



The
Freedom
Initiative

In the Shadows of Authoritarianism

2023

Egyptian and Saudi Transnational Repression in the U.S.



Report

Transnational repression:

When governments attempt to curtail rights and freedoms across borders.

Table of Contents:

• Executive Summary -----	6
• Chapter 1: Introduction -----	12
• Chapter 2: Methodology and Review of Literature -----	14
• Chapter 3: Saudi Transnational Repression -----	18
• Chapter 4: Egyptian Transnational Repression -----	31
• Chapter 5: Policy and Response to Transnational Repression ---	40
• Chapter 6: Findings and Recommendations -----	47
• Abbreviations and Acronyms -----	52
• Endnotes -----	53

Foreword

Foreign state actors increasingly target, intimidate and assault people across borders, including in the United States. Yet, time and again, successive administrations have sacrificed our most cherished standards — liberty, equality, freedom of expression and association — to political convenience. Time and again, promises to protect Americans at home and combat authoritarianism overseas have gone unkept, as interests have overshadowed principles.

In 2008, President George W. Bush touted his refusal to meet Raul Castro of Cuba, calling him a brutal dictator and a “tyrant.” Bush recognized that meeting with Castro would lend him “the credibility of the Office of the President.” But only a month earlier, Bush reveled in his visit to Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud’s extravagant ranch on the heels of Parade Magazine listing King Abdullah as one of the world’s worst dictators.

During his candidacy for president in 2019, Joe Biden campaigned on a commitment to treating Saudi Arabia as a “pariah” state after the brutal murder of Virginia resident Jamal Khashoggi; he similarly promised “no more blank checks” for Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi over his targeting of Americans like the Freedom Initiative’s founder Mohamed Soltan. But when oil prices started to skyrocket, Biden famously flew to Jeddah, where he fist bumped Khashoggi’s killer, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), and discussed “advanc[ing] the U.S.-Egypt relationship” with el-Sisi.

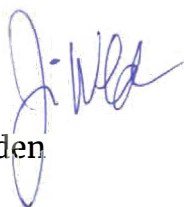
The chilling stories in the pages of the Freedom Initiative’s report, *In the Shadows of Authoritarianism*, demonstrate with clarity that transnational repression is on the rise, signaling that today, U.S. equivocation on rights is a palpable threat to our own citizens, corporations and national interest. As the report shows, this special brand of repression has become more frequent and more flagrant in recent years, including by so-called U.S. allies, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Although the Khashoggi murder may seem particularly anomalous, the trendline suggests that acts like it may become commonplace if cross-border human rights crimes remain unchecked.

Weakness in the face of evil begets more evil.

The horrors suffered at the hands of persecutors in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other countries require determined and innovative action. We can no longer rely solely on foreign policy in the fight against rampant state-sponsored repression.

It is time to enact new and robust criminal sanctions and civil remedies, legislating reasonable exceptions to the perennial dictators' loophole of foreign sovereign immunity. We must better define mechanisms for courts to exercise jurisdiction over foreign heads of state, such as MBS, where they use their roles as sovereigns in furtherance of crimes and repression in the private sphere, including against U.S. persons and corporations. The Department of Justice and U.S. law enforcement must commence a new era of enforcing human rights laws against our allies as well as our enemies. The arrest and conviction of Saudi spy Ahmad Abouammo — for disclosing confidential user information from Twitter which the Saudi regime used to target, arrest, torture and imprison dissidents — is a good start.

I am heartened to see that the Freedom Initiative's report advances the dialogue around solutions to the new threats we face as a global community, and I urge defenders of human rights to take note of this new thinking.



Jim Walden

Walden, Macht & Haran, LLP



Executive Summary

Transnational repression (TNR) represents a growing threat to U.S. national security and human rights norms. American policymakers are increasingly recognizing this threat, both in foreign and domestic policy positions. Yet, TNR is most often portrayed as a feature of America's enemies, even as authoritarian allies of the United States have become increasingly emboldened in their efforts to curtail rights and freedoms abroad. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) created a website dedicated to TNR which features 14 press releases: three dedicated to Iran, 10 to China, and one with an international focus.¹ As this report illustrates, TNR is not exclusively perpetrated by enemy states. Indeed, allied authoritarian nations routinely flout American laws and sovereignty by targeting dissidents and others on U.S. soil.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia are two of the most prominent allies carrying out acts of TNR. Both countries enjoy strategic partnerships with the U.S. and benefit from political support, arms transfers and an annual \$1.3 billion security assistance package in the case of Egypt. But both countries are also among the world's worst human rights abusers, and their security agencies have increasingly employed the same repressive tactics used to silence dissent at home to curtail rights and freedoms abroad.

