The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy

ESHHAD
QUARTERLY REPORT
April – June 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.

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Overview

Since its inception in 2013, Eshhad has documented over 400 sectarian incidents occurring on or after August 14, 2013 in Egypt.[1] In the second quarter of 2016 (April through June), **Eshhad recorded 16 sectarian incidents in Egypt**, compared to 15 in the previous quarter (January through March).

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 third quarterly report, covering April, May, and June of 2016. Section II discusses **trends that Eshhad has identified** over those three months compared with prior periods. 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.

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[1] Eshhad Database, http://eshhad.timep.org/database/.

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 current focus is on ***religious minorities*** in Egypt, including Ahmadis, Bahá'ís, Christian, Jewish, Non-Religious, Shi'a, and Quranists.

Overall Trends of Sectarian Attacks

Eshhad documented 16 incidents in the second quarter of 2016. Of the **16** incidents documented, **15 incidents** were against Christians and one incident, the forced closure of cafes in a Giza neighborhood during Ramadan, impacted all religious groups in the affected area, including Sunni Muslims.[2]

The province of Minya continues to experience the highest number of reported sectarian incidents in Egypt. In the second quarter of 2016, **eight of the 16 incidents** documented occurred in Minya, for a total of **15 incidents** in Minya so far this year. Throughout 2015, the number of attacks in Minya also roughly rose and fell with the number of attacks throughout the country, totaling **51 incidents** throughout the year. The province of Assiut is where the second-highest number of incidents occurred in total since August 2013 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Total Incidents Since August 2013

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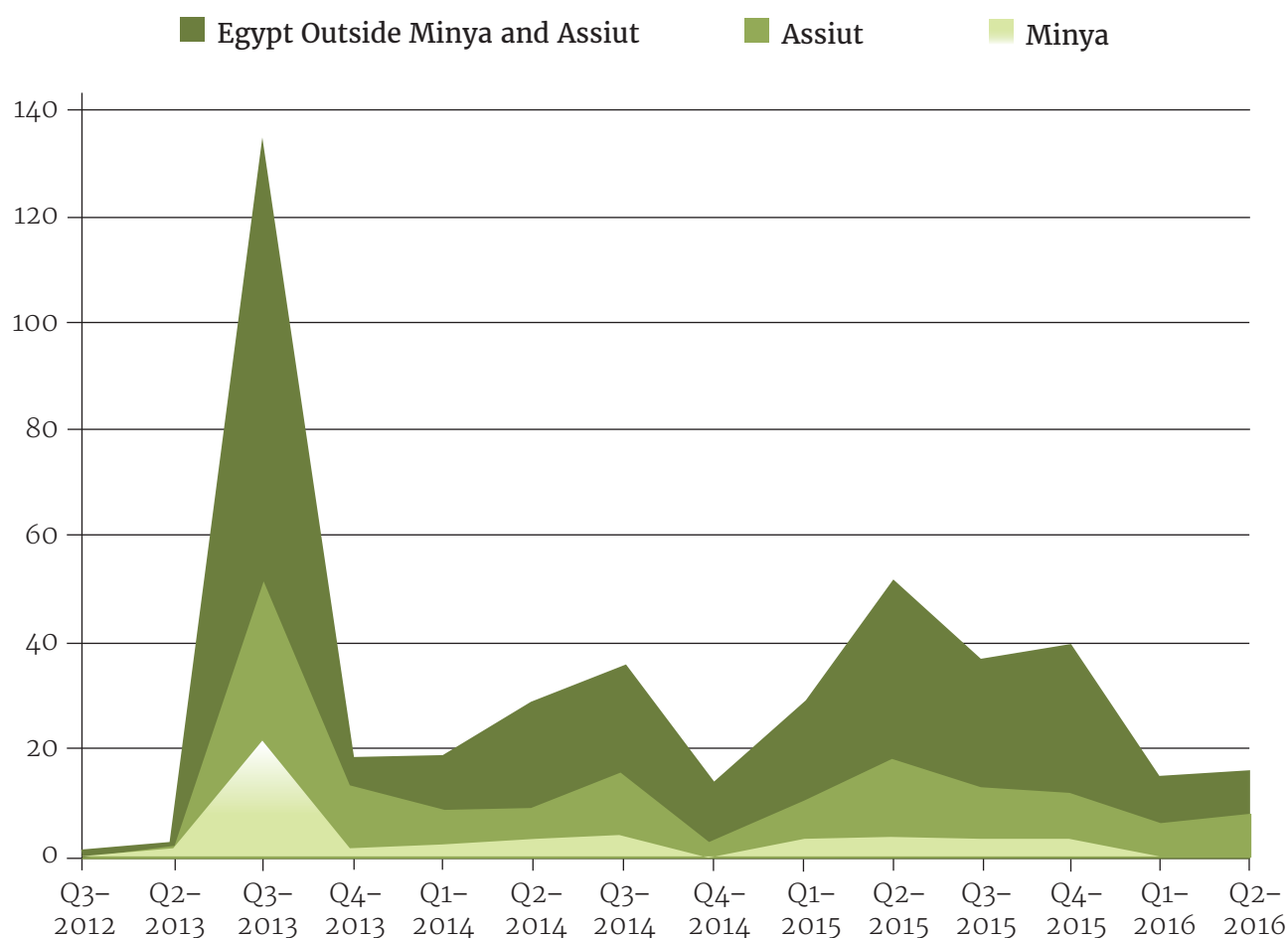
[2] For more information on Christians and other non-majority religious groups in Egypt, refer to Eshhad's issue briefs located on our website at http://eshhad.timep.org/category/reports/minority-profiles-and-issuebriefs/.

