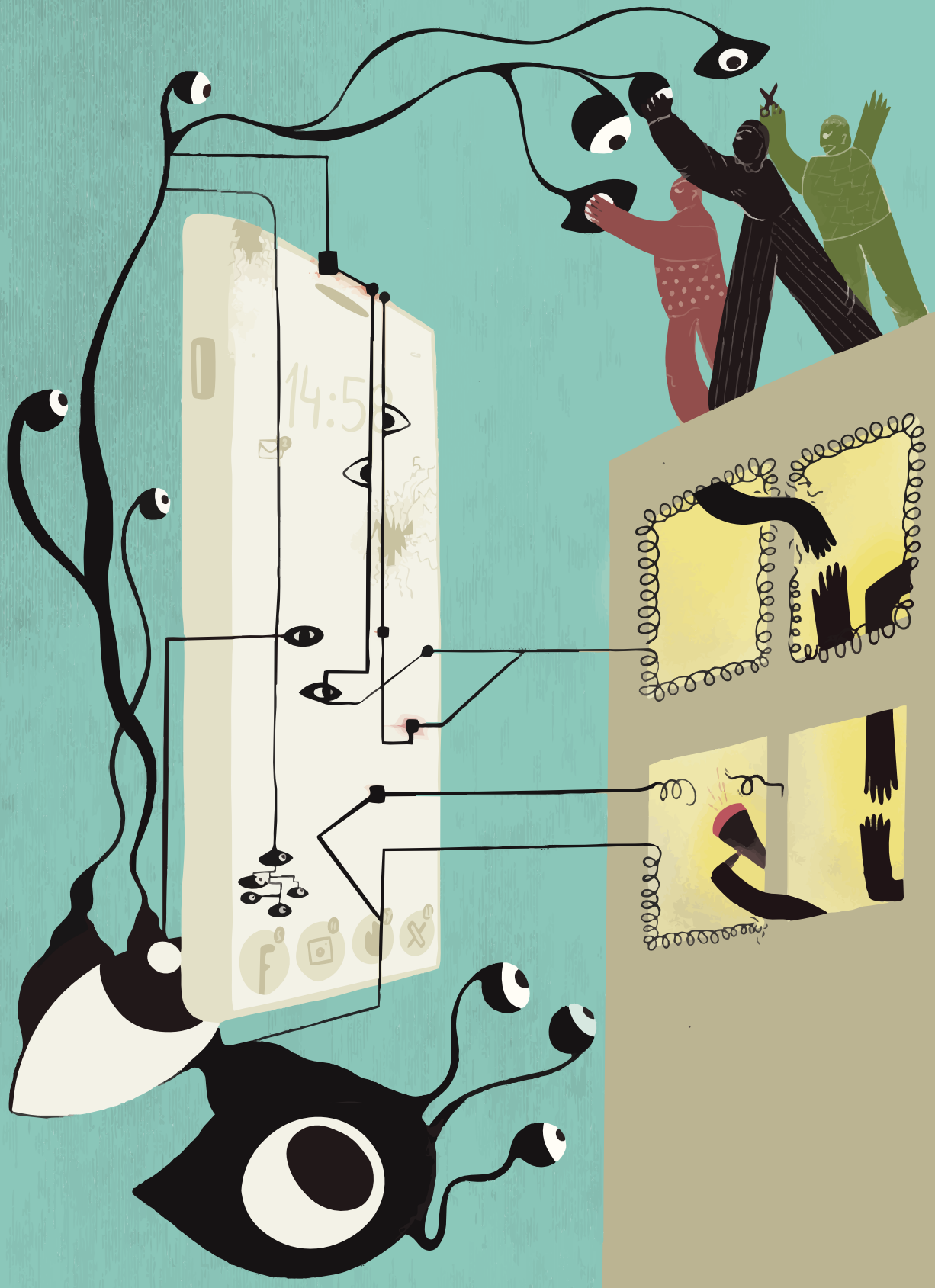
PROPAGANDA, HOSTILITY AND RESISTANCE:

REALITIES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE IN EGYPT

RESEARCH REPORT 2025



Propaganda, hostility and resistance: Realities of technology-facilitated violence in Egypt

Research report, July 2025

Propaganda, hostility and resistance: Realities of technology-facilitated violence in Egypt

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FIRN is a network of researchers, activists and practitioners from Global South countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. FIRN focuses on the making of a feminist internet, seeing this as critical to bringing about transformation in gendered structures of power that exist online and offline and to capture fully the fluidity of these spaces and our experiences with them. Members of the network undertake data-driven research that provides substantial evidence to drive change in policy and law, and in the discourse around internet rights.

Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute is the host organisation of the research and represents the inaugural regional legal institution with a distinctive focus on issues pertaining to the sexual and bodily liberties of marginalised communities.

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Their insights and trust were invaluable in shaping the research.

Executive summary

Technology-facilitated violence (TFV) is a multifaceted and pervasive form of digital repression. From widespread surveillance, criminalisation of online content and expression, to propaganda, disinformation campaigns and persecution of online users, state and non-state actors deploy myriad mechanisms to monitor, intimidate and silence individuals and communities. These practices result in grave and multilayered consequences, extending beyond self-censorship and infiltrating the intimate, social and professional lives of those affected.

In this qualitative research, we provide an intersectional examination of the complex array of the political, economic and social structures that contribute to shaping the realities of TFV in Egypt. Additionally, we highlight its repercussions on the health and the physical and social security of survivors, alongside their responses and resistance strategies.

To do so, we conducted in-depth interviews with 20 participants who were women and members of LGBTQI+ communities. They included migrants and refugees, digital content creators, women's rights defenders and feminist activists, among others. This was complemented with secondary data from diverse resources, such as news articles, op-eds and publications.

Centring participants' lived experiences, the study shows how the current political climate and economic crisis, deeply intertwined with existing systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism and classism, play a fundamental role in driving and legitimising TFV. Repercussions of such violence are severe, affecting the safety, security and well-being of individuals. These consequences intensify as individuals' identities intersect and access to supportive services, whether legal or healthcare, is obstructed by systemic discrimination and structural stigma. Nevertheless, as participants illustrated, survivors find ways to resist and challenge violence through various tactics and means, from strategic visibility, confrontation and documentation, to coordinated efforts of digital archiving and community building.

Addressing technology-facilitated violence requires political will and structural reforms. State laws and policies should be enforced to provide fair legal protection for survivors, irrespective of their gender, sexual orientation, race or class. The state must cease weaponising legislation like the Cybercrime Law and related provisions, as tools to target and detain online users. Additionally, inhumane practices that violate bodily integrity, such as forced anal or vaginal examinations of LGBTQI+ individuals, must be prevented. Non-state actors, such as technology companies, should adopt human rights-centred content moderation policies to effectively respond to online violence, including hate speech and defamation.

Finally, increased funding and support for grassroots and community building are essential. Funding organisation should prioritise long-term funding and support for groups working on digital security, legal aid and psychosocial support for marginalised communities, especially beyond urban areas. Importantly, funding should also support prevention measures and initiatives such as knowledge production and educational programmes that deepen understanding of the role of different key actors, including technology companies. This includes examining how violence is embedded in the design and processes of technologies and what strategies and tools can be developed to shift power dynamics in the creation and use of digital tools to better prevent technology-facilitated violence.

Introduction

ESCALATING REGIONAL REPRESSION

Digital technologies, such as the internet, social media and artificial intelligence (AI), continue to reshape our personal, social and economic experiences as well as our political engagement, blurring the boundaries between the "virtual" and the "real". However, for over a decade, these technologies have been increasingly co-opted and exploited by repressive governments, including those in South-West Asia and North Africa (SWANA),[1] as instruments for control and repression, undermining fundamental human rights like as freedom of speech, privacy and socioeconomic rights.

For instance, several governments across the region have weaponised these technologies and related legislation to monitor, control and silence online expression and dissent. Laws like the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law have granted authorities sweeping power to tighten their grip on the digital realm, intensify online censorship, wield mass surveillance and target a wide range of groups, under the pretext of preserving "national security" and "family values".[2] Those targeted include digital content creators, queer individuals, migrants, activists, human rights defenders and other online users. Moreover, non-state actors such as technology and social media corporations play a major role in perpetuating government repression by providing surveillance infrastructure and related technologies, profiting significantly from maintaining and expanding these systems of control.[3] A regional mapping of tactics and narratives employed by an assemblage of key state and non-state

1. In this report, we use the term South-West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) as an accurate and decolonial descriptor of the region, situating it within its continental geographical context.
2. Abdelmeguid, H. (2024). Digital Repression in the Middle East: The Strategic Weaponization of Cybercrime Laws in MENA. *McGill Undergraduate Law Review, No. 9.* https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4909215; Fatafta, M. (2020, 17 December). From Free Space to a Tool of Oppression: What Happened to the Internet Since the Arab Spring? *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy.* https://timep.org/2020/12/17/from-free-space-to-a-tool-of-oppression-what-happened-to-the-internet-since-the-arab-spring/
3. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. (2024). *Keeping watch: Surveillance companies in Middle East & North Africa*. https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/from-us/briefings/mena-surveillance-2024/; Fatafta, M. (2021). Transnational Digital Repression in the MENA Region. *POMEPS Studies, 43.* https://pomeps.org/transnational-digital-repression-in-the-mena-region

actors across the SWANA region, illustrated an orchestrated and escalating pattern of digital repression throughout the region.[4]

