public university employees who want to participate in academic exchange abroad have to explain their reasons for travelling and describe the content of their presentations; this measure is intended to prevent researchers from “doing harm to

⁶⁰ AFTE, “Universities Without Academic Freedoms,” p. 8.

⁶¹ Said, “Cairo University: The Flagship University of Egypt,” p. 79.

Egypt's image" – so said one of the interviewees, quoting a security official who had interviewed them about their application for a travel permit.⁶²

Two Egyptian scholars mentioned being surveilled by the Egyptian authorities abroad – for instance, by embassy staff who attended their public talks. Moreover, individual travel bans imposed by the security services target faculty members who have spoken about politically sensitive issues while abroad in the past. A recent report by AFTE, which investigated three cases of Egyptian academics who were prevented from leaving Egypt due to pending security clearances, substantiated the fact that these newly established security clearance obligations lead to restrictions on academic mobility and international exchange.⁶³ The study highlights only three recent cases, but the real number of such or similar cases is likely much higher, as only a few researchers would publicly or even anonymously talk about such incidents for fear of reprisals from the security services.

The need for security clearance is not limited to Egyptian faculty at public universities who want to travel abroad; it also applies to incoming faculty members from outside Egypt who take up permanent or visiting positions in Egyptian higher education institutions – a situation which further restricts international staff exchange. The interviews conducted for this case study confirmed that such restrictions have become more common in recent years. One of the interviewees mentioned having to postpone several workshops at universities in Cairo because the security clearance for these events was repeatedly delayed. In sum, the security services control most aspects of academic life through their presence on campus and their veto powers in administrative procedures.

⁶² Information taken from Interview 1.

⁶³ AFTE, "Pending Security Clearance. Travel Restrictions on Faculty Members," 2019, <https://aftegypt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pending-Security-Clearance.pdf>.

One extremely contentious and subsequently publicized example of revoked travel permission for an Egyptian researcher took place during the most recent Universal Periodical Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva. The Egyptian authorities prohibited at least one Egyptian scholar who was scheduled to testify at the UNHRC hearing from leaving the country in an attempt to prevent critical Egyptian voices from participating in the review as experts.⁶⁴ However, this case was clearly driven by the overtly political nature of the topic as well as the high-profile venue – the political stakes for the Egyptian government were extremely high.

Egyptian academics regularly voice their opinions in newspapers as well as on television and radio programs. Some of the more prominent academics even have their own editorials or columns in national newspapers. As one interviewee pointed out: “The professor as a public figure is something which is very present in Egypt.”⁶⁵ Many use social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to disseminate their research findings to a wider audience. If the statements researchers make on social media contradict the current government narrative or touch on the sensitive issues mentioned above, this may lead to persecution by the authorities on charges of defaming Egypt or spreading fake news. Without a doubt, there are limits to what academics can say publicly in print media due to widespread censorship at most Egyptians newspapers. Anything that is overly critical of the current regime or contradicts the regime’s position on a certain issue is likely to be censored in print media. Consequently, in recent years, academics such as the economist Hassan Nafsa

⁶⁴ Press Release by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 2016, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20924&LangID=E>.

⁶⁵ Information taken from Interview 3.

have stopped writing their columns for large Egyptian newspapers as a protest against this censorship.

Some online outlets regularly host interviews with or invite contributions by Egyptian academics without censoring them, but their reach is limited in comparison to print media, and many of these independent media websites are blocked in Egypt.⁶⁶ If academics in Egypt criticize current policies in the media, repercussions are likely to follow. An example of this is the case of Prof. Nader Nour El-Dain, an expert in the field of irrigation and water management at Cairo University, who was accused of defamation by the minister responsible for irrigation and investigated by the public prosecutor because he criticized water irrigation policies in a newspaper article.⁶⁷ This case demonstrates that while most of the restrictions on and repercussions for the exchange and dissemination of research are concentrated on social scientists, even natural scientists' statements can become political, and disciplinary measures will be taken if a researcher publicly criticizes government policy.

To sum up, the freedom to exchange and disseminate one's research findings has been curtailed in part by newly established regulatory regimes which institutionalize the role of the security services in approving Egyptian researchers' travel applications and giving permission to scholars who wish to participate in academic exchanges in Egypt. Beyond academic peer-to-peer exchange, Egypt's altered media landscape has also resulted in increased censorship for academics who engage with print or online media.

⁶⁶ AFTE, "Decision from an Unknown Body: On blocking websites in Egypt," 2017, https://afteegypt.org/en/right_to_know-2/publicationsright_to_know-right_to_know-2/2017/06/04/13069-afteegypt.html.

