The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy

ESHHAD
QUARTERLY REPORT
October - December 2015

ESHHAD

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, Eshhad has [documented](#) over 400 sectarian incidents occurring on or after August 14, 2013, in Egypt. In the last quarter of 2015, Eshhad recorded **33** sectarian incidents in Egypt (compared to 35 in the previous quarter). Minya remains the province with the highest number of incidents throughout the year, recording 11 attacks in the last quarter of 2015 and 51 throughout the year. Abductions and disappearances were the most commonly reported incident type, with nine incidents in the last quarter of 2015 and 30 in total. The 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 in the new parliament.

Figure 1: Incidents Each Quarter of 2015
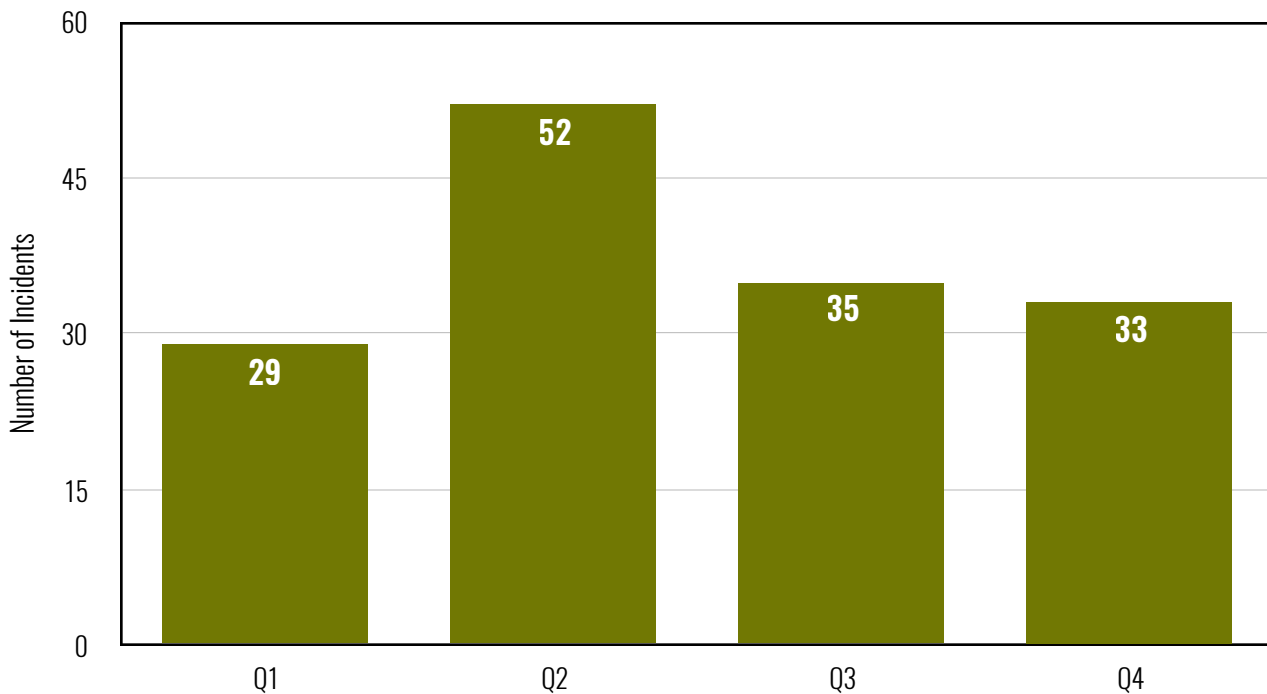
This report is Eshhad's first quarterly report, covering October, November, and December of 2015. Section II discusses **trends that Eshhad has identified** over the past three months compared to the rest of the year. Section III discusses **sectarianism and security**, particularly the difference between the direct and indirect involvement of security forces in sectarian incidents across the country. Section IV follows **court decisions** or related matters as it pertains to sectarian incidents or other forms of discrimination. Section V discusses **minority representation in parliament**. In future issues, this section will look at legislation and other matters involving parliament. Section VI follows **the media and sectarian incitement**, and Section VII is a brief summary of Eshhad's **methodology and research** models.