To understand the origins of this trend, it is essential to situate these repressive practices within the broader historical, political and socioeconomic context of the region, particularly since 2011. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring – a critical moment in history that highlighted the role of the internet as a catalyst for mobilisation towards political and social justice in the digital era – the region witnessed escalating repression, especially by Arab regimes, who exploited technologies to diminish any potentially emerging political or social movements, under the guise of fighting terrorism.[5] Politically, Arab regimes have enacted new restrictive laws and weaponised existing ones to legitimise crackdowns on dissent. Tactics such as eroding civic spaces, forced disappearance, arbitrary arrest and revocation of citizenship are systematically deployed to undermine freedom of speech, expression and assembly and other fundamental rights.[6]

In addition, the region continues to face socioeconomic challenges amid ongoing genocidal wars, heightened militarisation of states and deeply rooted inequalities. These challenges have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed underlying structural weaknesses and aggravated preexisting issues such as unemployment, widespread poverty, growing inequality and fragile social protection systems. Consequently, socioeconomic rights have been severely undermined, reinforcing repression and violence against marginalised groups by both state and non-state actors.[7] Moreover, this repression has expanded into the digital sphere. Through an authoritarian approach to internet regulation and governance, regimes turned a space once central to political and social organising into a heavily policed realm, extending control beyond national borders. The transnational dimension of digital repression is facilitated by the advancements in affordable technology and the transfer of sophisticated surveillance tools, such as spyware.[8]

DIGITAL REPRESSION IN EGYPT

Defined as the use of information and communications technology to surveil, coerce or manipulate individuals or groups, digital repression in Egypt is widespread and pervasive.[9] It involves multiple mechanisms deployed by both state and non-state actors. These include online censorship by restricting content

4. Wahba, N. (2024). *Roots of Hate: Fascist and Fundamentalist Narratives & Actors in South-West Asia and North Africa Regions.* Noor. https://wearenoor.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Roots-of-Hate-SSEA.pdf
5. Al Jazeera. (2020, 17 December). What is the Arab Spring, and how did it start? *Al Jazeera.* https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/17/what-is-the-arab-spring-and-how-did-it-start; Fatafta, M. (2020, 17 December). Op. cit.
6. Josua, M., & Edel, M. (2021). The Arab uprisings and the return of repression. *Mediterranean Politics, 26*(5), 586-611. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2021.1889298
7. Femena. (2024). *Silent No More!: WHRDs in SWANA Speak Out on Sexual Violence by State Security.* https://femena.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Silent-No-More.pdf
8. Fatafta, M. (2021). Op. cit.
9. Feldstein, S. (2021). *The Rise of Digital Repression: How Technology is Reshaping Power, Politics, and Resistance.* Oxford University Press.

and access to information through internet regulations or repressive legislation. For example, over 600 websites, including human rights and independent media platforms, have been blocked since 2017.[10] Additionally, it involves mass and targeted cyber surveillance. Other measures include social manipulation and disinformation, as well as persecution of online users. These practices often overlap with each other and with other traditional forms of repression, such as random street security checks, detentions and physical and sexual assaults. **Together, these repressive mechanisms form an integrated ecosystem of control that strengthens the regime's capabilities for monitoring, intimidating and silencing anyone who challenges its narrative or the social order it strives to maintain.**

Such digital repression does not exist in a vacuum. Since the current regime came to power in 2013, its policies and legislations that were claimed to "preserve national security" and "combat terrorism" have led to tight control. This is evident in the criminalisation of expression and silencing of dissident voices, be they political or related to women's or minority rights, pointing to a persistent and expanding infringement of fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech, expression and assembly.

This human rights crisis is marked by grave abuses, such as enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and inhumane prison conditions, as well as sexual and gender-based torture and ill treatment, including sexual harassment, virginity tests for women and forced anal and genital examination for LGBTQI+ people, especially gay men and trans women. These practices are systematically deployed with impunity.[11] This crisis is also reflected in the systematic erasure of civic spaces. For instance, Non-Governmental Organisations Law 149/2019 imposes strict conditions on non-governmental and civil society organisations, limiting their ability to operate independently or collaborate with other local or international organisations.[12]

In addition to political repression, the country's economy, militarised by the regime, has been facing crises for over a decade.[13] These have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as regional instabilities due to the ongoing ethnic cleansing and genocide in Gaza and Sudan. This occurs alongside economic reform strategies driven by external loans, notably from the International Monetary Fund, which have funded mega infrastructure projects.[14]

10. Masaar. (2021, 27 April). Blocked websites in Egypt. https://masaar.net/en/blocked-websites-in-egypt/
11. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, et al. (2025). *Joint stakeholders' submission on criminal justice: For Egypt's 4th cycle Universal Periodic Review.* https://eipr.org/en/publications/joint-stakeholders%E2%80%99-submission-criminal-justice-egypt%E2%80%99s-4th-cycle-universal-periodic
12. Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. (2019, 21 August). TIMEP Brief: Law No. 149 of 2019 (NGO Law). https://timep.org/2019/08/21/ngo-law-of-2019/
13. Mandour, M. (2022). الاقتصاد السياسي للحرمان الاجتماعي. Egyptian Human Rights Forum. https://egyptianforum.org/الاقتصاد-السياسي-للحرمان-الاجتماعي/
14. Saad-Filho, A., & Abdelaty, S. (2024). *Towards a Sustainable Economic Transformation Strategy for Egypt.* Alternative Policy Solutions. https://aps.aucegypt.edu/en/articles/1363/towards-a-sustainable-economic-transformation-strategy-for-egypt; Albazar, S. (2024, 29 October). Egypt's Economy Amidst Regional Conflicts. *Washington Institute for Near East Policy.* https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/egypts-economy-amidst-regional-conflicts

Moreover, these reforms have involved deep austerity measures without any plans to mitigate their impacts on social and economic rights of the population, especially the most vulnerable. **The Austerity measures such as cuts to food and energy subsidies and spending on social protection programmes have contributed to increased poverty, which is reflected in the change of the country's class structure, with a significant decline in the size of the middle class.**[15] Additionally, these measures included cuts to spending on health that adversely impacted access to quality healthcare services.[16]

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE

Given this context, it is no surprise that state and non-state violence – a byproduct of political and socioeconomic deterioration – is prevalent. In the digital sphere, which is occupied by more than 90% of Egyptians (over 100 million), violence facilitated by digital technologies has become widespread, turning it into a space of heightened and pervasive harm and abuse.[17] In this research, technology-facilitated violence (TFV), a form of digital repression, is defined as:

> [A]ny act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.[18]

TFV includes social manipulation, disinformation, trolling, doxing, harassment, cyberstalking, defamation to undermine credibility and reputation, hate speech, death or rape threats and online entrapment for political or social activity.[19] Additionally, it involves strategies used by state and non-state sponsored actors to shape beliefs and narratives to manipulate internet users and incite violence. Such violence targets a broad range of groups, including women, LGBTQI+ communities, migrants and refugee communities, activists and human rights defenders and other online users, with adverse impacts on their health and their social and personal lives.[20]

15. Mandour, M. (2022). Op. cit.
16. Egyptian Front for Human Rights. (2025). *Joint Stakeholder Submission to the UN Human Rights Council's 4th-Universal Periodic Review - EGYPT.* https://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Final-Joint-Stakeholder-Submission-on-Economic-and-Social-Rights-in-Egypt-to-the-UN-Human-Rights-Councils-4th-Universal-Periodic-Review-EGYPT-48th-session-Jan-Feb-2025.pdf
17. Kemp, S. (2025, 3 March). Digital 2025: Egypt. *DataReportal.* https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-egypt
18. UN Women & World Health Organization. (2022). *Technology-facilitated Violence against Women: Towards a common definition. Report of the meeting of the Expert Group, 15-16 November 2022.* https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Expert-Group-Meeting-report-Technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-en.pdf
19. Amnesty International. (2019). *Challenging power, fighting discrimination: A call to action to recognise and protect women human rights defenders.* https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/1139/2019/en/; Feldstein, S. (2021). Op. cit.
20. Vaughan, C., & Bergman, S. (2023). *Measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence: A discussion paper.* UNFPA. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_Measuring%20TF%20GBV_%20A%20Discussion%20Paper_FINAL.pdf

A global study that measured the prevalence of gendered online violence in 51 countries illustrated that the greater the gender gap, the more prevalent the rates of violence.[21] In 2025, Egypt ranked 139th out of 148 countries on a global gender disparity index, following a decline from the 135th position the previous year.[22] This persistent and widening gender gap in Egypt points to an especially high risk and a growing prevalence of gendered technology-facilitated violence.

