ESHHAD
QUARTERLY REPORT
January – March 2016

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.

THE TAHRIR INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization, is dedicated to understanding and supporting Middle Eastern countries undergoing democratic transitions and committed to informing international policymakers and the public of developments in these countries.

TIMEP is fully registered and acknowledged under Section501(c)(3) in the District of Columbia.
For more information about TIMEP's mission, programming, or upcoming events, please visit www.timep.org.

Contents

Introduction

Overview

Since its inception in 2013, Eshhad has documented over 400 sectarian incidents occurring in Egypt on or after August 14, 2013.[1] **In the first quarter (January through March) of 2016, Eshhad recorded 15 sectarian incidents in Egypt, compared to 39 in the previous quarter** (October to December 2015). In addition to the 15 new incidents recorded in the reporting period, Eshhad has added significant numbers of incidents that occurred prior to the reporting period of this quarterly report. Notably, in the previous quarter (October through December 2015), the 33 documented incidents increased to 39.

Eshhad's quarterly reports provide an overview of the trends of sectarian incidents in the country while providing analysis of the significant developments that occur with respect to attacks, legislation and court cases, as well as representation and developments in the newly formed parliament. This report is Eshhad's second quarterly report, covering January, February, and March of 2016. Section II discusses **trends that Eshhad has identified** over the past three months compared with prior quarters and/or years. Section III discusses **sectarianism and security**, particularly the relationship that security personnel have with minority groups in Egypt as well as what role they play in perpetrating or quelling sectarian incidents across the country. Section IV follows **court developments and decisions** pertaining to sectarian incidents or other forms of discrimination. Section V discusses relevant **lawmaking and parliamentary affairs**. Section VI tracks developments **in the media pertaining to sectarianism**. Finally, Section VII is a brief summary of Eshhad's methodology and research models.

Since the last reporting period, two developments are worth noting:
- The Eshhad team has continued to add entries from previous quarters; specifically, more than 90 incidents occurring between August 14, 2013, and December 31, 2015, have been added to the database.
- MidEast Christian News (MCN), one of the most prodigious news sources reporting alleged sectarian events, suspended its operations on March 1, 2016. This contributed to a significant drop in the reporting of alleged sectarian events in Egypt, one possible factor in the lower number of incidents this quarter.[2] (For more on Eshhad's methodology, see Section VII.)

---

[1] Eshhad Database, http://eshhad.timep.org/database/.
[2] "MidEast Christian News to Suspend Operations", MCN, March 1, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject.aspx?id=66054#.VwFnVBMrKRs

About Eshhad

Eshhad is a project that tracks incidents that are sectarian in nature. Eshhad is currently incubated as a project of the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP). It first began tracking incidents in Egypt on August 14, 2013, and was formally launched with TIMEP on September 4, 2015.

While there is no single political or legal definition of sectarianism, for the purposes of the database and map, Eshhad defines **sectarianism** as actions that are motivated—in whole or in part—or colored by bigotry, discrimination, or hatred regarding perceived differences between divisions within a group on account of a minority status, whether religious, ethnic, or another defining feature, by state or non-state actors.

Eshhad's specific focus is sectarianism of a religious nature. Sectarianism includes both non-state and state actions. Further, sectarianism can be committed against persons, private properties, or religiously affiliated entities. The means by which sectarianism can occur include but are not limited to verbal threats, media incitement, discriminatory legal policies, kidnapping, the taking of personal property, physical violence, and murder. Eshhad's focus is on religious minorities in Egypt, including Ahmadis, Bahá'ís, Christian, Jewish, Non-Religious, Shi'a, and Quaranists.