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

Ranking	Incident Location (Province)	Total Incidents Through Q2 2016
1	Minya	178
2	Assiut	41
3	Cairo	31
4	Beni Suef	26
5	Giza	22

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

Ranking	Incident Location (District)	Total Incidents Through Q2 2016
1	Minya, Minya	56
2	Samalout, Minya	44
3	Malawi, Minya	22
4	Assiut, Assiut	17
5	Deir Mawas, Minya	15

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 90 since August 2013. According to Figure 4, Looting/ Destruction of property and Arson/Burning are the second- and third-highest incident types. Notably, the majority of incidents in those categories occurred in August 2013 and dropped off significantly since then.[3]

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[3] 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 17 incidents occurred following the third quarter of 2013. Similarly, 39 of the 66 incidents of Looting/Destruction of property occurred in August 2013. 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 4: Top Incident Types since August 2013

Ranking	Incident Type	Total Through Q2 2016
1	Abductions/Disappearances	90
2	Looting/Destruction of Property	68
3	Arson/Burning	68
4	Shooting	30
5	Attempted Attack	22
6	Assault	25

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. Non-state actors carry out a vast majority of sectarian incidents: of the **462 total incidents (88 percent)** recorded since Eshhad began documenting, state actors directly carried out **55 of the incidents (12 percent)** roughly on pace with last quarter's percentage.

Actors within state institutions can act as representatives 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 can also perpetrate an incident in his or her own individual capacity without representing the institution; such an action would be considered to be perpetrated by a non-state actor.

Figure 5: Number of Incidents Committed by State and Non-State Actors

Non-State Actors	407 (88%)
State Actors	55 (12%)
Total	**426**

Note: 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 under-reporting and lack of data. Although it is known that Egypt's minorities are all discriminated against or persecuted in a variety of ways, incidents against Christians dominate the statistics: throughout 2015, *of the recorded incidents*, **91 percent** of the victims targeted self-identify as Christians. 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.

Sectarianism and Security

Security in Upper Egypt continues to be a concern for religious minorities. This quarter, three violent incidents occurred regarding church-related buildings or rumors of new church construction and three different disappearances were also recorded, one involving a woman and her two children.

One particularly violent incident erupted over an alleged romance between a Muslim woman and a Coptic man in Abu Qurqas, Minya.

"According to reports, hundreds of Muslims gathered outside of the Coptic man's home and set a fire, which then led to further violence that affected the homes of Muslims and Christians in the village. Two persons were injured in the violence and seven homes and a storage unit were burned. Three days after the incident, the Coptic man's mother submitted an official complaint in which she described how she was stripped naked, dragged into the street, and beaten during the violence. Police ignored the initial complaint made by the mother and initially dismissed it as a rumor, throwing her and her family out of the station; the governor of Minya also reportedly denied the assault."[4]