Moreover, existing systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism and classism play a fundamental role in driving and legitimising TVF.[23] Patriarchy, for example, shapes social and gender norms that privilege men and place them in a superior position over women. It is also embedded in the legal system which discriminates against women and criminalises diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. For example, while no specific law criminalises same-sex relationships, Law No. 10 of 1961 originally enacted to combat sex work has been extended to arrest LGBTQI+ communities under charges of "habitual debauchery" and "prostitution".[24] **These systems perpetuate a culture of impunity where perpetrators of violence face little to no legal consequences, reinforcing a vicious cycle of harm and abuse, with severe repercussions on survivors' personal, social and digital security and well-being.**

There has been a growing body of work on technology-facilitated violence in Egypt over recent years, with many scholars focusing primarily on online violence against women. These studies, which have mostly used quantitative methods, alongside documentation and reports by civil society organisations, examined the enablers and consequences of violence perpetrated by non-state actors.[25] They explored how factors such as demographics, online behaviour and legal frameworks contribute to enabling technology-facilitated violence against women in Egypt, while also highlighting the repercussions on victims' mental health.

While these contributions have attempted to provide an understanding of the issue, they fell short of capturing the scale and complexity of TFV, often narrowly framing it as mainly a "women's issue". This limited understanding

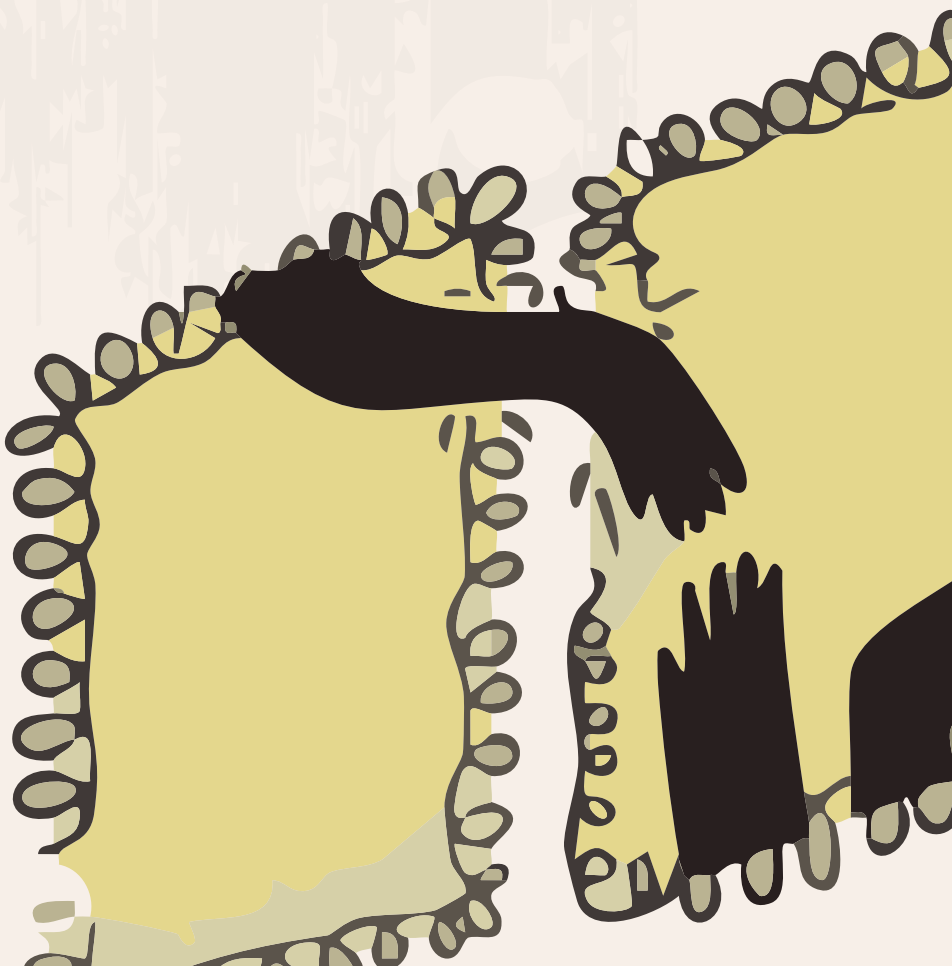
21. The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021, 1 March). Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women. *The Economist.* https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/
22. World Economic Forum. (2025). *Gender Gap Report 2025.* https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf
23. Harper, C., Marcus, R., George, R., D'Angelo, S., & Samman, E. (2020). *Gender, power and progress: How norms change.* ALIGN/ODI. https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/align_-_gender_power_and_progress_0.pdf
24. https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1961/en/102795
25. Arafa, A., Mahmoud, O., & Senosy, S. (2015). The emotional impacts of different forms of cyber bullying victimization in Egyptian university students. *Egyptian Journal of Medical Sciences, 36,* 867-880. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316455202_THE_EMOTIONAL_IMPACTS_OF_DIFFERENT_FORMS_OF_CYBER_BULLYING_VICTIMIZATION_IN_EGYPTIAN_UNIVERSITY_STUDENTS; Arafa, A. E., Elbahrawe, R. S., Saber, N. M., Ahmed, S. S., & Abbas, A. M. (2017). Cyber sexual harassment: a cross-sectional survey over female university students in Upper Egypt. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health, 5*(1), 61. https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20175763; Arafa, A., & Senosy, S. (2017). Pattern and correlates of cyberbullying victimization among Egyptian university students in Beni-Suef, Egypt. *Journal of The Egyptian Public Health Association, 92*(2), 107-115. https://doi.org/10.21608/EPX.2018.8948; Hassan, F. M., Khalifa, F. N., El Desouky, E. D., Salem, M. R., & Ali, M. M. (2020). Cyber violence pattern and related factors: online survey of females in Egypt. *Egyptian Journal of Forensic Sciences, 10*(1), 6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41935-020-0180-0; Zagloul, N. M., Farghaly, R. M., ELKhatib, H., Issa, S. Y., & El-Zoghby, S. M. (2022). Technology facilitated sexual violence: a comparative study between working and non-working females in Egypt before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Egyptian Journal of Forensic Sciences, 12*(1), 21. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41935-022-00278-2

overlooks how other groups, such as LGBTQI+ communities, migrants and others, experience this violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors differently. Moreover, the analysis failed to capture the intricate interplay of systems of oppression, such as racism and classism as well as political and economic structures, that shape individual experiences and resistance strategies. This gap hinders a nuanced understanding of the problem and fails to reflect the heterogeneous realities of those affected.

As technology- facilitated violence persists as a multifaceted and pervasive threat, it is imperative to examine the complex realities of violence and the far-reaching implications of such violence to inform resistance, policy and advocacy efforts. This requires an intersectional analysis of the complex political, economic, legal and digital systems that shape the experiences of violence, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, as well as the responses and resistance strategies employed against it. **This analysis must prioritise making visible the perspectives of a diverse range of groups affected by TFV, acknowledging their varied lived experiences. This approach is crucial not only to have an in-depth understanding of such violence but also to amplify the capacity and agency of survivors in their response and contestation.**

Accordingly, this research aims to provide an intersectional analysis of the political and structural determinants that shape the realities of TFV, while also examining its impact on the health and physical and social security of survivors. It further explores the responses and resistance strategies employed by those affected. Ultimately, the study aims to offer recommendations for policy and advocacy initiatives to combat TFV in the context of Egypt.

Approach and Methodology



INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality was conceptualised by Kimberlé Crenshaw, drawing on the long and rich history of Black feminist thought.[26] Intersectionality provides an analytical approach to examine how the multiple systems of power and oppression across axes such as gender, race and class intersect and operate at the personal, institutional and structural levels. In her work, Crenshaw highlights that a focus on a single aspect of identity flattens the lived experiences and obscures how these factors interlink to shape forms of vulnerabilities and resistance. Moreover, Patricia Hill Collin's concept of "the matrix of domination" further highlights the fact that systems of power function simultaneously across multiple levels, leading to complex and context-dependent realities.[27] In light of these insights, **intersectionality was essential in this research to analyse how TFV as a system of power and oppression intertwined with socioeconomic, technological and political structures, impacted the realities of individuals and influenced resistance.**

METHODS, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

We conducted qualitative interviews, complemented with secondary data from diverse resources, such as news articles, op-eds and publications to deepen the analysis. Between October 2024 and January 2025, we conducted in-depth semi-structured online interviews with approximately 20 participants. We used both purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify participants who were women (n=10), including one Sudanese woman participant and another who left the country during the past year. In addition, participants included members of the LGBTQI+ community (n=11). One queer participant was from Sudan and had moved to Egypt due to the war. Another participant left Egypt during the past year to seek asylum in a European country, fearing for his safety. The rest of the participants lived in Cairo, Delta and Upper Egypt. All participants had experienced TFV during the past year and were between 20 and 39 years old and of middle- or lower-middle-class extraction. Moreover, participants included students, practitioners, unemployed persons, women's rights advocates and feminist activists.