Overall Trends of Sectarian Attacks

Eshhad documented 15 incidents in the first quarter of 2016. Of the **15** incidents documented, **14** incidents were recorded against Christians and **one** against a Non-Religious victim.[3]

The province of Minya consistently experiences the highest number of reported sectarian incidents in Egypt.[4] In the first quarter of 2016, **seven of the 15** incidents documented occurred in Minya. Throughout 2015, the number of attacks in Minya roughly rose and fell with the number of attacks throughout the country, totaling 51 incidents throughout the year. The province of Assiut is the province where the second-highest number of incidents occurred in total since August 2013, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Total Incidents Since August 2013

---
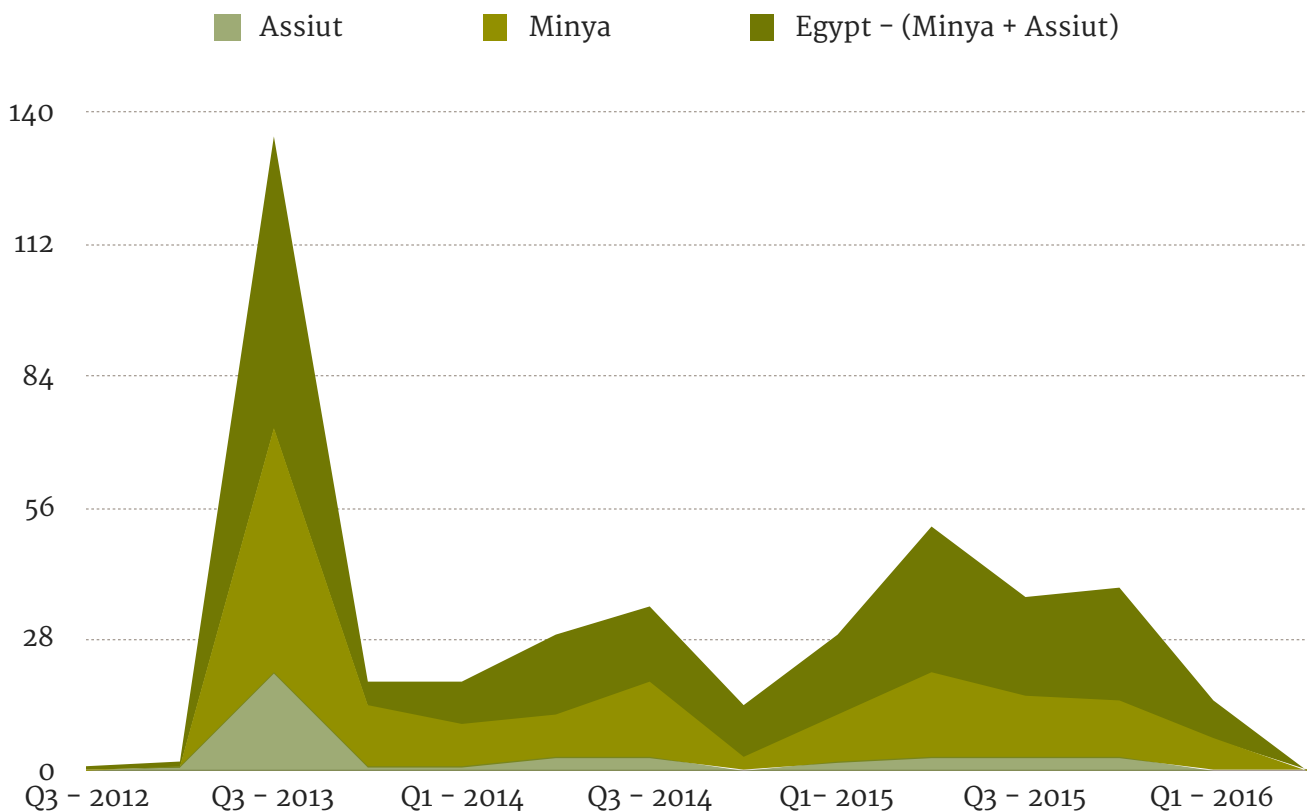
[3] For more information on Christians and Non-Religious in Egypt, refer to Eshhad's issue briefs located on our website at http://eshhad.timep.org/category/reports/minority-profiles-and-issue-briefs/.