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 Bahá'ís, Christians, Jews, the Non-Religious, Shi'as, and all other religious groups in the country.

Overall Trends of Sectarian Attacks

Of the 33 incidents documented in the last quarter of 2015, **29** incidents were recorded against Christians and an additional **four** against Shi'a. 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 widely believed 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.

Minya consistently experiences the highest number of reported sectarian incidents in Egypt. In the last quarter of 2015, **11** of the 33 incidents Eshhad documented were in Minya. Any number of reasons may explain why Minya consistently experiences the greatest number of sectarian incidents, including its higher density of religious minorities, less stringent or active security, education, and socioeconomic conditions. Throughout 2015, the number of attacks in Minya roughly rose and fell with the number of attacks throughout the country.

Figure 2: Incidents 2015 (Minya)
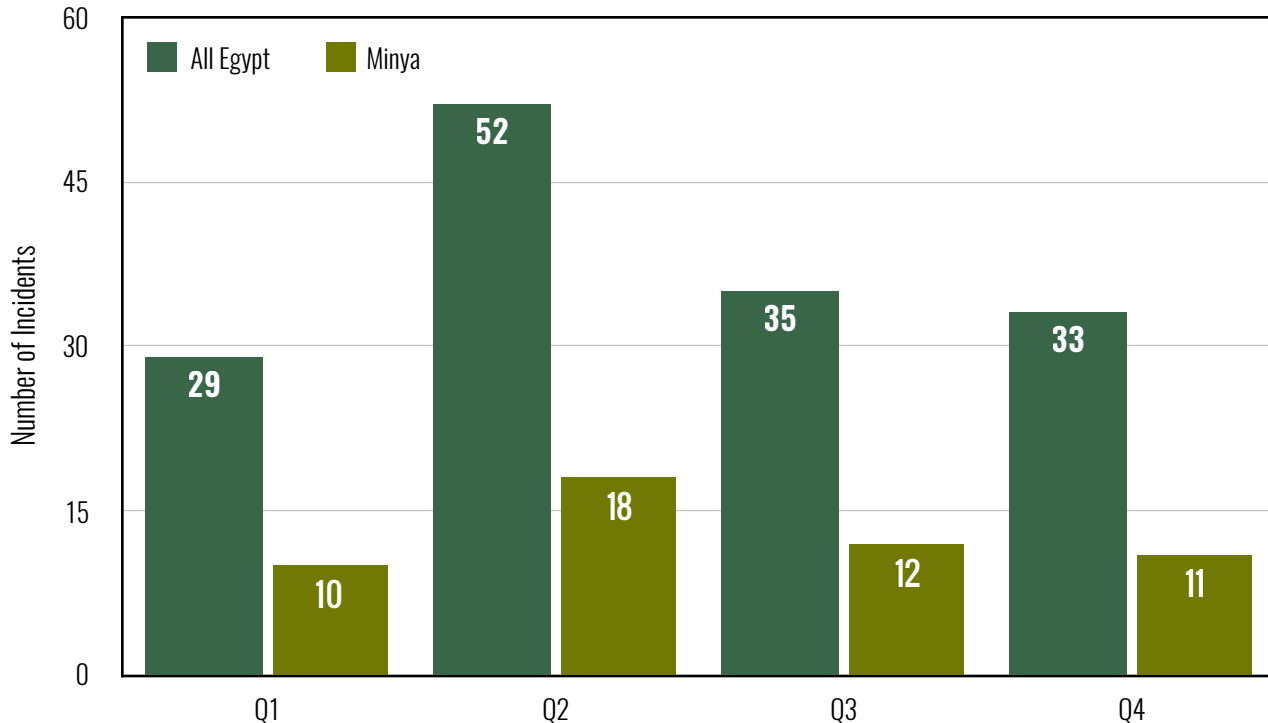
Another notable trend is that abductions and disappearances were the most commonly reported incident type of sectarianism in 2015. Of the 33 incidents recorded in the last

quarter of this year, **nine** incidents were categorized as "Abducted/Disappeared." This means that approximately **27 percent** of incidents were abductions or disappearances.