To recruit participants, our research team of three leveraged both professional and personal networks for support. Additionally, we disseminated a call for participation via the digital platform of the host organisation. While the sampling

26. Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*(1). https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf
27. Collins, P. H., da Silva, E. C. G., Ergun, E., Furseth, I., Bond, K. D., & Martínez-Palacios, J. (2021). Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory. *Contemporary Political Theory, 20,* 690-725. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-021-00490-0

approach aimed for maximum variation to capture the diverse perspectives, the team's positionality somewhat influenced the characteristics of those who participated. (See below for more reflection on methodology and positionality.)[28]

The research team contacted participants via encrypted emails or the Signal application to explain the project, safety and security measures and to request their written consent. Additionally, before conducting interviews, the team pilot-tested the semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were conducted digitally using secure communication platforms and took an average of 90-120 minutes. As a means of ensuring informed consent, we began by discussing the research objectives, ensuring that participants understood all the necessary information, and explained how their data would be anonymised and used. We reminded them of their right to opt out of the interview or retract their consent or stop the recording at any time. Once participants had provided their verbal consent, we started recording. Furthermore, we created an environment of ease and comfort for participants. Throughout the interviews, participants' well-being took precedence over research goals. We checked in with participants periodically, refrained from pressuring them to disclose anything they were uncomfortable sharing, even if such disclosures might enrich the study, and stopped recording whenever they requested it, in case they wished to share confidential information but not record it. Additionally, we sent follow-up emails a few days after the interview to check on participants and remind them of available support resources. All recorded interview files were securely saved on an encrypted cloud research drive, accessible only by the research team to ensure data safety and confidentiality. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymised. The recordings were turned into a written script and any identifying information, such as names or place of residence, was removed. The anonymised transcripts were translated from Arabic into English and reviewed for accuracy and reliability. Transcripts were then coded and analysed, using a thematic approach to the analysis.

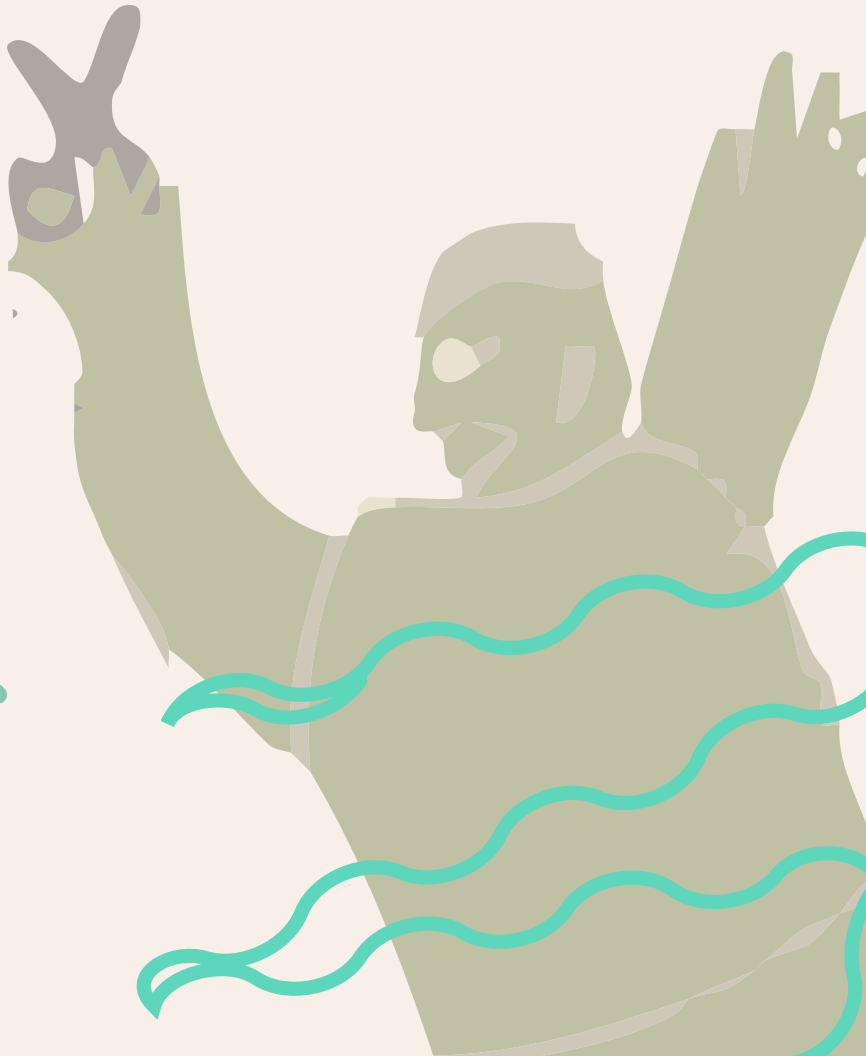
ETHICS OF CARE

In this research, safety, security and care for research participants were the foundational principles guiding our work. Before engaging with participants, we undertook the following steps. **First, digital safety and security:** we took all the necessary precautions to ensure safety for participants during digital

28. For additional reflection on the methodology, see ElHusseini, A. (2025, 28 April). Beyond knowledge production: Can research be a site for more? Reflexive notes. *GenderIT.org.* https://genderit.org/feminist-talk/beyond-knowledge-production-can-research-be-site-more-reflexive-notes

conversations. Additionally, with the support of a security adviser, we developed a concise, user-friendly digital security guide to help participants implement essential security measures on their end, reinforcing mutual responsibility for digital security. **Second, legal support:** participants were provided access to legal assistance through the Cairo52 Legal Research Institute in case of any legal repercussions arising from participation in the research. **Third, internet access:** reasonable financial support was provided to purchase internet data bundles if they had limited connectivity. **Finally, emotional support:** to ensure we supported participants emotionally, a feminist psychologist, with an intersectional approach to understanding lived experiences influenced by multiple systems of oppression, was available to support participants, in case they needed it. These support resources were detailed in the consent form in addition to an explanation of the research topic, potential risks and benefits, and the measures in place to protect participants' safety and confidentiality. In addition, we included details about the data collection process, analysis and usage, as well as the steps that participants could take if they suspected misuse of their data by the researcher.

Findings



This chapter is organised into three sections. In the first, we examine the experiences of participants with TFV, and the tactics employed by state and non-state actors to incite and perpetrate violence against a wide range of groups, including migrants, LGBTQI+ people, digital content creators, feminist activists and human rights defenders. Additionally, we unpack the overlap of multiple systems of discrimination and oppression that determined the frequency and brutality of violence that participants experienced. In the second section, we illustrate the consequences of such violence on participants' health and physical and social security, highlighting how it reshaped their online and offline existence. In the third section, we explore participants' responses and their attempts to negotiate, confront and challenge violence at both the individual and collective level.

1. VIRTUAL REALITIES, TACTICS AND ENABLERS

Participants' experiences, particularly with social manipulation and disinformation, illustrated how the current political climate and economic deterioration in Egypt are deeply intertwined with existing oppressive systems, including racism, discriminatory legislation and patriarchal norms, further exacerbated by entrenched impunity. These forces continue to shape realities marked not only by pervasive violence, but also by acts of resistance. Additionally, these realities were remarkably heterogeneous, as participants' overlapping identities such as class, race, gender and social location influence the frequency and severity of violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.

Disinformation, racialised and gendered violence

During conversations with participants, we discussed the nexus between the current economic situation and the increased scale and magnitude of online violence. Wafaa, a Sudanese woman who has lived in Egypt most of her life and provides psychosocial support for refugee women, described how the economic crisis has contributed to fuelling a rise in racial and gendered violence, both online and offline. Since the Sudan war outbreak in April 2023, she has witnessed a spike in online disinformation, hate speech and xenophobia, particularly targeting Sudanese migrants and refugees.

According to Wafaa, she has consistently faced hostility and harassment because she is a dark-skinned Sudanese woman. Yet, the situation has worsened with the growing influx of Sudanese individuals seeking safety in Egypt due to the war. She recounted how digital platforms became breeding grounds for hate, with users blaming refugees, especially the Sudanese, for the economic decline. She mentioned:

> People were saying stuff like “You’re disgusting” and “We’re fed up with you.” I jumped in to say that Egypt and Sudan are one country. Then, people started trolling me with comments like “Why do you even care? You came here and made things worse.” Then they started messaging me through [Facebook] saying things like “You only show up in the dark” or “If you hadn’t spoken up, we wouldn’t have noticed you.”

Wafaa emphasised that her experience of gendered and racialised violence mirrors that of many of her friends, as well as of the migrant and refugee women she works with, who have faced similar hostility. Moreover, she explained how online hate speech spills into offline aggression:

> We’re constantly reminded that we’re Sudanese [and] getting called names or asked, “When are you going back to your country?” [...] At the supermarket, someone said, “Sugar and oil prices went up since the Sudanese came.” I feel like some people are stirring things up online, and it just keeps spreading.