[4] Egypt is divided into 27 provinces (also called governorates). Most provinces are further divided into districts (Cairo and Alexandria, the two officially designated "urban" provinces, are not), and within each district are cities, towns, villages, and the smaller units of ezba and nazla.

Of the seven districts that witnessed the highest number of incidents since Eshhad began documenting in 2013, five of them are within the province of Minya, including the city of Minya (51), Samalout (44), Mallawi (22), Deir Mawas (13), and Maghagha (12). The city of Assiut is also an ongoing area of higher incidents, with 17 since 2013.

Figure 2: Top Seven Provinces (Total Since August 2013)

Ranking	Incident Location (Province)	Number of Incidents Total
1	Minya	162
2	Assiut	41
3	Cairo	26
4	Beni Suef	25
5	Giza	21
6	Sohag	21
7	Alexandria	14

No other province has seen more than 10 attacks.

Figure 3: Top Seven Districts (Total Since August 2013)

Ranking	Incident Location (Province)	Number of Incidents Total
1	Minya, Minya	51
2	Samalout, Minya	44
3	Mallawi, Minya	22
4	Assiut, Assiut	17
5	Deir Mawas, Minya	13
6	Maghagha, Minya	12
7	All[5]	12

No other district has seen more than 10 attacks.

Consistent with last quarter, abductions and disappearances continue to be the highest documented incident type. Three of this quarter's incidents were abductions or disappearances, bringing the total to 84 since 2013. According to Figure 4, Looting/ Destruction of property and Arson/Burning are the second- and third-highest incident

---

[5] If an incident affects all districts in Egypt, usually a case of incitement, Eshhad researchers mark "All" to indicate its location.

types. It is important to note, however, that the majority of incidents in those categories occurred in August 2013 and dropped off significantly since then.[6]

Figure 4: Top Five Incident Types (Since August 2013)[7]

Ranking	Incident Type	Number of Incidents Total
1	Abductions/Disappearances	84
2	Looting/Destruction of Property	66
3	Arson/Burning	61
4	Shooting	25
5	Attempted Attack	22

Figure 5 presents whether perpetrators of incidents that Eshhad has documented are state or non-state actors. Looking at whether the perpetrators of a specific sectarian incident are state or non-state actors is crucial to the analysis and the data in Egypt is telling. Non-state actors carry out a vast majority of sectarian incidents: of the 426 total incidents recorded since Eshhad began documenting, state actors directly carried out only 50 of the incidents.

Actors within state institutions can act in representation of the state or in their personal capacities. The context in which an action occurs is considered in the determination of whether an incident is perpetrated by a state or non-state actor. For example, al-Azhar, a leading voice of Islam in Egypt and the Middle East, can carry the weight of the state when it speaks as an institution, reflecting an action perpetrated by a state actor. However, an individual who works at al-Azhar without representing the institution can also perpetrate an incident in his or her own individual capacity; such an action would be considered to be perpetrated by a non-state actor.

---

[6] Significant numbers of incidents are documented as either Looting/Destruction of property or Arson/Burning as shown in Figure 4. However, 51 of the incidents that were coded Arson/Burning occurred in August 2013; only ten incidents occurred following the third quarter of 2013. Similarly, 39 of the 66 incidents of Looting/Destruction of property occurred in August 2013.

[7] For a list of all incident types and working definitions of each type refer to the Eshhad Map Methodology and Database Codebook, version 1, page 12, September 8, 2015, http://eshhad.timep.org/ wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Eshhad-Codebook-v1.pdf.

Figure 5: Number of State and Non-State Actors

Non-State Actors	376
State Actors	50
Total	**426**

The fact that victims of sectarianism in Egypt are predominantly Christian is a consistent and unsurprising trend. Christian denominations make up the majority of religious minorities in Egypt, and many smaller minority groups are not always vocal or public when incidents do occur, leading to significant underreporting and lack of data. Although Egypt's minorities are all discriminated against or persecuted in a variety of ways, incidents against Christians dominate the statistics. At the end of 2015, *among the recorded incidents*, Eshhad found that **91 percent** of the victims self-identify as Christians[7]. With recently added data from past years, including incidents in August 2013, the percentage of incidents targeting Christians has risen to 95 percent in total.