This report examines transnational repression — the phenomenon in which a foreign state attempts to curtail rights and freedoms beyond its own borders — perpetrated by Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the U.S. Building on survey data from 72 individuals with personal or professional ties to Egypt or Saudi Arabia, we examine cases of TNR, document the impact on victims and communities and assess policy response.

Saudi Arabia's Transnational Repression in the U.S.

- **Wrongful detention:** Saudi Arabia is currently holding one U.S. citizen in detention without just cause: an elderly man whose name is withheld to protect his privacy. At least seven U.S. citizens and one legal permanent resident (LPR) remain in the country and are subject to unlawful travel bans. One American — Mohammed Salem — was detained in November 2022 and allowed to return home to the U.S. after his release.
- **Physical surveillance:** Four respondents reported being physically surveilled in the U.S., including at private meetings and at public events. Students were subject to surveillance through the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, and activists, rights workers, and family members of detainees faced surveillance as well.

- **Digital surveillance:** While digital surveillance is difficult to detect, respondents described changing their behavior over overwhelming concerns that they could be targeted with spyware. Other digital surveillance takes place on public internet forums, and in the case of activist and blogger Danah Almayouf, this digital surveillance escalated into an attempt to orchestrate a meeting in person; the individual who proposed the meeting pled guilty to lying to authorities investigating the incident.



- **Threats and harassment:** Threats and harassment from Saudi authorities or those who appear to be working on their behalf are commonplace. Abdullah Alaoudh, the Freedom Initiative’s Saudi Director² and son of detained Saudi preacher Salman al-Odah, reported that he receives “daily” threats online, including those which threaten death or physical harm. Other threats are conducted via anonymous phone calls.

- **Denial of documents:** Four respondents reported that Saudi officials withheld or delayed issuing passports or other government documents, and some were told that they would have to return to Saudi Arabia in order to process them. None felt safe to do so.

- **Prosecutions in Saudi courts:** One individual, Wajeeh Lion, explained that he faced the death penalty because of his sexual orientation. Saudi law also allows for prosecutions over speech or acts related to the country, even when they take place abroad; at least one individual we interviewed faced prosecution in the Kingdom over comments she had made to the media while in the U.S. years earlier.



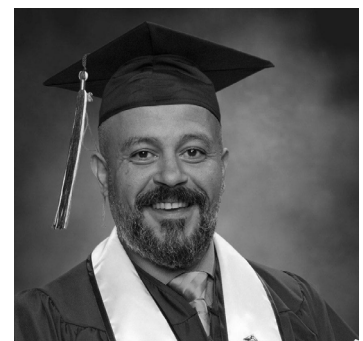
Wajeeh Lion

- **Defamation and media threats:** Saudi state-aligned media regularly targets U.S. citizens, American NGOs and U.S.-based media workers, describing them as “spies” or “fugitives” and, in one case, asserting that the Saudi government was monitoring their whereabouts.
- **Pursuits in U.S. courts:** Several high-profile lawsuits have been filed by Saudi-related companies or individuals against U.S.-based dissidents, activists and others. This litigation has drained defendants of financial resources and facilitated access to sensitive information during discovery. Due to attorney-client protections, little is known about the extent to which the Saudi government may be funding these suits.
- **State hostage-taking:** Eight survey respondents reported that Saudi Arabia had detained or disappeared their family members as a method of punishing them for dissent or coercing them into silence.
- **Chilling effect:** Even those who do not experience TNR directly change their behavior for fear they could fall victim to it. Most respondents adjusted their work or studies for fear of TNR, and nearly half were fearful to use their own name in public engagements.

- **Economic cost:** Respondents reported loss of income, abandonment of assets in Saudi Arabia and costs associated with legal fees and therapy. Three respondents estimated that TNR had cost them over \$1 million.
- **Psychosocial impact:** Twenty respondents were separated from a family member who remained in Saudi Arabia. Nearly all all respondents reported feeling isolated due to their experiences with or fear of TNR, and nearly half reported recurring nightmares and difficulty imagining a long life in which they would achieve their goals.