Racism has long persisted in Egypt, particularly targeting dark-skinned individuals and sub-Saharan Africans.[29] Sudanese people frequently encounter violence that is not only racialised, but also gendered, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.[30] However, in the months following April 2023, Egypt saw a sharp rise in racist and xenophobic narratives, fuelled by state and state-sponsored media propaganda that portrayed Sudanese migrants as economic “burdens”.[31] This anti-refugee sentiment was further intensified through a simultaneous and coordinated incitement campaign on social media by state-sponsored actors, with hashtags calling for deportation and blaming refugees, including Sudanese refugees, for inflation and price hikes.[32]

This nationalist and hate narrative is not only aimed at scapegoating refugees for the state’s economic failures and inciting violence against them; it is also intended to overshadow exclusionary policies and restrictive legislations to control their inflows. These policies include mass arrests and deportations of Sudanese refugees and denial of asylum protections, as well as the swift adoption of Egypt’s first asylum law, widely criticised for further

29. Magdy, S. (2020, 2 January). Fleeing war, poverty, African migrants face racism in Egypt. *Associated Press.* https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-poverty-sudan-immigration-50f901e74759384266bf6a189805c8f2
30. Amnesty International. (2020, 4 November). Egypt: Protests by Sudanese migrants and refugees over brutal killing of a child met with violence and arrests. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/11/egypt-protests-by-sudanese-migrants-and-refugees-over-brutal-killing-of-a-child-met-with-violence-and-arrests/; Al-Mahdawi, H. (2020, 22 October). اللاجئات في مصر يتعرضن أيضاً للاعتداء الجنسي. Mada Masr. https://www.madamasr.com/2020/10/22/feature/%d9%85%d8%ac%d8%aa%d9%85%d8%b9/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ac%d8%a6%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d9%85%d8%b5%d8%b1-%d9%8a%d8%aa%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%b6%d9%86-%d8%a3%d9%8a%d8%b6%d9%8b%d8%a7-%d9%84%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%aa%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%a1/
31. Daraj. (2023, 14 May). كفاية لاجئين”… حملات مصرية منسقة لرفض دخول السودانيين الفارين من الحرب. درج . https://daraj.media/%d9%83%d9%81%d8%a7%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ac%d8%a6%d9%8a%d9%86-%d8%ad%d9%85%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%85%d8%b5%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%85%d9%86%d8%b3%d9%82%d8%a9-%d9%84%d8%b1%d9%81%d8%b6-%d8%af/
32. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1013903226766829&set=pb.100044414830143.-2207520000&type=3&fbclid=IwY2xjawEnEqlleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHa0gBHZEMbPso4SQiub5p7AW4G7TwgLG9WsCsYxbJp3FCFj_EPW9cAls6g_aem_h964piKWoK93cXHn2msh6g

undermining refugee rights.[33] According to a joint report by the Refugees Platform in Egypt (RPE) and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), the policy of mass arrest and deportation is characterised by systematic, deliberate and indiscriminate targeting of recognised refugees, registered asylum seekers and others. This demonstrates a significant shift in Egypt's treatment of refugees that stems from "a higher policy to strip refugees of protection and make them feel unsafe in the host country."[34] This is evidenced by documentation from local actors showing that over 20,000 refugees were forcibly deported to Sudan in 2024, compared to just around 3,000 in 2023.[35]

The hostility and online hate that Wafaa experienced and witnessed were not merely a consequence of her being a dark-skinned Sudanese woman; rather, they were mainly driven by a deeply rooted system of racism embedded within society and the state. This systemic and structural racism is perpetuated and reinforced by exclusionary policies targeting migrants and refugees. This is alongside the regime's strategy of scapegoating refugees for its economic failure by constructing an anti-refugee rhetoric. Together, these drivers have fuelled the rise in gendered and racial violence, both online and offline, manifesting in hate speech, harassment, mass arrest and deportation, and other discriminatory and repressive practices.

Wafaa was not the only migrant with whom we spoke. We also had a conversation with Seif, a queer Sudanese man in his twenties who sought safety in Egypt shortly after the outbreak of the war and who works on providing support to LGBTQI+ communities. Seif described experiencing violence at multiple levels. This included constant racial and gendered harassment, simply by walking in the street, where he would hear comments such as "Go back to your country," or when someone recorded a video, mocking him and his friends, which was then posted online. Alongside this is his constant fear of state security entrapment, whether through random street checks or online persecution. He shared the following:

> There are ongoing police campaigns, and sometimes they do phone inspections. If they find something like this [dating app] on your phone, even if you try to hide it within another app, they can still tell. For me, it's very risky, and I don't want to deal with that, so I'm scared to use it.

33. As of November 2024, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Egypt hosted over 800,000 refugees and asylum seekers, most of whom were Sudanese and Syrian. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been responsible for their registration, reviewing and deciding on asylum applications, as well as providing support for the most vulnerable. In December 2024, the Egyptian parliament passed its first asylum law, which is purportedly aimed at regulating the settlement of refugees in the country. In the law, refugee-related responsibilities were shifted to another body called Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs. This committee is responsible for information management, asylum application decisions and revocation of status. UNHCR. (2024, 30 November). Registered Population (Refugees and Asylum Seekers) as of 30 November 2024. https://www.unhcr.org/eg/media/registered-population-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-30-november-2024; Ali, O. K., & Henish, H. (2025, 6 February). A Crossroads for Refugee Rights: Examining Egypt's New Asylum Law. *Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy.* https://timep.org/2025/02/06/a-crossroads-for-refugee-rights-examining-egypts-new-asylum-law/
34. Refugee Platform in Egypt & Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. (2025). *The Collapse of Egypt's Protection for Refugees: Systematic and Widespread Violations of the Non-Refoulement Principle and the Right to Asylum.* https://rpegy.org/en/editions/the-collapse-of-egypts-protection-for-refugees-joint-report-reveals-widespread-systematic-violations-of-the-principle-of-non-refoulement-and-the-right-to-asylum/
35. Ibid.

Similar to Wafaa, the risks that Seif faces stem from the overlapping of systems discussed above. However, his experience showed an additional dimension of risk **due to the criminalisation of LGBTQI+ communities in Egypt (detailed in the following section), which poses additional threats to his safety and security. While he chose not to disclose more details about the specific nature of these threats to protect himself, his experience illustrates the heightened vulnerability of queer migrants and refugees to both online and offline violence.**

Entrapment, extortion and discriminatory legislation

Queer relations are not explicitly criminalised under Egyptian law. However, the authorities frequently use vague vice laws to target and prosecute LGBTQI+ people under common charges of "habitual practice" or "prostitution and debauchery", which may result in a prison term of up to three years. **Moreover, the Cybercrime Law, with its family values provision, has increasingly been invoked, leading to intensified (online) entrapment and prosecution of LGBTQI+ communities based on digital evidence that is sometimes fabricated or obtained through coercion.** This evidence includes dating app conversations, personal photos, sexts, or other private communications, which are considered sufficient proof of a "morality crime", unlike other laws that require evidence of sexual activity.[36]

During our investigation, we spoke with LGBTQI+ people from Cairo, Delta and Upper Egypt who experienced entrapment, both online and offline, by state security forces.[37] All 11 participants were based in Egypt, except for Kamel who was forced to leave the country during the past year, fearing prosecution. Kamel who frequently experienced entrapment, described one such incident:

> Just as I was getting in [the car], the police showed up. They grabbed the guy's phone, went through it and saw everything. That's when they took us to the station. It was rough. Luckily, no official report was filed, but I had my money and bankcard stolen. [The police officer] threatened me, saying that if he saw me again, it would be straight to prison. He kept repeating, "Next time, I won't let you go" and hurling insults and curses and hitting me.

This was not Kamel's first experience, but it was the last before he fled the country, fearing for his safety. Another form of entrapment is through security

36. Rigot, A. (2022). *Digital Crime Scenes: The Role of Digital Evidence in the Persecution of LGBTQ People in Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia.* Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/pantheon_files/files/publication/Digital%20crime%20scenes%20.pdf
37. Entrapment frequently occurs online, where authorities use dating apps to arrange meetings, then arrest individuals and search their phones for digital evidence of so-called "deviant" behaviour. Evidence collected often includes dating app conversations, personal photos, sexts and other private communications. It can also occur offline in certain areas that are known to the authorities as meeting points for individuals and are thus targeted by security forces.

checkpoints, where authorities randomly stop individuals and search and confiscate personal devices. This happens on streets, in public squares or metro stations. Fahd, another queer participant in his twenties, explained:

> Recently, I was walking along Abdel Moneim Riad Street when I was stopped and had my phone taken. [...] In moments like that, I try my best to act in ways that seem "normal" or "expected".

Such entrapment practice is an old unlawful procedure that violates the individual's right to privacy and forms part of a broader strategy to monitor and suppress freedom of political speech.[38] However, this practice poses a heightened threat for those who are or are merely perceived to be gender or sexuality non-conforming. This is particularly the case for tanswomen and gay men who are disproportionately subjected to suspicion and arrest under the pretext of "protecting family values". **As Fahd illustrates, performing masculinity becomes a strategy to reduce the chances of suspicion and safeguard himself. This risk intensifies further for individuals with intersecting marginalised identities, as exemplified earlier by Seif, a queer Sudanese migrant.**

Entrenched impunity and heightened hostility

The criminalisation of gender and sexual non-conforming identities is not only enforced by security forces; it is also propagated by non-state actors who do not necessarily perceive it as violence, but rather as a "moral duty". This sentiment was echoed by many research participants during our discussions. For example, Hazem shared:

> Most people don't take [the harm] seriously. They think it's normal, that we deserve it [...], that we deserve to be treated this way, as less than human.

Hazem and others shared this particularly when describing the harmful entrapment experiences perpetrated by non-state actors. Hazem is in his thirties, based in Egypt and often used dating apps to meet and connect with new people. During our discussions, he recounted how he agreed to meet a neighbour he trusted through a dating app, only to be ambushed:

> I felt safe to meet him at his place. I was sitting there and, out of nowhere, I noticed about five or six men in the apartment [...] I managed to run, but they took my ID and went through all my personal details, they even took photos of it. They stole my money and belongings and kept saying things

38. Kataya, A. (2022, 21 October). Unwarranted Phone Seizure Violates Egypt's Laws and Constitution. *SMEX.* https://smex.org/unwarranted-phone-seizure-violates-egypts-laws-and-constitution/

> like, "We know where to find you, we have all your information and we're coming to your house to expose you. Why are you even doing this?"