⁶⁷ Mohammed Mostafa and Ahmed Shaban, "Academic freedom and scientific research freedom in Egypt," 2018, <http://www.ec-rf.net/?p=1284>.

4.5 Campus Integrity

Overall, political rights and freedoms in Egypt have decreased significantly since 2012, and the repression of critical voices and oppositional organizations has risen enormously since the military takeover in 2013. In this context, the negative developments with regard to campus integrity in recent years, as outlined in detail below, must be understood as one among many societal areas which have experienced an increasing security presence and suffered violence at the hands of the security forces.⁶⁸ Physical violence and repressive actions against students and faculty peaked between 2013 and 2014, and declined thereafter. This trend coincides with the widespread student protests that took place after the coup in 2013.⁶⁹

Access to public university campuses for visitors or foreign researchers requires security clearance from the respective university's security officers and is thus impossible without a prior announcement and an application. In Cairo and Alexandria, but also elsewhere in Egypt, the presence of riot police and other security services around and on campuses has increased significantly in the years since the coup.⁷⁰ At Cairo University, for example, policemen in uniform and plainclothes officers stationed at every gate conduct thorough security and ID checks on anyone who wishes to enter the campus, while riot police in full protest gear have been permanently stationed outside all university gates since the 2013/2014 student protests.

⁶⁸ Other spheres include civil society (see <https://www.hrw.org/tag/egypt-crackdown-civil-society>), but similar tendencies can also be observed in the political arena around elections.

⁶⁹ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, "Education under Attack 2020," New York, 2020, p. 136, <https://protectingeducation.org/publication/education-under-attack-2020/>.

⁷⁰ See <https://timep.org/timeline/police-presence-reinstated-university-campus-egyptian-court-declares-muslim-brotherhood-terrorist-organization>.

Some faculty members at Cairo University have complained that covert security personnel are increasingly present in classrooms and at faculty meetings, heightening student and faculty fears of being reported, and consequently leading to more self-censorship.⁷¹ In a 2017 report for AFTE, Mohammed Nagy notes that the increasing

presence of security forces on campus and the use of military trials to repress students and faculty, instead of protecting them [...] not only undermines the principle of university autonomy and harms individuals, by putting students' lives at risk, but also creates a climate of fear and repression and causes a setback in the progress and quality of research and education.⁷²

According to this report, between mid-2013 and mid-2016, more than 1,180 students were arrested at Egyptian universities.⁷³ Most of these arrests happened during protest activities in or around campuses between 2013 and 2014. Other arrests seem to have targeted students for their political activity on campus. Most horrifically, during the same period, AFTE documented 21 extrajudicial killings of students on or around campuses at the hands of the security services. Most of these harsh repressive tactics were observed between mid-2013 and 2014, when many pro-Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood students were protesting the military coup.⁷⁴ Despite the security services' heavy-handed response to the student protests in 2013 and 2014, no universities were officially closed for political reasons.⁷⁵ However, since then, the right to assemble has been severely restricted, both on and off campus.⁷⁶ Consequently, students and researchers were also

⁷¹ Holmes and Aziz, "Egypt's Lost Academic Freedom."

⁷² AFTE and SAR, "Joint submission to 34th Universal Periodical Review of the Human Rights Council on Egypt," pp. 16-17.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ Information taken from Interview 5.

⁷⁶ See Human rights Watch, "All According to Plan. The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt," 2014,

targeted as part of the post-coup repression of Muslim Brotherhood supporters.⁷⁷ More recently, the crackdown has widened, and the security services have expanded their repressive tactics to include nearly all the critical voices speaking out against or criticizing the military regime.⁷⁸

These repressive tactics around campuses in Egypt appear to have focused primarily on the main public universities in Cairo and Alexandria. AFTE has documented that more than half of the 1,180 students mentioned above were arrested in or around the theological Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Another 117 arrests were reported at Cairo University, and 83 at Alexandria University. In total, universities in Cairo and Alexandria account for more than 830 of the 1,180 documented student arrests. Between 2013 and 2016, more than 1,000 students were reportedly expelled or subjected to disciplinary action, and at least 65 were tried by military courts.⁷⁹

Similarly, the 21 reported extrajudicial killings all occurred at campuses in Cairo and Alexandria. Documented cases of disciplinary measures (expulsions, suspensions, loss of position)

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt>; and Amnesty International “Egypt: ‘People were dying all around me’. Testimonies from Cairo violence on 14 August 2013,” London, 2013,

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/16000/mdei20462013en.pdf>.

⁷⁷ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/08/egypt-sentences-75-to-death-in-rabaa-massacre-mass-trial>.