Egypt's Transnational Repression in the U.S.

- **Wrongful detention:** Egypt continues to hold two U.S. legal permanent residents (Hossam Khalaf and Salah Soltan) whose detention has been declared arbitrary by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. At least two U.S. citizens remain banned from exiting the country; their names are withheld to protect their privacy.
- **Physical surveillance:** Physical surveillance takes place at a variety of public events (speaking engagements, demonstrations and vigils), in addition to targeting individuals engaging in private conversations or social outings.
- **Threats and harassment:** As with Saudi Arabia's acts of TNR, Egyptian authorities and their agents threaten and harass dissidents, human rights defenders and family members of detainees, using both private phone or text message as well as public forums like social media platforms.
- **Denial of documents:** Egyptian embassy and consular officers may hold documents for extended periods of time or outright refuse to grant passport renewals, leaving respondents in a state of vulnerability.
- **Prosecutions in Egyptian courts:** The consistent prosecution of human rights defenders, political activists and dissidents that began in Egypt in 2013 has not spared individuals in the U.S.; citizens and asylum seekers alike have been added to open cases or tried and sentenced in absentia.
- **Abuse of international intelligence sharing:** U.S.-Egyptian citizen Sherif Osman was detained in the United Arab Emirates on November 8, 2022, at which time he was informed that the Egyptian authorities had sought his arrest through an INTERPOL notice. He later learned that his arrest was based on a warrant from the Arab Interior Ministers Council, a regional law enforcement body.
- **Defamation and media threats:** Egyptian media is tightly controlled by the state, and news anchors frequently address American civil society and rights activists. Civil society organizations (including the Freedom Initiative) and their staff have been deemed terrorists on news programs.



Sherif Osman

- **State hostage-taking:** Five respondents reported family members being detained in Egypt as a reprisal for their criticisms of the government or their human rights work, though we assume the number is far larger. For example, five of the cousins of Mohamed Soltan, the founder of the Freedom Initiative, were detained in 2021 due to Soltan’s human rights advocacy, and his father continues to be subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment behind bars.
- **Seizure of assets:** Egypt uses both legal and extralegal measures to freeze or seize assets of those living in the U.S., including the abuse of the country’s “terrorism entities list,” which stipulates asset seizure as a punishment.
- **Chilling effect:** Over half of survey respondents said that they had changed their work or study plans for fear of repercussions on their family or interlocutors, or because they may not be able to return to Egypt.
- **Economic cost:** Five respondents reported losses of over \$100,000 due to TNR, and 75% of respondents reported some economic loss due to associated costs.
- **Psychosocial impact:** Nearly three out of five respondents reported symptoms concomitant with PTSD, citing negative impacts on their interpersonal relationships.

Currently, transnational repression is
not defined as a crime in U.S. law.

U.S. Policy and Response to Transnational Repression

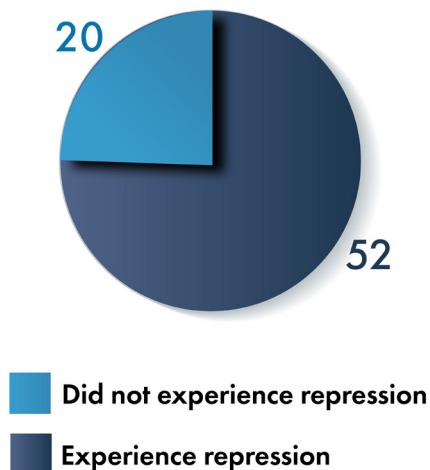
- **Codification and criminalization:** Currently, transnational repression is not defined as a crime in U.S. law. Several legislative efforts are underway to codify TNR as a crime, including the Transnational Repression Policy Act (S.831), which was introduced in March 2023.
- **Improving FARA:** Currently, lawyers are exempt from disclosing when their services are contracted by a foreign government. In 2021, the Department of Justice sought public comment on this exception to the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), but it has yet to amend it.
- **Accountability efforts:** Several accountability mechanisms exist and could potentially be utilized to target perpetrators of TNR. These include sanctions mechanisms and the application of criminal charges where TNR involves a violation of U.S. law.