Similarly, Fahd described an experience of online entrapment via a dating app. He and his friend connected with someone online and agreed to meet in person, only to discover that they were being targeted for extortion. He said:

> One of the men had a switchblade, the other held a kitchen knife. They took both our phones and my laptop and then demanded we sign a receipt for 60,000 pounds immediately. I was in complete shock, I panicked, my hands were shaking and I was terrified. My friend was trying to handle the situation, but it quickly escalated. My friend managed to slip away, open the door and shout that they were thieves. That's when they grabbed the stuff and fled.

The threats did not end there. The perpetrators continued to stalk and threaten Fahd and his friend, forcing them to leave their home for their safety. Fahd continued:

> It wasn't over, they began sending my friend threatening photos, demanding money and threatening that they were coming back. A few days later, one of them saw my friend riding his bike, stopped him in the street, started a fight and beat him up.

Throughout the investigation, participants frequently reported experiencing entrapment and extortion. These experiences were not random or isolated incidents perpetrated only by individuals, they also occurred in a coordinated manner. This was exemplified in Ramy's experience. Ramy, a queer participant in his early 20s, described a group in his city that systematically targets queer individuals using dating apps. He explained:

> They use dating apps, pretending they just want to meet and chat. One member of the group goes on the date first and later the others show up, claiming to be his friends and saying they're gay too. Then they secretly record the meeting and use the footage to blackmail the person. They take their phone and anything else they can and they beat him severely. I witnessed one of these incidents myself and many of my friends have been assaulted by them. [...] This person and his friends operate like a gang. It's a serious issue here and we don't know what to do. People say that the police are behind this group.

Such “gangs”, as Ramy described them, are not confined to his city. Local actors have monitored the repeated use of this tactic across Egypt and some of these groups are believed to be state-sponsored.[39] While we could not fully verify this information, the very existence of these gangs highlights the widespread hostility towards LGBTQI+ communities. This hostility, which cannot be viewed in isolation from the current economic challenges, is further exacerbated by the criminalising legal environment discussed earlier, which makes reporting such crimes impossible and leads to sustaining a pervasive culture of impunity.

In addition to online entrapment and extortion, online hate speech is also perpetrated in a coordinated manner. Participants highlighted that online hate campaigns often escalate following particular social events, fuelling greater hostility and hatred against queer people, and lead to a surge in on-ground violence by state and non-state actors. Notable examples were repeatedly mentioned by participants during our investigation, such as the Ferta campaign, the World Cup and the Arab Academy for Science incident, highlighting the increased online hostility they observed.[40] This intensification of online hate rhetoric cannot be separated from the policies of corporate social media platforms that reinforce online hatred through their business models that prioritise maximised engagement and profit over user safety and upholding human rights. Additionally, their content moderation policies often fail to prevent hate speech and disinformation and can even enable them. This is evident in the latest shift in content moderation policies across Meta-owned platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Threads and WhatsApp, in January 2025. Such sweeping change to policies was heavily criticised for intensifying hate speech and disinformation, and for creating a more hostile digital ecosystem for LGBTQI+ communities, which in turn could intensify harm and offline consequences.[41]

The experiences described above reflect a broader and persistent pattern of violence against LGBTQI+ communities, both online and offline. This violence is primarily enforced by the state and state-sponsored media, which portray LGBTQI+ people as an infiltrating Western influence that inherently threatens religion, society and culture. In fact, this framing has been a deliberate strategy deployed by Egyptian regimes. **By leveraging nationalist and religiously conservative narratives, the state manufactures moral panics to divert**

39. ANKH Association. (2021). *The 20th-anniversary campaign of the Cairo52 / Queen Boat incident.* https://www.docdroid.net/JMemzAu/20-years-queen-boat-en-pdf
40. “Fetra” in Arabic means “human instinct” and it was the name of an online campaign launched in 2022 by two Egyptian marketing professionals during Pride Month. According to one of the founders, the campaign aimed to counter Western narratives that “promote homosexuality” in the Arab world. It quickly gained traction across the region, amassing over two million followers on Facebook and 79,000 on Twitter before both accounts were banned following reports by digital rights activists. The 2022 World Cup hosted by Qatar drew international attention to the repressive legislation and treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in the host country and across the region, resulting in a backlash across Arab countries and fuelling the rise of hate campaigns against LGBTQ+ people. A video circulated on social media shows a violent group assault targeting individuals who displayed the rainbow flag. The incident reportedly took place at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport. Following the release of the video, posts inciting hate and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals appeared on Platform X, further fuelling hostility towards the community. Sadek, D. (2023, 5 April). Anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns spread on Arabic social media. *DFRLAB.* https://dfrlab.org/2023/04/05/anti-lgbtq-campaigns-spread-on-arabic-social-media/; REDWORD. (2024, 24 December). Egypt – Rainbow-phobia: Group Assault Over Rainbow Flag Display. https://redword.ca/egypt-rainbow-phobia-group-assault-over-rainbow-flag-display/
41. Human Rights Campaign. (2025, 15 January). Meta’s New Policies: How They Endanger LGBTQ+ Communities and Our Tips for Staying Safe Online. https://www.hrc.org/news/metas-new-policies-how-they-endanger-lgbtq-communities-and-our-tips-for-staying-safe-online

public anger over government failures onto marginalised groups.[42] The current regime is no exception, having intensified security campaigns targeting queer individuals since coming to power in 2013. Between late 2013 and 2017, the average number of arrests surged to 66 per year, compared to just 14 annually over the previous 13 years.[43] **This strategy not only legitimises state violence and infringes on queer individuals' fundamental rights, but also fuels non-state violence with impunity. It shows how the state's vilifying discourse and discriminatory policies create a perilous environment that perpetuates violence and abuse against LGBTQI+ people.**

Similar tactic and expanded control

This framing strategy is not limited to scapegoating refugees or queer individuals. The same tactic has been increasingly applied to criminalise online content creators. Over the past five years authorities have particularly targeted women from middle- and lower-middle-income backgrounds. By invoking the rhetoric of family values and public morals, the state has justified the targeting and arrest of hundreds of content creators. This campaign began in 2020 when the Ministry of the Interior arrested a group of female TikTokers accused of "violating family values", including one who was framed by the public prosecution as participating in an international human trafficking ring, sparking widespread moral panic. Since then, a persistent security campaign has been underway, criminalising digital content and expression under Article 25 of Egypt's cybercrime law. According to EIPR, more than 151 individuals have been charged with violating Egyptian family values in at least 109 different cases, during the past five years. However, the true extent of this campaign is believed to be greater.[44]

Moreover, most recently, state authorities have aggressively intensified their crackdown on TikTok content creators, arresting dozens, predominantly women who had gained fame and income through their online content and seemed to share modest social background. They were charged with publishing content that violates "public morals" and "family values". According to a statement by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), this security campaign was preceded by a digital campaign calling for their arrest, sparked by allegations made by a TikTok user accusing other female TikTok content creators of operating an international organ trafficking ring.[45] Despite a lack of supporting evidence, these claims fueled moral panic and security concerns, setting the stage for subsequent arrests under moral related charges. Prior to these arrests, the

42. Bahgat, H. (2001, 23 July). Explaining Egypt's Targeting of Gays. *Middle East Report Online Issue, No. 314.* https://merip.org/2001/07/explaining-egypts-targeting-of-gays/
43. Abdel Hamid, D. (2017). *The Trap: Punishing Sexual Difference in Egypt.* Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. https://eipr.org/sites/default/files/reports/pdf/the_trap-en.pdf
44. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. (2025, 4 August). Crackdown on Content Creators: The mix of security repression, class discrimination, and "moral panic" is the real threat here. https://eipr.org/en/press/2025/08/crackdown-content-creators-mix-security-repression-class-discrimination-and-%E2%80%9Cmoral
45. Ibid.

Public Prosecution received several complaints from lawyers, including one signed by 32 lawyers against 10 content creators. **These practices reflect the state's growing hostility and censorship of the digital sphere and online expression, further consolidating its authoritarian social control**.

Activists, doxing and defamation

During the investigation, participants highlighted other manifestations of social manipulation and disinformation, such as harassment, stalking, doxing and defamation, perpetrated by state and non-state actors. For example, Amira, a human rights defender and journalist in her 30s, shared her experience with doxing. **Defined as a deliberate disclosure of someone's personal information online, doxing is often motivated by the intent to threaten, intimidate or undermine the person's credibility.**[46]

In Amira's experience, her personal information, including her phone number, was published without her consent. Although she could not identify the perpetrator or determine how her details were obtained, Amira attributed the attack to her work. Consequently, doxing her personal information escalated to mass gender trolling,[47] with Amira receiving numerous insulting and humiliating messages through her WhatsApp. She said:

> [The perpetrators] illegally and unlawfully obtained my phone number and sent me WhatsApp messages containing insults and abuse.

Similar to Amira's experience, Soha was subjected to doxing, with her information published as part of a smear campaign targeting her due to her work as a human rights defender. According to Soha, the campaign constituted a deliberate and sustained effort to damage her reputation by spreading false information and personal details including personal photos. The campaign persisted for several weeks, resulting in profound consequences that affected her professional, personal and public life. As Soha described:

> The screenshots had my personal details in them. The shared posts included incitement. On top of that, you see how many people like the posts and comments and share them.