---

[8] Eshhad Quarterly Report: Oct – Dec 2015, Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, January 29, 2016, http://eshhad.timep.org/reports/quarterly-oct-dec-2015/.

Sectarianism and Security

Members of the Egyptian police forces or military continue to play active roles in discrimination of Egyptian minorities both indirectly and directly. Although non-state actors perpetrate a vast majority of incidents, police often are involved in later phases of an incident when called to intervene or investigate. This quarter, security personnel were involved in at least 10 of the 15 incidents in different capacities; their role is most commonly triggered when a victim of sectarianism files a police report or a police report is filed against a victim as exemplified below.

In one incident this quarter, a police report was filed against Pastor Daniel Tayyeb because he prepared a tent above the building of the Catholic St. George's Church in a village in Qena.[9] The pastor had reported that the tents where Christians worshiped in 2015 Christmas celebrations had been burned and that the church had not been allowed to renovate after being denied a construction permit for the last 23 years.[10]

In another church construction incident, 10 Christian workers were arrested in January 2016 after they began constructing a fence on a piece of land that had been bought in anticipation of the construction or expansion of a church in Abu Hannas Village in Samalout, Minya.[11] The church had not yet received a license. They were all released on bail three days later.[12]

On February 3, 2016, taxi drivers in Cairo attacked brothers Hany and Gerges Abu Lila, but the police allegedly refused to cooperate when the brothers attempted to file a police report.[13]

Reconciliation councils and sessions continue to be used in many areas of Upper Egypt. Police forces often rely on them and entrust them to resolve conflicts between parties, although the councils continue to be unsuccessful in achieving lasting reconciliation in most instances. On February 21, 2016, a dispute between Christian Ghabriel Suriel and the Muslim al-Qadi family arose out of the building of a wall around Suriel's land.[14] Police

---

[9] "Report filed against priest in Upper Egypt over preparation of metal tent for prayers," MidEast Christian News, February 22, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject.aspx?id=65984#.V1GYcpMrKHp.

[10] Ibid.

[11] "Arrest of ten Copts while they built a wall in preparation for the establishment of a church in Abu Hannas," MidEast Christian News, January 26, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject_ar.aspx?id=65702&utm_source=MCNarabic.com&utm_medium=twitter#.V1GY5pMrKHp (Arabic).

[12] "The release of ten Copts in the wall building incident in Abu Hannas," MidEast Christian News, January 29, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject_ar.aspx?id=65736&utm_source=MCNarabic.com&utm_medium=twitter#.V1GZ75MrKHp (Arabic).

[13] "Azbet Al-Nakhl police refuse to file a report on Coptic victim: brother," MidEast Christian News, February 7, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject.aspx?id=65825#.V1GbXpMrKHp.

[14] "Coptic family in Upper Egypt forced to end dispute over piece of land," MidEast Christian News, February 21, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject.aspx?id=65971#.VxKQj5MrKRt.

intervention led to the referral of both families to prosecution and to the convening of a reconciliation committee to mediate the dispute.

This quarter, Eshhad published its newest issue brief on the use of reconciliation councils.[15] A selection is provided below.

> Customary reconciliation councils are a form of conflict resolution in much of Egypt's countryside, particularly Upper Egypt and Sinai. Locally referred to as "majales al-solh al-orfeyya," these sessions are deeply rooted in Egyptian culture and have been used as a method of community-based conflict resolution, long predating the modern judicial system in Egypt.
>
> Although convenient for the state, the sessions often lead to ineffective policing and enforcement of the rule of law, functioning as a parallel judiciary.
>
> Not only do reconciliation sessions frequently lead to inequitable and unpredictable results for minorities, the sessions are frequently used as an alternate judicial system. Although these sessions are often quicker and cheaper than the normal legal system, the results are ineffective and rarely reach lasting outcomes in which perpetrators are held accountable.