- **Law enforcement:** In 2022, the FBI created a transnational repression “fusion center” to coordinate agency efforts and engage in inter-agency communication on TNR. Still, many local law enforcement departments have not been oriented to the threat of TNR and remain ill-equipped to address it.
- **Foreign policy:** Despite the continued perpetration of acts of TNR and a rupture in U.S.-Saudi relations after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, bilateral relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia have steadily improved in the past two years.

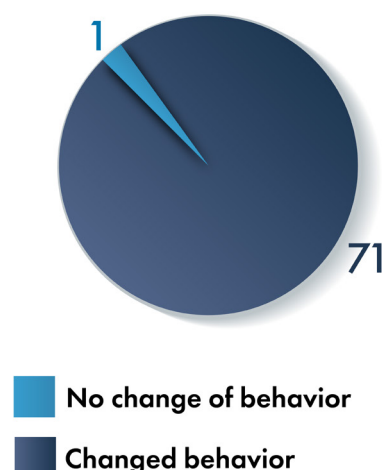
Findings

- **Transnational repression is an explicit product of authoritarianism:** The acts of TNR that Egypt and Saudi Arabia have perpetrated are part and parcel of their authoritarian governance. Victims of TNR know to take threats seriously because they have seen these governments arrest, torture and kill with impunity.
- **Egypt and Saudi Arabia have become more innovative and emboldened in TNR:** As U.S. and international policymakers become savvier about acts of TNR, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have adapted accordingly, finding novel tactics to undertake TNR (like Saudi Arabia’s use of civil litigation to target dissidents).
- **There is no “typical” TNR victim:** Our research identified targets that ranged in profession and political activity from political and human rights activists to individuals with no public profile but who may have access to policymakers and interest in critiquing governments.
- **TNR is affecting individuals and communities across the U.S.:** Among the 72 respondents from across the United States who reported personal or professional ties to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, fewer than one-third reported that they had never been subjected to repression in the U.S., and only one reported that repression had no impact on their behavior.

Experiences in the U.S.



Affected by TNR in the U.S.



- **Closer bilateral relations did not deter acts of transnational repression:** Throughout the last three administrations, both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been carrying out TNR, and violations continue, despite the U.S. administration's close ties with Egypt and Saudi.
- **Victims' lack of trust in the U.S. government creates obstacles to addressing TNR:** Due in part to negative experiences with law enforcement and other authorities in the aftermath of 9/11, victims may be more reticent to report acts of TNR.