Figure 3: Abductions/Disappearances in 2015

Quarter 1	17%
Quarter 2	19%
Quarter 3	17%
Quarter 4	27%

> Without on-the-ground research and investigation, it is often difficult to determine whether a specific incident can be recorded as abduction or disappearance. Abductions are usually kidnappings for criminal purposes, sometimes encouraged or driven by sectarian motives. Often times, organizations and victim families report all missing persons as abductions. At times, some Christian females voluntarily leave or disappear for the purpose of divorce, conversion, or eloping with a Muslim male. For this reason, Eshhad codes all such incidents as "Abducted/Disappeared."[1]

Although Eshhad categorizes all kidnappings and disappearances in one category, a request for ransom is often an indicator that the incident is an actual abduction or kidnapping rather than a voluntary disappearance. In the last three months, five of the nine incidents involved ransom requests ranging from 37,000 Egyptian pounds (LE) to LE300,000. Another case was that of a merchant who was abducted and allegedly forced to sign blank checks, also leading researchers to categorize the case as a kidnapping. Of the remaining three cases, one involved a minor who was kidnapped for five days and found at the door of a hospital. The last two were young women who disappeared; **very little information is available on the young women's cases except that they went missing and that police have yet to discover their whereabouts.**

---

[1] The category "Abduction/Disappearance" includes kidnappings, forced disappearances, and the disappearances of persons without an identified motive. For more, see Eshhad Map Methodology and Database Codebook, version 1, September 8, 2015, Section 3.4.8, p. 16, http://eshhad.timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Eshhad-Codebook-v1.pdf.

Sectarianism and Security

The role of security forces is most easily categorized as indirect or direct instigation of sectarian violence. Indirect instigation involves passive involvement, lack of involvement, or silent approval of sectarian and criminal actions against religious minorities. Direct instigation is when security forces are directly involved in the sectarian act. Although direct involvement by security forces provides clear indication that state actors condone and support certain types of sectarian violence or other forms of discrimination against religious minorities, indirect involvement is equally condemning. Negligence to fulfill a duty, whether to stop ongoing violence, to investigate crimes, to arrest perpetrators, or to implement court orders often results in equally damaging consequences for the victims of any individual incident.

The only instance in the last quarter of 2015 in which security forces were ***directly involved*** as the perpetrators of a sectarian incident was in mid-October when the studios of SAT-7 —a Christian broadcaster and content producer—was subjected to a police search. Its equipment was confiscated, and its director, Farid Samir, was detained for six hours. Samir left the interrogation facing four charges that related to the operation of a satellite television channel without the necessary licenses. No new information has been published since the initial interrogation in October. Raiding the property of religious institutions is not a new phenomenon. In April 2015, security forces in Minya raided a building that was affiliated with the Maghagha Diocese in Mayana village. The stated reason was that the building was constructed without a permit. Religious minorities are not the only group in Egypt to face this type of police involvement, as security forces often raid political or activist organizations, nonprofits, and media-related institutions. This interference impedes the ability of citizens to enjoy their rights to freedom of religion, association, and expression.

Security forces were also directly involved in closing the shrine of Imam Hussein at al-Hussein Mosque in Cairo in late October, a decision that the Ministry of Religious Endowments issued leading up to Ashoura celebrations. In this case, the shrine or mosque was not raided under a guise of missing papers; rather the sectarian intent was clear: the closing of the shrine was to prevent Shi'a worship on Ashoura, as has happened on several instances in the past.