⁷⁸ Jannis J. Grimm and Cilja Harders, “Unpacking the effects of repression: The evolution of Islamist repertoires of contention in Egypt after the fall of President Morsi,” *Social Movement Studies* 17, no. 1 (2017): pp. 1–18. See also Amnesty International, “Egypt: NGOs face unprecedented crackdown,” London, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mdei2/3799/2016/en/>; and Human Rights Watch, “Egypt: New NGO Law Renews Draconian Restrictions,” Washington, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/24/egypt-new-ngo-law-renews-draconian-restrictions>.

⁷⁹ AFTE and SAR, “Joint submission to 34th Universal Periodical Review of the Human Rights Council on Egypt.”

also peaked in 2013 and 2014, with around 800 out of 1,051 reported incidents targeting students and faculty in Cairo and Alexandria. This regional and institutional focus on a few of the most prominent academic institutions in the country supports the suspicion that certain universities were seen as hotbeds of political deliberation, contestation, and mobilization, and were accordingly targeted by the security forces and law enforcement agencies. Holmes and Aziz conclude that “unprecedented levels of censorship, surveillance, and repression of academic freedom” took hold in Egypt after the military takeover.⁸⁰ Comparing these violations to events in the aftermath of the Free Officers’ coup between 1952 and 1956, which paved the way for Nasser’s 14-year socialist rule, one might challenge the idea that such events are unprecedented. However, in direct comparison to the thirty years under Mubarak (1981–2011) and the previous period under President Sadat (1970–1981), censorship, surveillance, and repression have continued unabated and have only intensified since the 2013 coup.

As for researchers, Scholars at Risk (SAR) confirmed the wrongful imprisonment of at least 14 faculty members between 2013 and 2019, mainly in Cairo. SAR further verified at least nine killings of researchers in Egypt during the same period.⁸¹ Due to SAR’s methods of data collection, the report most likely underestimates the actual number of incidents.⁸²

The increased presence of military personnel at civilian universities constitutes further grounds for concern. Due to official agreements with the Egyptian Armed Forces, soldiers

⁸⁰ Holmes and Aziz, “Egypt’s Lost Academic Freedom.”

⁸¹ See <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-monitoring-project/>.

⁸² Jannis J. Grimm and Ilyas Saliba: “Free Research in Fearful Times: Conceptualizing an Index to Monitor Academic Freedom,” *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* 3, no. 1 (2017): pp. 51–52. See also <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/methodology-of-the-academic-freedom-monitoring-project/>.

increasingly study in standard university programs,⁸³ which creates a feeling of being surveilled among the civilian students. It is likely that internal security agents are also monitoring classes, especially in the capital, although their exact numbers and range of activities have not been documented.

Moreover, class participants or university staff sometimes film university lectures without giving the lecturer the opportunity to prohibit this – a phenomenon which limits freedom of speech in lecture halls. CCTV exists on university campuses, as it increasingly does everywhere in Egypt – especially at private universities – but usually not inside buildings or classrooms.

4.6 Subnational and Disciplinary Variation

Differences with respect to the above-mentioned violations of academic freedom do exist, especially between the more prestigious, well-known universities in Cairo and other smaller, less prominent universities in Egypt. The latter likely experience a less overt security presence at their gates. Beyond the geography, size, and prestige of a university, political activities on the part of students or faculty may attract the attention of the state security forces and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research alike.

Disciplinary variances are pertinent, but everyone is a potential target. Disciplines such as political science and sociology are more prone to restrictions, including surveillance, censorship, and disciplinary measures, or even hard repression. However, the above-mentioned cases of the professor of water management and the economist show that restrictions on academic exchange and debate are not exclusive to certain disciplines – if the statement or publication is deemed too critical of the current regime's policies or ideology, this will have consequences.

⁸³ Information taken from Interview 4.

The pressure on universities, faculty, and students to refrain from engaging in critical political debate originates with different actors, but by far the most significant restrictive actor violating the principles of academic freedom in Egypt in recent years has been the state apparatus – particularly the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, the various internal security services, and the prosecution authorities. However, religious or media actors may also threaten faculty and/or students for indecency or for violating religious rules and customs. Various actors – including conservative religious institutions or pro-regime media outlets – occasionally publicly criticize outspoken, progressive researchers, often in vile language, which contributes to creating a climate of fear among researchers.

Despite the overall negative trend in academic freedom in Egypt in recent years, private universities still function as a kind of safe haven in which the freedom to teach and research is largely guaranteed and neither faculty nor students are directly surveilled by the security services on campus. Nevertheless, state security services informants likely exist among students and faculty at private universities as well, although they are not as visibly present as they are on public university campuses and in public lecture halls.