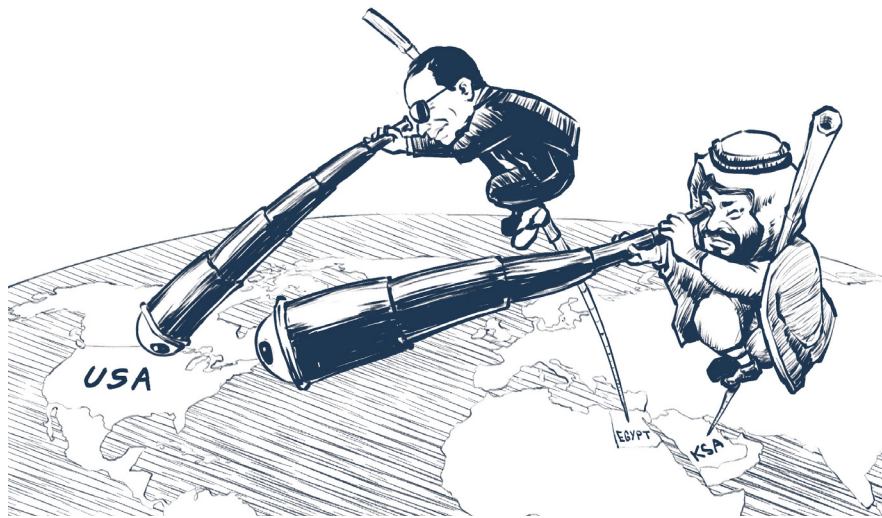
Recommendations

- **Congress should pass legislation that defines transnational repression,** outlines criminal penalties and provides additional appropriations for enforcement.
- **Congress should appropriate funds to improve coordination** on TNR within the U.S. government.
- **Congress should expand existing legislation on wrongful detention of Americans** to make resources available for U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents whose family members are detained in acts of state hostage-taking.
- **Congress should take reports of TNR seriously** from constituents and use public platforms to call out these abuses.
- **The Biden Administration should arrange regular coordinating meetings** with relevant agencies and ensure that sufficient consideration is given to TNR perpetrated by allied states.
- **The State Department should meet with civil society and victims of TNR** to stay informed of changes to patterns and tactics.
- **The State Department and Department of Justice should use sanctions to target individuals** implicated in TNR violations.
- **The Department of Justice should seek maximum sentences** for perpetrators of crimes that involve TNR as a deterrent.
- **The FBI should expand on existing training and awareness programs** with local bureaus, local law enforcement and other government agencies.
- **The FBI and local law enforcement should work with trusted interlocutors** to rebuild trust with communities vulnerable to TNR.
- **Civil society organizations should provide trainings** for local communities, diaspora groups and supporters to demystify the concept of TNR and improve reporting to U.S. law enforcement.
- **Human rights organizations should develop materials** to make potential victims of TNR aware of their rights.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Modern-day systems of authoritarian governance rely on transnational repression to project and maintain power. State-society relations in authoritarian contexts, like those of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, are based not on a social contract, but on control and coercion through violence, incarceration and threat; just as acts of war and conflict flaunt state sovereignty, so too do these acts of personal or collective aggression. While the murder of Jamal Khashoggi is often cited as a prime example of this form of repression, it is unfortunately a familiar occurrence that has rendered the world increasingly hostile for those with personal or professional ties to (for the most part) authoritarian countries — even if they reside within the borders of seemingly “safe,” democratic states.

Ironically, the countries that perpetuate transnational repression are not always viewed as hostile actors. In this report, we examine two case studies: Egypt and Saudi Arabia. While these are described as “strategic” allies of the United States, we demonstrate clear evidence that their patterns of incarceration and rights abuses threaten human security and democratic norms on U.S. soil.



This report on Egypt and Saudi Arabia highlights the scope of “transnational repression” — the phenomenon of curtailing rights and freedoms across state borders, which may take the form of direct or indirect targeting — and how transnational repression affects those who experience it and the communities in which they are situated. We present analysis of surveys completed by 72 individuals with an elevated risk of exposure to TNR, drawing also on in-depth interviews with victims. In this way, we aim to expand existing definitions of transnational repression to better encompass the lived reality of those who experience it.

We believe that this research is a critical starting point to help guide policies that adequately identify the threat of transnational repression, protect its victims and mitigate this evolving phenomenon. While our research, findings and recommendations are primarily oriented to those in the U.S., we recognize that transnational repression is experienced worldwide, and thus believe our work has implications for how global actors should understand and address it.

Transnational repression has rendered
the world increasingly hostile for many.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Review of Literature

2.1 Defining Transnational Repression

Transnational repression is not the mere exacting of violence beyond national borders, but a mode of governance: To the modern authoritarian state, borders extend to the body of the furthest subject they can reach, or presenting even more complex challenges, to the behaviors, speech or criticisms that may form outside of their own sovereign control. Transnational repression is currently not uniformly defined or criminalized under U.S. law, though it is recognized as a problem in the United States. Title 22 of the United States Code Section 263b, which came into effect in December 2021, is one of the only statutes in U.S. law to address transnational repression. The law seeks to prevent transnational repression specifically in INTERPOL notices, defined as actions to “harass or persecute political opponents, human rights defenders or journalists.” Other government agencies have started to take greater action to address transnational repression; in 2022, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) formed a transnational repression cell dedicated to working specifically on such violations, and similar attention is being paid to transnational repression within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), State Department and Department of Justice (DOJ) (see Chapter 5).

In the pioneering work *Arab Spring from Abroad*, Dana Moss defines transnational repression as “attempts by regimes to punish, deter, undermine, and silence activism in the diaspora.³ Moss’s work speaks to diasporas’ responses to the Arab Spring and the successes and failures of their consequent mobilizations. This is particularly concerning as upticks in transnational repression have also been associated with increased securitization of diasporas.⁴ In its seminal reports on transnational repression, Freedom House lists Egypt as the third largest abuser after China and Iran.⁵ Finally, researcher Mohamed Mandour studies Egyptian organizing and activism in exile, as well as the state’s response in his robust analysis for the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy.⁶ Their research all takes a similar approach in its focus on exiles and diasporas (rightfully including activists and the apolitical alike) and succeeds in identifying perpetrators and underscoring the threat that TNR poses to democracy.