Indirect involvement often times manifests through the lack of involvement or negligence to fulfill the duty that members of security forces carry. This may result from the inability or unwillingness to interfere when residents of a village are attacking Christian homes or property. Other times, police support or condone the use of reconciliation sessions, which often strip the victims of their right to redress and rarely actually prevent continued violence. In one incident in mid-November 2015, former Muslim Marwa A.Y. was killed by her uncle when she returned to her home village in Fayoum three years after she had converted and left the village with a Christian man who she married. A reconciliation session was held to mediate between Marwa's family and her husband's family, resulting in an order for the forced displacement of the husband's family. Security forces gave the family ten days to sell their property and leave the village and implemented a curfew until the family departed.

Not all police involvement in the last quarter of 2015 was negative. In at least three cases, police in Minya were able to locate victims who had been kidnapped and were able to arrest the perpetrators; these successes are largely isolated, however, as police involvement is often convoluted. After a church was attacked and vandalized in Naga Hammadi, police arrested five Christians. After the death of a Christian farmer in Minya, two Christians were arrested (and later released), one of whom was the victim's cousin, despite the fact that evidence pointed to other perpetrators.

Sectarianism and the Courts

In the final quarter of 2015, Egyptian courts continued to hear a number of cases that relate to various religious matters. In December 2015, the Supreme Administrative Court issued a decision affirming the rejection of the registration of al-Tahrir al-Shi'a Party. The court denied the appeal of Shi'a activist Ahmed Rassem al-Nafees against the decision of the Political Party Committee not to allow a new party called the Tahrir Party to be formed. The Political Party Committee had ruled against the forming of the party due to an administrative requirement not being met.

At the end of December 2015, an appeals court reduced the five-year sentence initially handed down to Muslim television anchor Islam al-Beheiry to one year on blasphemy charges. He was sentenced after questioning the credibility of some the sources of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings during one of his shows.

Blasphemy charges have also repeatedly been used against Christians; a number of cases remain pending before the courts, including Maher Fayez, Bishoy Armia, and the case of the three Christians who passed out dates and verses to Muslims in Ramadan. This quarter there have been no significant structural developments regarding blasphemy in Egypt, as cases continue to be prosecuted against individuals from several religious groups. For more information on these cases, read Eshhad's issue brief on blasphemy laws in Egypt.

A rights group submitted a case to the Supreme Administrative Court requesting that the seven Egyptian Christians killed in Libya be considered martyrs by the state. The case is still pending.

Sectarianism, the Law, and the Parliament

Parliamentary Elections 2010-2012

To provide context for the parliamentary elections that occurred in the last quarter of 2015, a brief review of previous elections is relevant.

Shi'a	Despite periodic calls by some Shi'a leaders for a parliamentary quota for Shi'a, none was enacted. A few months before the election in 2011, the Egyptian High Elections Committee banned the Shi'a-formed Tahrir Party for being "based on religion." Shi'a regrouped under the banner of the secular-leaning Unity and Freedom Party, which fielded 30 candidates in the 2011 elections (including Shi'a), but won no seats.
Bahá'i and Jews	Other religious minorities, including Bahá'í and Jews, did not field any candidates in the elections or gain any representation in parliament.

Former President Hosni Mubarak had sought to increase diversity in parliament by granting the majority of the appointed People's Assembly seats to Christians; in 2010 he appointed seven Christians out of the 10 appointed seats despite no official quota. Christians held about two percent of all seats in the 2010 parliament, but most of their representatives were appointed. The percentage of Christians in parliament had hovered around two percent since the 1950s.

