

Presented as religious deviants by Egyptian leaders, Bahá'ís have been ostracized from Egyptian society. This position has been supported by al-Azhar's repeated fatwas banning the Bahá'í community and condemning its members as apostates.

*The Bahá'í Faith is not one of the Abrahamic religions recognized by the Egyptian Constitution, thus facilitating confiscation of **Bahá'í property, banning of organized religious practice, and mass arrests.***

*Despite court rulings in their favor, **Bahá'ís remain without proper legal identification**, preventing them from receiving marriage licenses, death certificates, and birth certificates. They are also **discriminated against when trying to access public schools and other services.***

ORGANIZED PRACTICE OF BAHÁ'Í FAITH IS PUNISHABLE BY LAW

Established in the mid-1800s, the Bahá'í faith has existed in Egypt for over one hundred years. Since the 1952 Revolution, Bahá'ís have been persecuted and marginalized by the Egyptian state and society in various ways. President Gamal Abdel Nasser declared the group [to have lost all religious rights in 1960](#), after an al-Azhar fatwa (since re-affirmed) [declared](#) the Bahá'í faith to be a non-religion. Nasser's decree [dissolved](#) all Bahá'í centers throughout Egypt, confiscated all property held by the Bahá'í administrative body, and made the organized practice of Bahá'ism punishable by law. In the decades following the decision, hundreds of Egyptian Bahá'ís were [arrested](#) on charges of “contempt of religion.”

EGYPTIAN BAHÁ'Í FACE LEGAL AND SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION

Since 1952, no constitution has recognized the Bahá'í faith as a legally protected religion, precluding Bahá'ís from exercising many of their civil and religious rights. Estimates on how many Bahá'ís are in Egypt range from a [few hundred](#) to [more than five thousand](#). Legal marginalization of the Bahá'ís has been manifested politically and religiously by leaders who regularly warn of the perceived threat Bahá'ism poses to Islamic morals and Egypt's social structure. These warnings, which have come in the form of [statements](#) as well as [government-backed campaigns](#), have been

actively supported by al-Azhar [fatwas](#) that ban the Bahá'í faith and condemn its members as apostates.

In the last decade, persecution of Bahá'ís has not only continued but in many ways intensified. There have been attacks on Bahá'í property and [malicious statements](#) regarding Bahá'í religious heritage and practice. Over a period of four days in late March 2009, the homes of Bahá'ís in Sohag's al-Shuraniya village were [attacked with stones and firebombs](#), ultimately resulting in the forcible displacement of the village's Bahá'í families. The attack has been [linked](#) to an episode of the television show “al-Haqiqa,” in which journalist Gamal Abdel Rahim presented the Bahá'í as a threat to Egypt's religious security. Rahim would later [praise the attackers](#) in the days following the incident as well. Two years later, in 2011, demonstrations in the same village led to the [repeated firebombing](#) of Bahá'í homes. In February 2012, Salafi leader Abdel Moneim al-Shahat stated that the Bahá'í faith poses a threat to Egyptian national security and that Bahá'ís should be tried for treason. Today, the community continues to face institutional discrimination, including the [inability to access public services](#), such as healthcare and education. These practices were formally articulated in 2013 when Egypt's minister of education [repeatedly stated](#) that Bahá'ís could not enroll in public schools.

Egypt's religious institutions have acted to institutionalize discrimination against Bahá'ís. Egypt's Ministry of Religious Endowments and

Ministry of Culture [initiated a series of campaigns and workshops](#) in December 2014, aimed at “raising awareness” of the “growing dangers of the spread of Baha’ism.”

THE LEGAL STRUGGLE FOR IDENTIFICATION

Historically, government officials permitted Bahá’ís to list their religion on their national identification cards or insert a dash where a religion is usually listed. However, following a 1960 presidential decree, officials forced Bahá’ís to list an Abrahamic religion or be denied official papers. An administrative court in 1983 ruled that Bahá’ís should be allowed to list their religion on their papers (though the ruling upheld the university’s right to discriminate against a Bahá’í student). In 2004, the [Ministry of Interior](#) issued a decision to refuse to issue documents that listed any religion other than one of the three state-recognized religions. Consequently, Bahá’ís were forced to either misidentify their faith or forgo a national identification card, depriving them of basic civil services and rights.

Shortly after the 2004 policy was [enacted](#), the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) took on the case of a Bahá’í couple that was unable to obtain identification or register their children in schools. A favorable ruling from the Court of Administrative Justice in April 2006 [held](#) that “Bahá’ís must be allowed to identify their religion on government forms and that the government cannot deny them official documents,” but the Supreme Administrative Court overturned the ruling. In 2007 the EIPR took up another case and in 2008, the Court of Administrative Justice again [ruled](#) in favor of the plaintiffs, deciding that even though a Bahá’í cannot list his or her own faith on an official document, the slot could be left blank or a dash placed instead. The Supreme Administrative Court upheld the ruling in March 2009. The Ministry of Interior quickly issued a decree signaling its intent to comply with the ruling; however, implementation of these decisions has been slow. The Ministry of Interior as of November 2010 [remained seemingly unwilling](#) to issue new or amended identification to Bahá’ís. This difficulty in obtaining legal documentation has not only effectively nullified the hard-won 2008 ruling, but also perpetuated Bahá’í [deprivation](#) of essential official documents such as marriage licenses, death certificates,

and birth certificates, all of which depend on proper identification.

DENIGRATION OF BAHÁ’Í IS A MAINSTAY IN EGYPTIAN SOCIOPOLITICAL DIALOGUE

Discrimination against the Bahá’í faith is perpetuated by misinformation widely disseminated by prominent clerics and political figures. These [fabrications](#) include allegations that Bahá’ís are funded by Israel and are a threat to Egypt’s national security. In 2012, a number of then-prominent political officials, including Muslim Brotherhood [spokesman](#) Mahmoud Ghozlan and Salafi leader Abdel Moneim al-Shahat, repeated these rumors. Further, fatwas issued by al-Azhar’s Islamic Research Center condemning the Bahá’í as apostates in the eyes of Islam have created further tension. Since 1910, at least fifteen fatwas have been issued about the Bahá’í faith, most of which condemn the Bahá’í community as apostates. There have been six [issued](#) since 1968, with the most recent, issued [in 2003](#), [announcing](#) that the Bahá’í faith represents a deadly spiritual epidemic that must be destroyed by the state. This repeated public denigration, coupled with the issue of proper identification, has resulted in widespread discrimination against Bahá’í, making critical tasks, such as finding employment, owning property, and opening bank accounts, difficult or nearly impossible.

RESOURCES

The Muslim Network for Bahá'í Rights:
<http://www.bahairights.org/>

Bahá'í International Community: United Nations Office:
<https://www.bic.org/>

Human Rights Watch report on Bahá'í legal documentation issues in Egypt:
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/11/11/prohibited-identities/state-interference-religious-freedom>

TIMEP's interview with Bahaa Ibrahim, an Egyptian Bahá'í detained and harassed by security forces:
<http://timep.org/commentary/interview-bahaa-ibrahim/>

ESHHAD

Eshhad is an online platform that aggregates and collates alleged religious persecution and sectarian attacks in Egypt.

Eshhad, which previously existed as an independent entity and is now an incubated project at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), seeks to encourage transparency and to influence policy by explaining the context in which sectarianism occurs throughout the Middle East.

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