We seek to build on this research by incorporating incidents documented by news outlets and human rights organizations that demonstrate a wider scope of violations than those previously studied. Forms of TNR range from refusing to grant identification documents, threats of physical harm, surveilling activists and communities, hacking into phones of dissidents, arrests of family members, defamation, and attempts at expatriation via INTERPOL or allied countries.

These abuses are not mere assaults on a few select dissidents, but orientations towards entire communities. This is evident in arrests of Egyptian informants and spies who targeted diasporas in Germany and the United States.⁷

It is also evident in the caustic tirades of state-aligned media that portray global civil society as a “fifth column” and defame American or other foreign NGOs as “terrorists.” Taking dissidents’ family members hostage through detention and/or application of criminal charges has grown increasingly common as well.⁸

Our research posits that focusing on diasporas alone does not speak to the actual breadth of transnational repression in practice. We therefore look at instances of transnational repression as those in which foreign governments attempt to punish, deter, undermine and silence individuals across state borders. This allows us to look at non-nationals or those outside of the diaspora as also affected by the rise of transnational repression, filling a gap in the current literature on transnational repression that suggests that the rise of this phenomenon is an extension of increased migrations from authoritarian regimes.⁹

We identify transnational repression against diaspora groups, as well as a variety of other targets.

In this sense, we explore transnational repression not only as a set of “acts,” but as a phenomenon encompassing both acts of repression (whether by the targeting of individuals or groups, or targeting by proxy), as well as the impact of these acts (the creation of a “chilling effect” or the downstream effects of lost knowledge production, stunted democratic and economic development, erosion of norms and security, etc.) This broadening of the definition allows us to better understand the true scope and potential harm of transnational repression by investigating the experiences not only of those who already identify as victims of TNR, but also of those who are exposed to these states by virtue of their personal and professional ties (i.e., their transnationalism or membership in a diaspora community), and who may not be aware of or may be desensitized to the threat.

2.2 Background and Historical Context

The instrumentalization of transnational repression is consistent with the changing regional politics in the Middle East and North Africa. The crackdown against political opposition since 2011 has led to migrations, a more vocal diaspora and loud critique from human rights defenders, all of which regimes view as inherently threatening to their singular control of power and narrative production. The intermittent failure of some of the security apparatuses during the Arab Spring and subsequent rise of transnational repression can be seen as a form of authoritarian upgrading to silence and control these voices outside.¹⁰ This upgrade has emerged not only as characteristic of certain authoritarian states in the MENA, but of authoritarian states as a whole. For example, that Egypt and Saudi Arabia both amended their terrorism laws in the aftermath of the Arab Spring speaks to a larger trend of authoritarian learning amongst these states.¹¹ These practices are consistent with those carried out — to far greater international outcry — by the Chinese, Russian and Iranian governments, a trend Diamond, Plattner and Walker refer to as “authoritarianism going global.”¹²

Looking specifically at the Egyptian case, it is important to note how the state's relationship with the diaspora changed in the aftermath of the 2013 coup. In 2015, President Adly Mansour created the Ministry of Expatriates' Affairs. In the years that followed, Expatriates' Affairs Minister Nabila Makram has worked to build ties with certain diaspora groups, especially in North America. This diaspora engagement has been received positively by those who express support for the Egyptian regime but takes on a more sinister meaning for those who do not. While speaking to a crowd of Egyptians in Canada in July 2021, Makram threatened that anyone from the diaspora who speaks ill of Egypt would have their heads severed.¹³ The embassy and ministry have also worked to develop databases of Egyptians in the U.S., reportedly as part of efforts to "improve" the services they offer, in addition to reaching out to Egyptian graduate students in the U.S. and other western countries to request that they report their university research projects to the embassy, both of which have raised concerns about surveillance.

We therefore understand the phenomenon of TNR studied in this report as both a product of "authoritarianism going global" as well as a specific manifestation of Egyptian and Saudi government efforts to rein in the growing global spotlight on their abuse of human rights.