Statistics on the number of Coptic candidates are far from comprehensive, likely due to a significant stigma in Egypt regarding religion-based politics among Christians, leading many Christian candidates to downplay their religion. What is known, however, is that in 2011 the majority of Christians ran as members of liberal parties such as the Wafd, Free Egyptians Party, and the Social Democratic Party, although some also ran under the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood. No Christians ran as members of the Nour Party, which at the time had a *de facto* prohibition on Christian membership. Ultimately, eleven Christians were seated in the House of Representatives (about two percent); **six** were elected and **five** were appointed. The most prominent of this group was Emad Gad, a liberal activist and member of the leftist Social Democratic Party.
In the Shura Council, twelve Christians gained seats (four and a half percent) in 2012. Nine were elected and three were appointed.[2]

---

[2] In the 2011-2012 Egyptian parliament, there were 678 seats—498 in the People's Assembly, the lower house; and 180 in the Shura Council, the upper house. One hundred seats were appointed—ten in the People's Assembly and 90 in the Shura Council—and the remaining 578 seats were elected

Parliamentary Elections 2015

Christian Representation

Christian candidates performed better in the 2015 parliamentary elections than in any other election in modern Egyptian history. In the first phase of the elections, which covered Upper Egypt and the West Delta, Christians secured **15** seats in the House of Representatives. This includes **12** candidates who won on party lists, all of whom represented the For the Love of Egypt coalition. Additionally, 23 Coptic candidates running as individuals advanced to runoffs in the first phase, of whom **three** secured seats, one from the Egyptian Democratic Party and two from the Free Egyptians Party.

In the second phase of the elections, which covered Cairo and the East Delta, another **12** Christians running on party lists won seats, all of them representing the For the Love of Egypt coalition. Moreover, Samir Ghattas, representing the National Party for the Nasr City constituency, made history by becoming the first Christian running as an individual to secure a seat in the first round of elections without a runoff. In the second phase, 20 Christian candidates running as individuals advanced to the runoff round, of which **eight** —all of them in Cairo—won. Thus, a combined **21** Christians won seats in the second phase, bringing the total of elected Coptic members of parliament to **36**, by far the highest representation Christians have achieved in the Egyptian parliament. Additionally, three of the 28 appointed members are Christians.[3]

There are five Christian members of the newly elected parliament who served in the 2011 parliament: Emad Gad, Maged Tobia, Susie Nashed, Nadia Henry, and Magaret Azer. Additionally, Ashraf Shawqy, a Christian former member of parliament (2011), lost his bid for a seat in Minya. The most prominent Christian to lose was Ihab Ramzi, a doctor and community leader in Minya who lost in the runoffs to Sherif al–Nady, another Christian.

Christian leaders reported an increase in the number of Christians who joined or intended to vote for the Salafi Nour Party in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Despite the fact that the Nour Party has not traditionally welcomed Christians, in order to meet constitutional quotas for Christians in political parties, the party included 24 Christians on their lists in the 2015 parliamentary elections. This representation reflects a major improvement from the 2011 elections, in which the party prohibited Christians from joining the party.

Although some of the Christian support for the Nour Party may stem simply from a lack of alternatives, at least some support can likely be attributed to the Copts 38 movement and its opposition to the official Coptic Orthodox Church hierarchy. Several young activists founded Copts 38 in opposition to the church's personal status law governing divorce.[4] To these young Christians, Pope Tawadros' August declaration forbidding Copts from joining the Nour Party—an official political decision that that church is technically prohibited from making—has only served to further isolate them from a clergy they perceive as overbearing. For members of Copts 38, joining or voting for the Nour Party is not only a

---

[3] In the unicameral parliament elected in 2015, there are 596 seats, 28 of which were appointed.

[4] Its name is a reference to a 1938 papal decree that established ten cases in which it was acceptable for Copts to divorce; in 1971, Pope Shenouda III amended that decree to allow divorce only in cases of adultery, a restriction that has drawn opposition from many young Copts in recent years.

protest vote, but also possibly a strategic move: the form of *sharia* that Nour hopes to implement would make divorce significantly easier for Christians by eliminating the church as an arbiter of marriage and divorce and thus allowing civil marriages—and possibly easier divorces—for Christians. For more information on the personal status laws dictating Christian ability to obtain divorces, read Ishak Ibrahim's analysis for Eshhad on the topic.