Amal also endured relentless smear campaigns and harassment as an outspoken feminist activist and advocate for women's rights. She mentioned:

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46. Douglas, D. M. (2016). Doxing: A conceptual analysis. *Ethics and Information Technology, 18,* 199-210. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-016-9406-0
47. Gender trolling involves a concerted and coordinated effort to attack, humiliate and insult the targeted persons through mass commenting with dozens or hundreds of hateful messages and gender-based insults. Mantilla, K. (2013). Gendertrolling: Misogyny Adapts to New Media. *Feminist Studies, 39(2),* 563-570. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/fem.2013.0039

> I've faced a lot of backlash and cyberattacks online. There were instances where my photos were taken and shared online with offensive captions [and] insulting comments. [...] I receive threats in my inbox with [messages] like, "If I ever see you, watch out." There was one person who seemed to make it his mission to incite violence against me.

Amira, Soha and Amal are all advocates for women's rights and outspoken feminists, which has increased their risk of exposure to attacks such as doxing and smear campaigns aimed at intimidating and silencing them. These attacks are further exacerbated by the lack of effective content moderation policies on social media platforms, which often fail to respond swiftly to these forms of violence. Additionally, the data-harvesting business models of these platforms expose users' private information to exploitation and abuse, for example facilitating doxing.

For Farida, a queer activist, the risk for attacks is higher and harm is severe, given the legal landscape previously described. They said:

> It's not just that someone is threatening you, it's also about being constantly surveilled.

While Farida chose not to disclose the full details of their experience, they emphasised the profound consequences, including prosecution.

The experiences of Farida, Amal, Soha and Amira are far from isolated. They reflect a broader pattern in which feminists and queer activists, women's rights defenders, and journalists are persistently targeted by both state and non-state actors. This occurs in a context characterised by widespread online censorship and the criminalisation of political speech. Moreover, this targeting, especially by security forces, can escalate to prosecution and detention under inhumane conditions, including ill treatment and sexual violence. While none of the research participants themselves have experienced these escalations, human rights organisations have documented many of such cases.[48]

The impact of the violence and abuse illustrated in this section is not abstract, it is grave and multifaceted. Participants' testimonies discussed in the following section reveal how hate speech, harassment, defamation, extortion and (online) entrapment not only eroded their sense of safety but also severely impacted their physical and social security, as well as their well-being.

48. Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. (2024). *The Realities and Recourse for Women Journalists in and from North Africa.* https://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/TIMEP-Report-Jan2024-V4-1-1.pdf

2. CONSEQUENCES

It was a terrifying and traumatic experience. We had no choice but to leave the place we were staying in.

Fahd, participant

Mental health and sense of safety

Participants recounted how their experiences significantly impacted their mental health. Severe mental distress, fear and paranoia were common consequences. Amira, for example, described how doxing and trolling affected her. She said:

> The constant messaging was distressing, and I was feeling extremely unsafe. [...] If they were able to obtain my phone number, what other information could they be able to access? Could they find my location? This would have threatened my physical safety!

Yasmine, a women's rights defender and digital content creator, shared how perpetrators were able to reach her family. She faced numerous threats and sexual harassment due to her work. Yasmine recounted that one of the perpetrators managed to reach her family. Instead of receiving their support, there was backlash against her, blaming her for putting herself and everyone at risk. She mentioned:

> It completely broke me down. In the end, it took such a toll on my nervous system that I couldn't sleep at all, and to this day, I still have sleeping problems.

Similarly, Soha described the impact of a defamation campaign she endured, which not only affected her professionally, but also influenced her personal and social life.

> It was terrifying! I was so scared. It was a really tough experience. It felt like a total nightmare; I experienced every kind of panic attack you can imagine. [...] It took a huge emotional toll and caused many social and work losses.

Loss of trust, anger, isolation.

Participants highlighted more consequences, including feelings of loss of trust, anger and isolation, resulting from either experiencing violence themselves or witnessing persistent hatred and hostility both online and offline. Amr, a queer individual in his 20s and a digital content creator, recounted the impact of online

hate campaigns like Fetra on his life.

> Sometimes, after experiencing much of this hatred, I just don't want to meet anyone. I just want to be alone. [...] I don't see how we're hurting anyone to deserve that level of hatred and aggression. It leaves me feeling really disheartened by how extreme people's views are in this society.

Karam and Reda, two trans men students in their 20s, shared similar feelings of anger and pain resulting from the pervasive online transphobia they face. Karam shared:

> I feel very discouraged and angry [...] when I see platforms that try to spread offensive or hostile ideas against trans people, it's personal to me [...] I feel pain at every single comment, I feel the social hostility and I feel angry at the reality and the society I live in.

For Reda, the distress and anger escalated to triggering gender dysphoria.[49] He shared:

> Comments such as "We'll never accept you because people like you are sick," "Why don't you show us what you've got?" or even "What do you do when you go to the bathroom?" definitely made me feel dysphoric.

Physical and sexual health

In addition to the impact on the participants' mental health, Ayman illustrated how these consequences can lead to serious effects on physical and sexual health. Ayman, a clinician in his 30s, experienced entrapment that severely impacted his well-being.

> The impact was very strong. I kept questioning myself, wondering if I was the only one dealing with this. It affected me mentally. It also affected my appetite. I was like this for a long time. It even affected me sexually and I started facing issues like impotence.

Other participants described additional sexual and physical effects. Farida mentioned vaginismus,[50] while Fahd shared about chronic pain, especially after his experience with extortion followed by stalking and threats from perpetrators.

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49. Gender dysphoria is defined as distress due to a discrepancy between one's assigned gender and gender identity. "One example of a social stressor experienced by some transgender individuals is 'misgendering' or being treated as or labelled a different gender to their own gender identity. Frequency of experiences of being misgendered, as well as feelings of being stigmatized, have been found to be positively associated with psychological distress in the transgender population." Cooper, K., Russell, A., Mandy, W., & Butler, C. (2020). The phenomenology of gender dysphoria in adults: A systematic review and meta-synthesis. *Clinical Psychology Review, 80.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2020.101875
50. Vaginismus is involuntary tightening of vaginal muscles, resulting from a complex interplay of psychological, social and biological factors. McEvoy, M., McElvaney, R., & Glover, R. (2021). Understanding vaginismus: a biopsychosocial perspective. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 39*(3), 680–701. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2021.2007233

Fahd also described living in such a perpetual state of fear that he was eventually forced to leave his home:

> It was a terrifying and traumatic experience. We had no choice but to leave the place we were staying in.

Similarly, Farida recounted this ongoing fear and also had to leave her home, fearing for her safety. Additionally, the consequences of entrapment and extortion severely affected Hazem and Kamel, both emotionally and physically. Hazem shared:

> [T]here were scratches on my face and cuts and bruises on my head and body. I ended up with a permanent injury to my back. After all that, I made up my mind: I'll never install another app on my phone, never trust anyone like that again. I don't even want to imagine what could have happened if I hadn't escaped, whether I'd have ended up dead or worse, in jail.

As for Kamel, he mentioned:

> The worst part was the fear of a police case being filed. It would've destroyed my life. I spent days at home, shut off from the world. I couldn't stand to see anyone. I knew I had to find a way out. Life in Egypt had become unbearable. Everything was over, my sense of safety, even my presence on the app… If that officer had taken things further and made it official, my whole life would've been ruined.

While Kamel was "lucky" not to get detained, many others were not. Documented testimonies reveal that queer and trans people entrapped, arrested and detained by state authorities are often subjected to humiliation, physical assault and threats of sexual violence.[51] Detainees are often threatened with having their gender identity or sexual orientation disclosed to other prisoners, which can incite further abuse and violence. In addition to physical abuse, detainees, particularly gay and trans individuals, are often subjected to invasive anal and genital examinations by the Forensic Medicine Authority. These practices are degrading and inhuman, breaching international principles of medical ethics, which prohibit medical professionals from participating in acts of torture or degrading treatment.[52]

These experiences emphasise the grave repercussions of technology-facilitated violence, not only affecting the mental health of individuals, but also violating their bodily integrity through physical or sexual violence. **Additionally, the consequences of violence largely contributed to reshaping the participants'**

51. Human Rights Watch. (2023). *"All This Terror Because of a Photo": Digital Targeting and Its Offline Consequences for LGBT People in the Middle East and North Africa.* https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/02/21/all-terror-because-photo/digital-targeting-and-its-offline-consequences-lgbt
52. Human Rights Watch. (2016). *Dignity Debased: Forced Anal Examinations in Homosexuality Prosecutions.* https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/12/dignity-debased/forced-anal-examinations-homosexuality-prosecutions

digital and offline existence. While many responded by self-censoring, or exiting the digital sphere, others were driven to start initiatives or engage in community work to address (online) violence, as we discuss next.

3. RESPONSES

As violence becomes more widespread and pervasive, resistance also evolves and adapts.

Yasmine, participant

In this section, we illustrate the ways in which participants attempted to negotiate, contest or confront the violence they experienced. We first discuss how inadequate legislation, structural stigma and other factors influenced participants' response to violence. Then, we highlight the means of support participants sought, including from their community or relevant grassroots organisations, in addition to the personal protection safeguards they adopted, underscoring how effective these measures were.