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[4] "Coptic woman stripped naked, assaulted in Minya sectarian violence," Mada Masr, May 26, 2016, http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/05/26/news/u/coptic-woman-stripped-naked-assaulted-in-minya-sectarian-violence/.
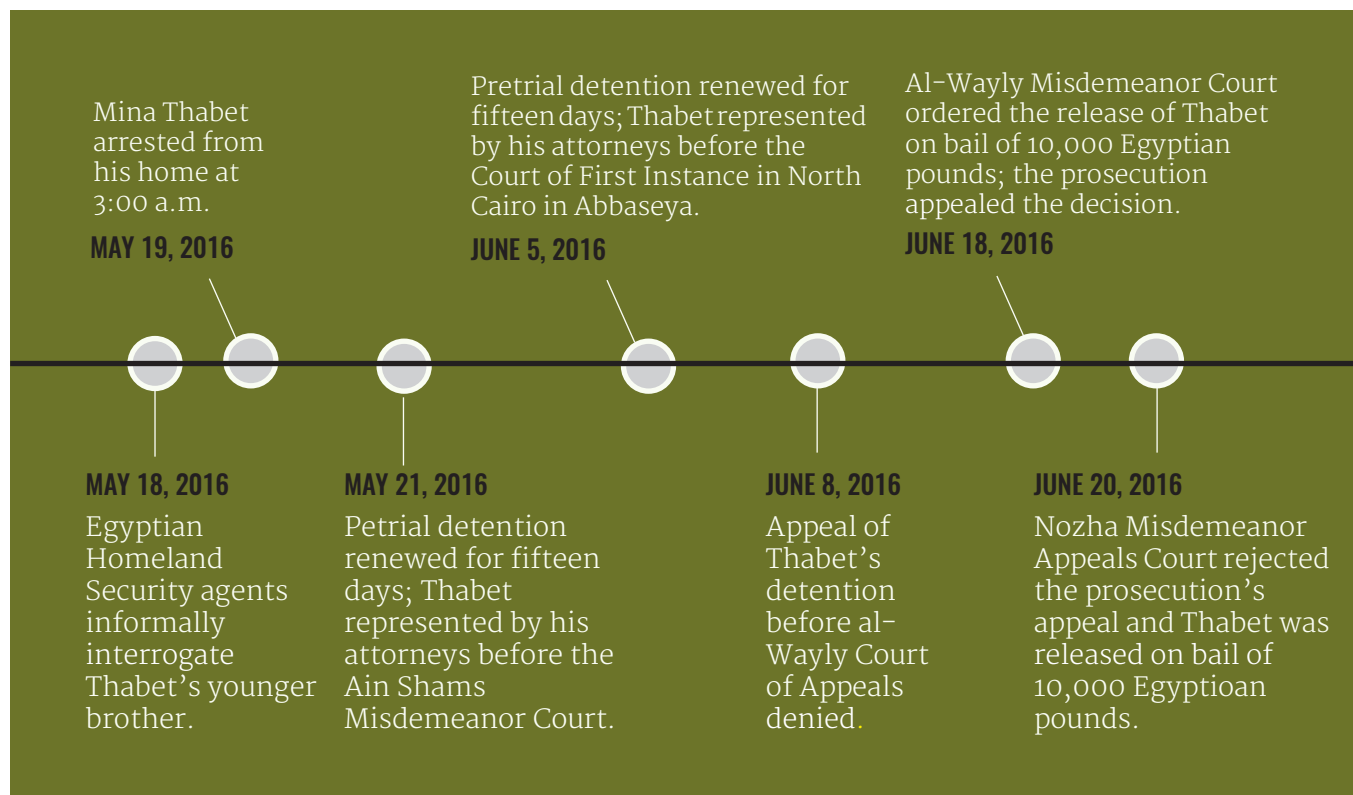
Sectarianism and the Courts

This quarter, the courts and the legal system continue to be a focal point of Eshhad's research, including the ongoing use of Egypt's blasphemy law[5] and the opening of new criminal investigations into members of civil society.

New Investigations

On May 19, 2016, Mina Thabet, the Director of the Religious Minorities and Marginalized Groups Program at the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF), was arrested and detained for his alleged criticism of the cession of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thabet was held in detention until June 21, when a court ordered his release and the prosecution's appeal was rejected.

TIMELINE: KEY DATES IN THE THABET CASE

Mina Thabet arrested from his home at 3:00 a.m.
MAY 19, 2016

Pretrial detention renewed for fifteen days; Thabet represented by his attorneys before the Court of First Instance in North Cairo in Abbaseya.
JUNE 5, 2016

Al-Wayly Misdemeanor Court ordered the release of Thabet on bail of 10,000 Egyptian pounds; the prosecution appealed the decision.
JUNE 18, 2016

MAY 18, 2016
Egyptian Homeland Security agents informally interrogate Thabet's younger brother.

MAY 21, 2016
Petrial detention renewed for fifteen days; Thabet represented by his attorneys before the Ain Shams Misdemeanor Court.

JUNE 8, 2016
Appeal of Thabet's detention before al-Wayly Court of Appeals denied.

JUNE 20, 2016
Nozha Misdemeanor Appeals Court rejected the prosecution's appeal and Thabet was released on bail of 10,000 Egyptioan pounds.

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[5] "Eshhad Quarterly Report: Jan – Mar 2016," Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, August 17, 2016, http://eshhad.timep.org/reports/eshhad-quarterly-report-jan-mar-2016/.