---

[15] Eshhad Issue Brief: Egypt's Reconciliation Councils, Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, March 2016, http://eshhad.timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Judiciary-mr-web.pdf.

Sectarianism and the Courts

Blasphemy Laws

Egypt's blasphemy laws have been used against individuals who publicly express views or statements considered insulting to religion, many of them religious minorities. Although not all cases end in conviction, overall data indicates that cases relating to blasphemy are increasing throughout the country.

Blasphemy, defined by Article 98(f) of the Penal Code below, is a crime punishable with either detention or a fine:

> Detention for a period of not less than six months and not exceeding five years, or paying a fine of not less than five hundred pounds and not exceeding one thousand pounds shall be the penalty inflicted on whoever exploits and uses the religion in advocating and propagating by talk or in writing, or by any other method, extremist thoughts with the aim of instigating sedition and division or disdaining and contempting any of the heavenly religions or the sects belonging thereto, or prejudicing national unity or social peace.[16]

Article 98(f) presents several legal issues due to how the law is applied within Egypt's legal system, often furthering religious discrimination rather than preventing what it purports to prevent.

First, the law is applied in a discriminatory manner, violating Article 64 of the 2014 Constitution which provides for the absolute freedom of belief, as well as Article 53 which prohibits discrimination against any Egyptian citizen on the grounds of religion. Article 64 also provides the right to practice religion freely, though it is limited to the three Abrahamic religions—Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

The blasphemy law is disproportionately applied against religious minorities, rather than against organizations or individuals who make statements that incite and instigate division. Twice this quarter, two Muslim clerics preached sermons that stirred up hatred against Christians. While leading Friday prayers on January 15, 2016, a Hurghada preacher stated that it is not permitted to greet or congratulate Christians during their religious holidays, stressing that is impermissible to celebrate their holidays or traditions.[17] The imam of al-Khalil Mosque in al-Montaza, Alexandria also used his pulpit to incite against Christians, referring to Christians as infidels.[18] The mosque, reportedly not licensed by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, is located across the street from the St. Maximus

---

[16] Article 98(f), Egyptian Penal Code
[17] Salah Abdalluh, "An Imam Issued a Fatwa in Hurghada Stating It Is Not Permissible to Congratulate Copts," El Watan News, January 16, 2016, http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/920335 (Arabic).
[18] Salafi Mosque in Alexandria Continues to Incite Against Copts, MidEast Christian News, January 19, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject_ar.aspx?id=65632&utm_source=MCNarabic.com&utm_medium=twitter#.VxFZ5pMrKRt (Arabic).

Church in Alexandria in an area that has previously witnessed sectarian violence. Neither of these cases have been referred to prosecution for a violation of the blasphemy law, a law that directly prohibits incitement.

In one example out of dozens of cases recently litigated or still pending in the courts, the blasphemy law was used to sentence three teenagers to five years in prison, and a fourth to a punitive juvenile institution. The four teenagers had made a short video in which they were pretending to be members of the Islamic State.[19] Colonel Essam Zain and Major Essam Abou al-Fadl executed an arrest in April 2015 after the commissioner officer in Beni Mazar received a complaint from Muslims in their village, al-Nasriah. In February 2016, a Beni Mazar court found them guilty of defaming Islam, furthering sectarian strife, and disseminating an offensive video. The teacher who allegedly had the video of the students on his cellphone was sentenced to three years in prison in a separate trial, despite allegations that his lawyer was not given adequate time to defend his client in court, that he was not allowed to show the video in question during the defense, and that the teacher was not present at the hearing.[20]

This is only one example of dozens of cases recently litigated or still pending in Egyptian courts. Eshhad's issue brief on the blasphemy law provides frequent updates to many of the cases as well as brief analysis surrounding many of the themes that arise through the cases.[21]