Access to legal support

The Cybercrime Law serves as the legal framework intended to protect individuals from cyberattacks. While this law is often weaponised by authorities to criminalise expression and target content creators and others, as discussed earlier, survivors may invoke it to report perpetrators.

Legal support surfaced in discussions with participants, but only a few pursued it. Amira, for example, who experienced doxing, did seek it: "I filed a police report, but it was in vain." For Amal, legal redress did not seem worthwhile: "I didn't want to take legal action since it seemed like a long process."

During the discussion with Nesma, a lawyer and women's rights defender, she emphasised that **the Cybercrime Law and other legal measures intended to protect women are fundamentally inadequate. Not only can the law be weaponised against survivors themselves, but also the enforcement process is lengthy and discriminatory.** She explained:

> The judicial system is another form of violence against women. Just going through the legal process itself is a form of violence. It takes so much time, sometimes years, just to get a verdict. In the end, after all that time, the outcome is often something like "case dismissed", "defendant acquitted" or another decision that doesn't change anything.

In addition to the long and discriminatory process, there are cases where

authorities refuse to file a report because they do not take the incident seriously. During reporting, survivors may also face disrespect, including slut shaming.[53] **These systemic barriers, compounded by social stigma and culture of victim blaming, explain why many survivors may hesitate to seek legal help or refuse to engage in the justice process altogether.**

For queer individuals, the challenges are more complex, as legal support is not accessible. Even when they try, they may face arrest instead of protection. This was the case for Ramy who was entrapped and physically beaten. He considered filing a report:

> I wanted to file a report, but then my friend advised me not to as [the police] might end up filing a report against me.

This situation is not limited to Ramy. Several documented cases show that queer individuals exposed to online entrapment or extortion by non-state actors who attempted to file reports were instead arrested by the authorities for "promoting prostitution online".[54]

The challenges were even more nuanced for Seif, whose risks extended beyond his sexual identity to include his status as a Sudanese refugee, adding further vulnerability, given the context for migrants and refugees, discussed in the first section.

Access to healthcare support

We asked participants if they sought healthcare support to address the health implications of their experiences such as mental distress and physical or sexual health implications. Many highlighted their fear of stigmatisation and discrimination as a barrier. Ayman's response was illustrative:

> I didn't feel safe at all to seek support. I knew I might need help; I just couldn't bring myself to trust it. I was worried I'd be judged or it would aggravate things, or worse yet, I'd end up in conversion therapy.

Stigmatisation of LGBTQI+ people is deeply systemic and structural, embedded across healthcare, laws, policies, practices and societal beliefs that reinforce widespread discrimination.[55] **This systemic and structural stigma exacerbates**

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53. Ouf, I. (2023, March 15). ضحايا الابتزاز الإلكتروني في مصر… مراكز الشرطة إذ تتحوّل إلى محاكمات أخلاقية . Daraj. https://daraj.media/106737/; UN Women. (2021). *Violence against women in the online space: Insights from multi-country research in the Arab States.* https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/11/violence-against-women-in-the-online-space#view
54. Human Rights Watch. (2020). *Egypt: Security Forces Abuse, Torture LGBT People.* https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/01/egypt-security-forces-abuse-torture-lgbt-people; Human Rights Watch. (2023, 21 February). Middle East, North Africa: Digital Targeting of LGBT People. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/21/middle-east-north-africa-digital-targeting-lgbt-people

consequences of online violence by obstructing access to essential support services, be it legal assistance or healthcare to address health implications. On a broader scale it reinforces oppressive and discriminatory systems such as homophobia, which in turn perpetuate cascading cycles of harm and abuse, both online and offline.

Strategic visibility, digital archiving and community support

Given the hurdles that prevent or hinder access to justice or well-being, **community and grassroots support plays a pivotal role in responding to violence and meaningfully assisting survivors.** In discussions with participants, they highlighted these communal support systems alongside their strategies not only to reduce their risk of exposure to online violence at the individual level, but also to confront, expose and challenge it more broadly.

Strategic visibility and confrontation, which involve knowing how and when to engage or respond to public attacks, were tactics shared by some participants, particularly activists. Amal, for example described how instead of seeking legal support, she confronts her attackers. She noted that to do this safely, she needed to learn certain tools and build social capital and community support to back her up. She shared:

> In the beginning, I was not known, I didn't have any tools to respond with. If I'd faced the same kind of attacks then, I probably would've just faded away, like so many others do. But as I found a way to stand my ground, now, when I'm targeted, I counterattack.

Engaging or responding to public attacks strategically is essential, as Yasmine emphasised, given that confrontation can sometimes provoke backlash and cause greater harm, as seen in her experience discussed in the implications section. She also described more tools and tactics beyond direct public engagement:

> As violence becomes more widespread and pervasive, resistance also evolves and adapts. Through podcasts, blogging, feminist hashtags and memes, women are finding new ways to fight back.

For Yasmine, these digital tools are essential not only to respond to violence but also to expose harm and challenge the systems that enable it.
This tactic of confrontation aligns with Amr's approach, who proactively reached

55. Abboud, S., et al. (2022). Sexual and gender minority health in the Middle East and North Africa Region: A scoping review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies Advances, 4.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnsa.2022.100085

out to participate in the research, saying, “The only way we can hold them accountable is by responding.” **In addition to exposing harm, Amr launched a digital archive project documenting the long history of queer people in the Arab world, including Egypt, to counter disinformation and challenge homophobic narratives.**

Community support was also highlighted by other participants as a vital source of strength. This was echoed in Seif’s words. He shared:

> We survive by company. I have my big circle and my friends those who I would honestly call my therapy; they help me through, and we support each other.

Grassroots and community networks play a critical role in addressing online violence and providing support. They offer resources such as raising awareness on personal digital safety and security, providing legal or technical assistance and advice through so-called digital clinics, and facilitating access to free psychological support. However, a challenge reported by some participants, particularly those from Upper Egypt and the Delta region, is that these support services are often concentrated in major urban centres, making access challenging for those living in remote areas.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this research, we engaged with diverse groups to have a nuanced understanding of technology-facilitated violence in Egypt and its profound consequences on individuals' lives. We spoke virtually with women and queer individuals who were migrants, digital content creators, feminist activists and human rights defenders, among others. Participants were either based in Egypt or had left the country during the past year.

Their experiences showed that state and non-state technology-facilitated violence is neither random nor isolated. Rather, it constitutes a deliberate tactic employed persistently to monitor, intimidate and silence expression and dissent. Participants' accounts clearly depicted how entrenched racism, patriarchy and classism, intertwined with the current political climate and economic hardship, shape the realities of TFV. Their overlapping identities further influenced the frequency and severity of the violence endured, reshaping participants' online and offline existences.

Participants also described how authorities weaponise legislation, particularly the Cybercrime Law, to legitimise violence against a wide range of groups. These experiences are not exhaustive, as the law is also deployed against groups we were unable to reach, such as sex workers, or others who did not meet the selection criteria.

In addition to the legal domain, participants' testimonies showed how the state strategically employs social manipulation and disinformation to construct moral and security panics. Through narratives that vilify and criminalise groups, such as migrants, LGBTQI+ people and women digital content creators, framing them as "threats" to the "nation" or the "family", the state deliberately incites hatred, fuels public's hostility and legitimises violence. Such tactics serve to divert the public attention away from underlying political and economic failures that severely undermine the socioeconomic rights of the people and to evade accountability. Through these repressive mechanisms and others, the state systematically curtails fundamental human rights as a principle of its governance to maintain social control and consolidate authoritarian power.

The repercussions of such violence are not abstract; they are grave and multifaceted. As described through the participants' testimonies, TFV severely impacts their safety, security and well-being. Additionally, consequences intensify and become multilayered at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities, compounded by systemic discrimination that obstructs access to essential legal and healthcare support. Despite these challenges, survivors actively resist through strategies such as strategic visibility, confrontation, documentation and digital archiving and community support networks. Many of these efforts would greatly benefit from increased support and decentralisation, enabling expanded access to networks and reach more communities.

Addressing technology-facilitated violence requires political will and structural reforms. State laws and policies should be enforced to provide fair legal protection for survivors, irrespective of their gender, sexual orientation, race or class. The state must cease weaponising legislation like the Cybercrime Law and related provisions as tools to target and detain online users. Additionally, inhumane practices that violate bodily integrity, such as forced anal or vaginal examinations of LGBTQI+ individuals, must be prevented. Non-state actors, such as technology companies, should adopt human rights-centred content moderation policies to effectively respond to online violence, including hate speech and defamation.

Finally, increased funding and support for grassroots and community building are essential. Funding organisations should prioritise long-term funding and support for groups working on digital security, legal aid and psychosocial support for marginalised communities, especially beyond urban areas. Importantly, funding should also support prevention measures and initiatives such as knowledge production and educational programmes that deepen understanding of the roles of different key actors, including technology companies. This includes examining how violence is embedded in the design and processes of technologies, and what strategies and tools can be developed to shift power dynamics in the creation and use of digital tools to better prevent technology-facilitated violence.

PROPAGANDA, HOSTILITY AND RESISTANCE:
REALITIES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE IN EGYPT