4.7 Efforts to Promote Academic Freedom

Internationally and multilaterally, rather than promoting academic freedom, the current Egyptian regime is actively seeking to undermine the international standards for safeguarding academic freedom which its predecessors signed up to (at least formally). It does so through rhetoric and within international fora – for example, by watering down definitions of terrorism in the UNHCR counter-terrorism working group.⁸⁴ Moreover, in the context of international institutions that serve

⁸⁴ Ibid.

to protect human rights in general – and academic freedom as one aspect of these rights – the Egyptian regime has shown no interest in advocating for academic freedom, rejecting any criticism of its recent crackdowns.⁸⁵

A number of organizations and networks in Egypt are working to promote the values of academic freedom by supporting scholars at risk in court or by documenting cases and raising awareness. Chief among these is the AFTE organization, registered as a law firm, which publishes reports and data on infringements on academic freedom in Egypt. AFTE also publishes press releases detailing cases of academics at risk. The network of the March 9 Movement, which consists of Egyptian academics who stand up for institutional autonomy and academic freedom in Egypt,⁸⁶ is another relevant organization. However, since the crackdown on students and faculty following the coup in 2013, this group has been marginalized, and its activities and statements have stalled.⁸⁷

Currently, there are a number of Egyptian scholars enrolled in protection programs for at-risk scholars with organizations such as SAR, the Council for Academics at Risk (CARA), and local support and protection programs in the US, Canada, and Europe. Following the crackdown on universities and scholars, the number of applicants from Egypt has risen significantly in most of these programs, according to the organizations themselves.⁸⁸ There are currently no dedicated programs to support or host at-risk scholars from other countries in Egypt.

⁸⁵ See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/20/we-need-talk-about-al-sisi-twisted-take-human-rights>; see also <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/sisi-tells-macron-that-egypt-is-not-europe-23713>.

⁸⁶ Geer, “Autonomy and Symbolic Capital in an Academic Social Movement: The March 9 Group in Egypt.”

⁸⁷ Information taken from Interview 4.

⁸⁸ See the CARA website: <https://www.cara.ngo/what-we-do/supporting-higher-education-in-crisis/>.

5. Conclusion

After a small window of opportunity between 2011 and 2013, academic freedom in Egypt has deteriorated since the military coup in 2013.⁸⁹ Although the most violent repression of student movements and faculty who were critical of the military takeover has declined since 2017, legalized and regulatory violations of academic freedom have increased. Nationally, this has been implemented via the state of emergency and new presidential decrees which impact university regulation and governance; on the university level, this has been accomplished via a surge in disciplinary hearings and the expulsions of a number of faculty and students, as well as changes to the content of teaching curricula or research projects. These political control measures, which aim to increase the central government's control over universities and to pressure researchers and students into political apathy, are likely to continue under the current regime.

These constant restrictions on political rights and freedoms have left deep scars on campuses across Egypt. Free and open academic debate on societally or politically relevant issues in classrooms or lecture halls has become increasingly difficult since 2013. The resurgence of security services on university campuses and the institutionalization of their role in approving grants, travel applications, or promotions at universities across Egypt has significantly impacted institutional autonomy, freedom to research and teach, and opportunities for international exchange for both academics and students.

With regard to campus integrity, in view of the closed, restrictive political space, combined with ongoing economic crises and widespread poverty, political protests in Egypt are likely to continue. Future protests will probably mobilize the younger 50 percent of the Egyptian population, among which are many

⁸⁹ Zayed, Sika, and Elnur, "Activism and Contentious Politics in Egypt."

students or recent graduates. If student organizations or students at certain universities become involved in such protests, the regime is likely to repeat the violent crackdown of 2013–2014, with many more victims among students in particular.

On the other hand, increasing the internationalization of higher education and research is one of the Egyptian government's higher education goals. The government is actively trying to attract European and US universities to open spin-off campuses in the new capital city, which is currently being built in the desert outside Cairo.⁹⁰ This gives European and US policymakers and universities some leverage with which to push for concessions in the realms of university institutional autonomy or even the freedom to research and teach – especially if the current regime realizes that foreign universities are hesitant to open satellite campuses or outposts in the country under the current restrictive conditions, and that international students and researchers are avoiding Egypt. The need to improve local conditions for faculty in Egypt could also be reinforced by the growing number of Egyptian researchers who are leaving Egypt to work and teach abroad, leading to shortages of qualified researchers in Egypt, particularly in the social sciences.⁹¹

⁹⁰ See <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/egypt-seeks-attract-international-branch-campus>.

⁹¹ See <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2019/12/most-arab-world-researchers-want-to-leave-a-new-survey-finds/>.