Second, the blasphemy law is implemented against defendants using inadequate evidence. Facebook posts have been used in multiple cases to find a person guilty of defaming Islam. In January 2016, an Idku court affirmed a three-year sentence against Mustafa Mustafa Muhammad Abdel Nabi on blasphemy charges for November 2014 statements that Mustafa shared on his Facebook account. His post was alleged to be a declaration of atheism that the court found to be defamatory.[22]

Other blasphemy investigations, although not ending in prosecution or conviction have been opened into individuals for evangelizing or other like-charges. In one case, three young men (all under the age of 25) were detained for passing out dates during Ramadan in July 2015; only one of the men had actually been passing out dates. When a journalist forcibly took him to the police station, two of the young man's friends were also detained when they came to help. The young men were accused of evangelizing, held in detention for three days, released on bail of 10,000 Egyptian pounds (approximately $1,100) each, and charged with contempt of religion and using modern methods to proselytize. In February 2015, the case was officially dropped.

---

[19] Mina Thabet Facebook Page, "Video of Teenagers Mocking Islamic State," February 4, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/mina.thabet2010/videos/1287426014618488/?pnref=story.
[20] "3 Coptic teens handed maximum 5-year prison sentence for insulting Islam," Mada Masr, February 25, 2016, http://www.madamasr.com/news/3-coptic-teens-handed-maximum-5-year-prison-sentence-insulting-islam.
[21] Eshhad Issue Brief: Egypt's Blasphemy Laws, Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, March 2016, http://eshhad.timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Blasphemy_MR_WEB.pdf.
[22] "Support of Three Years Imprisonment, Mustafa Abdel Nabil: Announcing Atheism on Facebook," Zahma.com, February 23, 2016, http://zahma.cairolive.com/?p=42580 (Arabic).

With over twenty blasphemy cases recorded in 2015, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights has called for a complete repeal of the law, as well as the release of all persons who have been prosecuted or convicted under it.[23]

Houses of Worship

The construction and maintenance of Christian houses of worship continues to be a highly litigated and debated issue throughout the country. On March 28, 2016, an Alexandria administrative court ruled in a case between the Coptic Orthodox Church and a plaintiff who had bought land from the Greek Orthodox Patriarch. Years after the sale, Pope Tawadros II intervened to prevent the demolition of a church that was on the purchased land. The court ruled against the church demolition plan, equating the legal status of a church to that of a mosque, and finding precedent in a 2004 Supreme Constitutional Court decision.

A recent Eshhad analysis piece analyzes the issue through the lens of this recent case:

> The main problem is, of course, that Christian houses of worship are not treated equally before the law. The laws themselves are neither settled nor are they equal, and to exacerbate the problem, houses of worship have repeatedly been targets of sectarian conflict over the last five years. Since August 2013, over 120 churches or their facilities were targeted throughout the country. A majority of those churches were targeted in August 2013 in the wake of the Raba'a al-Adaweya dispersal. President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi promised the Christian community in late 2013 that the damage caused during the widespread attack would be reversed; however, many of those churches have not been re-constructed despite government promises and court requirements. So far, only a handful of churches have been restored; there are at least 50 remaining, leading Sisi to vow in January to complete renovations and repairs by the end of 2016.[24]

---

[23] "EIPR condemns five-year prison sentence for children on blasphemy charges: 12 defendants convicted in 9 cases since January 2015; 11 cases pending before courts and more cases pending before disciplinary bodies," The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, February 25, 2016, http://eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2016/02/25/2552.

[24] Amira Mikhail, "Churches: As Sacred as Mosques?", Eshhad, April 14 2016, http://eshhad.timep.org/analysis/churches-as-sacred-as-mosques/.

Sectarianism, the Law, and the Parliament

This quarter, days after the sentencing of the four teenagers to blasphemy charges, 22 members of parliament signed a motion to repeal the blasphemy law.[25] The members explained that the law violates the constitution. Their request was based on a desire to maintain social order and peace of the society.