Shi'a and Other Minority Representation

At least nine Shi'a candidates unsuccessfully ran in the 2015 parliamentary elections under the banner of the Union and Freedom Party, a party that was created to unify Shi'a, Sufi, and some former leaders of the Tagammu Party. A Salafi coalition launched a campaign targeting Shi'a candidates, accusing them as "Iranian infiltrators." No Shi'a candidates won seats in parliament. A group of Shi'a has been attempting to re-establish the Tahrir Party, which was disbanded before the 2011 elections due to its religious affiliation. In December 2015, the latest appeal was denied, and the party remains inactive.

Additionally, little information has been published regarding other minority groups such as Jews, Baha'is, Ahmadis, or professed atheists and their involvement in the parliamentary elections. Several people unsuccessfully called for the head of Egypt's Jewish community, Magda Haroun, to be appointed to parliament. Haroun expressed concern about a parliamentary appointment amid opposition to the idea. For example, Hassan Kheirallah, member of parliament from the Republican People's Party, said he would refuse to sit next to Haroun or have her in parliament.

Sufi participation in elections led to two Sufi Muslims being elected to parliament, Abdul Hadi al-Qasbi and Mahmoud Sharif. No Sufi representatives were appointed to parliament despite requests by the community. Writer Fatima Naoot, a Sunni Muslim who has been the subject of blasphemy charges, ran for a seat in Cairo and won the most votes in her district in the first round, but failed to secure a majority and lost in the runoff election.

Sectarian Attacks Recorded During Elections

There were at least three separate incidents of harassment of Christian voters in the first phase of the 2015 parliamentary elections.

On October 27, 2015, security forces were brought in to secure the polling station at Salah al-Din School in Luxor City after a group of "thugs" were reportedly intimidating Coptic voters.

On October 28, 2015, groups of "thugs" reportedly attacked Christian voters and prevented them from voting in the village of Abwan al-Zabadi, which is one-third Christian. On that day, a runoff election was taking place for the Beni Mazar and Matay constituency, which was being led by Christian lawyer Ihab Ramzi, a former member of parliament. Reports did not name the party responsible for calling in the thugs. There were seven other candidates contesting the seat.

According to elections observers, on October 28, 2015, a mob of Nour Party members [attacked](#) two Coptic brothers, Ramon and Roger Rafaat Nathan, as they attempted to vote at their polling station at the Amiriya Secondary Business School.

In contrast to the first phase of the 2015 parliamentary elections, there were no conclusive reports of harassment of Christian voters or other minorities during the second phase of elections.

Sectarianism, Media, and Government

The last two years has been marked by growing restrictions on an individuals freedom of expression, something that many journalists, television figures, and authors have particularly experienced. As a growing number of people are referred to court for blasphemy cases, or cases involving the harming of public morals, other media outlets (those who publicly support the government) have used their platforms to lambast the state's enemies, dissidents, or political opposition. The trend is similar when looking at religious minority groups in the country. Media is consistently used as a means to spread ideology or rhetoric in Egypt, leading to unintentional and intentional sectarian or discriminatory remarks being broadcast to the entire population.

Eshhad recorded two significant incidents during the last quarter of 2015 in which Egypt's highest religious figure publicly warned television viewers of the spread of Shi'a Islam in the country. In late November 2015, Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayyeb warned television viewers during his weekly address about attempts to spread Shi'a Islam in Egypt, saying, "We don't reject [Shi'ism] as a faith, but we object to the politically motivated propagation of this faith, in Sunni areas." A few weeks earlier, he had also [stated](#), "We have seen huge funds being paid to convert Sunni youth to the Shi'a sect, and that is what we reject." These comments come a few months after Tayyeb expressed support for an Azhar campaign that sought to [combat](#) Shi'a expansion in Egypt.

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 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.

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