His arrest and detention come at a time when several organizations and members of civil society have been targeted by police investigations, criminal and political charges, and ongoing detentions.[6] This case is of particular interest and significance to Eshhad given the subject matter of Thabet's research. Led by Thabet, ECRF's research and writing on religious and marginalized minorities is valuable and credible work that sheds light on the various ways that minorities continue to face discriminatory practices throughout Egypt.

Although never formally charged with blasphemy, accusations of blasphemy (in addition to co-founding a group that aims to topple the regime and spreading false news that can harm the public interest were also added charges) were made against six members of a satirical group called the "Street Children Troupe."[8] The group was arrested in May 2016 following their production of some videos that mocked religious radio shows and were held in detention until early September of this year.[9]

In another case, Muhammad Hassan, a Salafi television preacher, was accused of contempt of religions, spreading extremist ideology, and harming national unity and social peace. Ahmed Fouad, a lawyer for the plaintiff, accused Hassan of blasphemy for recounting a story of Khadija's marriage to the Prophet Muhammad, specifically that she convinced her father to allow her to marry the Prophet by getting him drunk.[10] The story was found to be offensive because it implied that the Prophet's marriage was founded on lies and trickery.[11] On March 13, 2016, the First of October Misdemeanor Court adjourned the case until April 9, where the First of October Court again adjourned the case until April 30.[12] In May, he was acquitted of all charges.[13]

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[6] For more information on Mina Thabet's case, refer to Eshhad's special briefing dedicated to tracking his case: http://eshhad.timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/SPECIAL-BRIEFING-MINA-THABET.pdf.

[7] "Egypt: Free Satirical YouTube Group," Human Rights Watch, June 23, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/23/egypt-free-satirical-youtube-group.

[8] "Religious contempt lawsuit casts shadow over 'Street Children,'" Toqa Ezzidin, Daily News Egypt, May 17, 2016, http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/05/17/religious-contempt-lawsuit-casts-shadow-street-children/.

[9] "'Street Children' troupe members released under preventative measures," Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, September 7, 2016, http://anhri.net/?p=173881&lang=en.

[10] "Delay of Mohamed Hassan's Contempt of Religion Trial Until April 30," Mai Anany, al-Youm al-Sabaa, April 9, 2016, http://bit.ly/2elGkDs.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Kamel Kamel, "Learn Sheikh Mohamed Hassan's Reaction After Being Declared Innocent of Contempt of Religion Charges," al-Youm al-Sabaa, May 30, 2016, http://bit.ly/2e9webn.

Old Investigations

In April 2016, Joseph Malak, the lawyer representing the victims of the Alexandria Two Saints Church bombing in 2011, prepared a file on the bombing including details of the incident and in particular, the government's handling of the case.[14] Despite the fact that five years have passed without the perpetrators being identified, Malak has re-filed the case, calling it a matter of national security.

In 2012, Bishoy Kamel Garas, an Egyptian Copt, was sentenced to six years in prison for defaming Islam on a Facebook page that he has consistently alleged to be fake. After serving close to three years in prison, the Court of Cassation acquitted Kamel of the defamation of religion charge, the only remaining charge that he had not been acquitted of up until then.[15]

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[14] "Lawyer of 2011 Two Saints Church bombing calls for reopening case," al-Masry al-Youm, April 21, 2016, http://www.egyptindependent.com//news/lawyer-2011-two-saints-church-bombing-calls-reopening-case.

[15] "After Three Years in Prison...Cassation Court Exonerates Copt from Charges of Contempt of Religion," Mada Masr, March 13, 2016, http://bit.ly/2dtCbQR.

Sectarianism, Media, and Government

Yasser Farag, government representative and deputy mayor of the suburb of Agouza, Giza, launched a campaign on June 9, 2016 to raid coffee shops to enforce fasting during Ramadan.[16] The raids confiscated 177 chairs, 50 tables, and 25 shisha pipes, in a number of cafes on al-Alamein Street in the al-Kit Kat neighborhood. Police reports and other procedures have been filed against the coffee shop owners.[17]

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[16] Ezz Wahdan, "Video: Vice President of the Azouga Neighborhood Raids Cafes," http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1219748.

[17] Ibid.

Methodology

Eshhad relies on a number of available sources, including Arabic and English news sites and on-the-ground verification of particular cases conducted by international and domestic non-governmental organizations and human rights groups. 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 whch 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.

The Eshhad Codebook provides a deeper explanation of how Eshhad conducts research and codes data.[18]

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[18] Eshhad Map Methodology and Database Codebook, version 1, September 8, 2015, http://eshhad.timep.org/ wp-content/ uploads/2015/08/Eshhad-Codebook-v1.pdf.