Since the start of President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi's presidency, he has called for a renewal of religious discourse several times, an issue that may implicate the religious freedom of all Egyptians. During the last quarter, a member of parliament and President of the Tagammu Party, Sayyed Abdel 'Al, called on al-Azhar and the Ministry of Endowments to draft a proposal for a project that would encourage a renewal of religious discourse.[26]

This request follows several calls by President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi to renew religious discourse, the first of which occurred in January 2015 during an annual celebration organized by Egypt's Ministry of Endowments. In May 2015, Sisi again called for a renewal of the religious discourse in a speech during a celebration for the Prophet Muhammad's birthday.[27] Sisi accused the Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyeb and other clerics in July 2015 of failing to develop Egypt's religious discourse, stating "You are the one responsible for religious discourse, and God will ask me whether I am satisfied [with your performance] or not."[28] Sisi again called for a renewal of religious discourse in January 2016, one year after his first mention of the idea.[29] According to Sisi, his calls for religious discourse are motivated by his desire to counter extremist ideas that lead to terrorism.[30]

Renewing religious discourse may have a significant impact on religious freedom and freedom for sectarianism in Egypt depending on how it develops. A revival of religiosity led by the state could lead to a greater control over the personal religious affairs of an individual, or it might serve as a provocation for more radical individuals. However,

---

[25] "22 MPs sign request to the President of the House of Representatives to abolish the defamation of religions law in the Penal Code," MidEast Christian News, February 28, 2016, http://www.mcndirect.com/showsubject_ar.aspx?id=66036&utm_source=MCNarabic.com&utm_medium=twitter#.VxKHXpMrKRt.

[26] "Ahmed Arfa, MP Sayed Abdul 'Al Calls for Submission of a Draft Project on Renewal of Religious Discourse to Parliament," Parlmany, February 15, 2016, http://www.parlmany.com/News/8/39403/النائب-سيد-عبد-العال-يطالب-الأزهر-بتقديم-مشروع-لتجديد-الخطاب.

[27] *Al-Monitor* presents a layout of different responses to the interpretations and responses to Sisi's calls in May 2015, Rami Galal, "Sisi's calls for religions tolerance divides Muslims," Al-Monitor, May 26, 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/egypt-salafist-sufi-religion-extremism-azhar-quran-sheikh.html#.

[28] "El-Sisi says Al-Azhar has failed to renew Islamic discourse," Ahram Online, July 14, 2015, http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/135369.aspx.

[29] Hend Kortam, "Egypt: Sisi's Call for a Renewal of Religious Discourse - One Year Later," All Africa, January 3, 2016, http://allafrica.com/stories/201601042143.html.

[30] "El-Sisi says Al-Azhar has failed to renew Islamic discourse," Ahram Online, July 14, 2015, http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/135369.aspx.

leaving extant extremist views unchallenged may also lead to increased attacks and deprivation of rights of minorities.

Sectarianism, Media, and Education

The government crackdown on civil society has continued to impact the freedoms of press and expression. Coupled with bias and inconsistent reporting, this has contributed to a drop in the quality of reporting on sectarianism and discrimination in the country.

In one case, student protests (encouraged by Islamist factions) prevented the promotion of Christian teacher Mervat Sefein on two occasions. The police responded to both incidents, successfully disbanding the protests the first time but not the second. As reported by the media, the students reportedly chanted sectarian slogans, including the fact that they did not want a Christian teacher to take a senior position as director.[31] Media sources also widely-reported that the Ministry of Education insisted that the decision not to promote was not sectarian in nature.[32] In an interview Seifein gave with al-Mowatna News she did not bring up the issue of sectarianism, saying only that the students (at the first school) were demanding that the current director remain in his position.[33]

In March 2016, Mada Masr published a lengthy analytical piece analyzing Coptic media sites and posing the question of where the line is between expressing grievances or also perpetuating sectarianism.[34] The ultimate problem, the article implied, is that Coptic news sources tend to be as unreliable as state news, both plagued with bias or strong one-sided views. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, has produced a podcast and several analysis pieces on media bias and freedom in Egypt.[35] Facebook posts, short

---

[31] Magda al-Gindy, "State Decision," *al-Ahram*, March 2, 2016, http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/482870.aspx (Arabic).

[32] Ayman Ramadan, "Minya Education: Mervat Sefein's Problem is Administrative, Not Sectarian," *Youm7*, February 29, 2016, http://bit.ly/1SQcQZQ (Arabic).

[33] Mervat Sefein Interview with al-Mowatna News, February 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_t25zWnVGH0 (Arabic).

[34] Mai Shams el-Din, "Coptic Media: Expressing grievances, or sectarianism?", Mada Masr, March 17, 2016, http://www.madamasr.com/sections/politics/coptic-media-expressing-grievances-or-sectarianism.

[35] "Assessing Egypt's Media Landscape", The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, May 25, 2014, http://timep.org/scholarspotlight/ep3-assessing-egypts-media-landscape/; Basil El-Dabh, "Breaking News and Inconsistent Media Standards in Egypt," The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, September 18, 2015, http://timep.org/commentary/breaking-news-and-inconsistent-media-standards-in-egypt/; Ragab Saad, "In Egypt, Journalism is a Crime," The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, March 16, 2016, http://timep.org/commentary/breaking-news-and-inconsistent-media-standards-in-egypt/.

videos, and other individual expressions are used in the prosecution of blasphemy cases, as mentioned above in the discussion of sectarianism and the courts.[36]

[36] In February 2015, an Ismailia Misdemeanor Court sentenced Sherif Gaber to a year in prison or bail of one thousand pounds for contempt of religion for promoting atheism on a page on Facebook called "The Atheists." Emir Nader, "Egyptian student given prison sentence for atheist Facebook posts," Daily News Egypt, February 17, 2015, http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/02/17/egyptian-student-given-prison-sentence-for-atheist-facebook-posts/. See also "Support of Three Years Imprisonment, Mustafa Abdel Nabil: Announcing Atheism on Facebook", Zahma.com, February 23, 2016, http://zahma.cairolive.com/?p=42580 (Arabic); "3 Coptic teens handed maximum 5-year prison sentence for insulting Islam," Mada Masr, February 25, 2016, http://www.madamasr.com/news/3-coptic-teens-handed-maximum-5-year-prison-sentence-insulting-islam.

Methodology

Eshhad gathers data collected from domestic and international media outlets, social media sources, domestic and international non-governmental organizations and human rights entities, collaboration with peer organizations, and direct victim witness reports. Published incident reports reference at least one source in the source columns in the Eshhad Database; when possible, multiple sources will be provided. Due to security concerns, not all incidents are uploaded onto the public database; at times, names of victims may also be omitted.

For documentation purposes, Eshhad aggregates and collates data on events or incidents that could reasonably be considered sectarian and may rise to the level of persecution against minorities. Difficulties in discerning the intent of each incident arise when researchers and investigators are not directly at the scene of the incident to document and verify all alleged facts. For this reason, Eshhad collects data regardless of the intent or motive, while fully recognizing the variety of reasons that may have motivated any particular incident. Monitoring and collecting a wide range of incidents provides a context in which sectarian violence thrives and allows observers to understand the history of the area in which the event occurred and to potentially identify areas of concern.

Eshhad began data collection in August 2013 and continues to record incidents as they occur today. Later phases of the project may include expanding the data set to include incidents that occurred before August 2013. There are a few records in the database that predate August 2013 due to their relationship to ongoing or subsequent events that occurred after Eshhad began recording incidents.

The Eshhad Codebook provides a deeper explanation of how Eshhad conducts research and codes data.[37]

---

[37] Eshhad Map Methodology and Database Codebook, version 1, September 8, 2015, http://eshhad.timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Eshhad-Codebook.pdf.