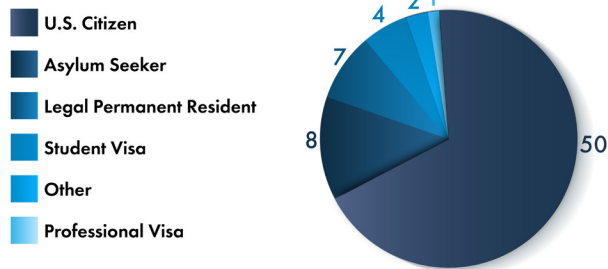
2.3 Research Methods

Through this report, we aim to inform the conversations and policy debates around transnational repression. We acknowledge, however, that little data or documentation exists on incidents of TNR. Most of the research and reporting on transnational repression is qualitative; quantitative work produces varied findings and is not sufficiently expansive.¹⁴ Although a lack of available data is expected for a study that is still in its infancy, insufficient quantitative data may also be a feature of studying or identifying acts of transnational repression. This is due to a kind of self-imposed selection bias, with only the more egregious violations against the more visible victims being reported. By expanding the pool of survey respondents to those deemed at higher risk of TNR, whether or not they reported having experienced it, this research aims to broaden the scope to assess a range of violations and their effect.

Our research relied primarily on an original survey and in-depth interviews with those who have personal or professional ties to Egypt or Saudi Arabia. The survey and requests for interviews were distributed between July and December 2022 through personal invitation to those in the diaspora, civil society space, media and academia. We encouraged anyone who had personal and/or professional ties to the country in question to respond to the survey through a secure online link. We refrained from disseminating the survey publicly; while we recognize that this may have vastly expanded our sample size, we prioritized the quality of data over the quantity, as a smaller pool of respondents allowed us to match each respondent with their responses and ensure no duplication or false submissions. Finally, we make no suggestion that the pool of respondents is in any way reflective of a broader Egyptian or Saudi society.

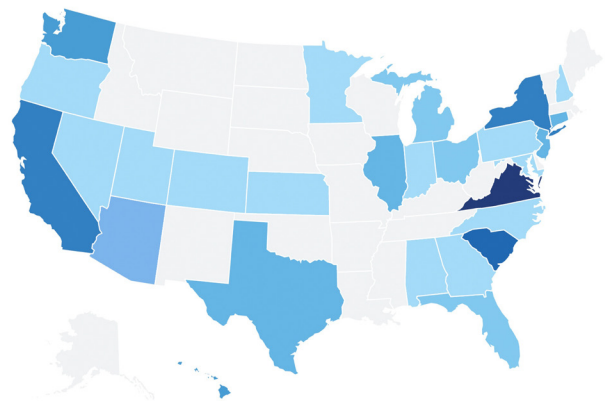
We received survey responses from 72 individuals, 23 of whom reported professional and/or personal ties to Saudi Arabia and 49 of whom reported professional and/or personal ties to Egypt. The majority of survey respondents were U.S. citizens. Thirty-two of the Egypt respondents held Egyptian citizenship, while 13 of the Saudi respondents held Saudi citizenship. Twenty-one Egypt respondents identified as women and 28 as men. Fourteen of the Saudi respondents identified as women, eight as men and one as non-binary. Respondents lived in 24 U.S. states and the District of Columbia and worked in the private and public sectors, media, human rights space, higher education/academia, or were unemployed.

Respondents' Citizenship Status

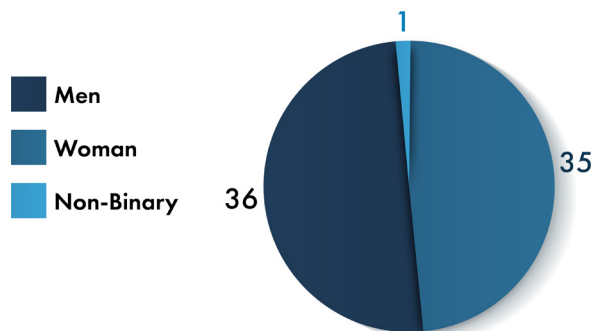


Respondents' Location in the U.S.

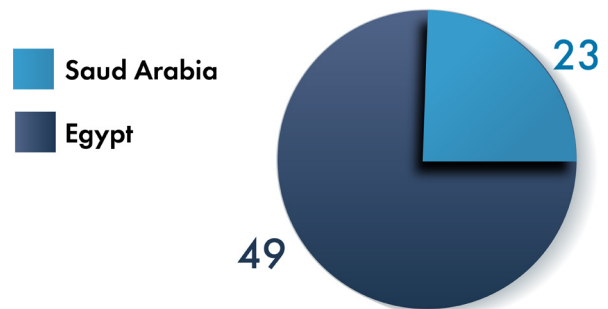
1 2 3 4 5 10 16



Respondents by Gender



Response by Country

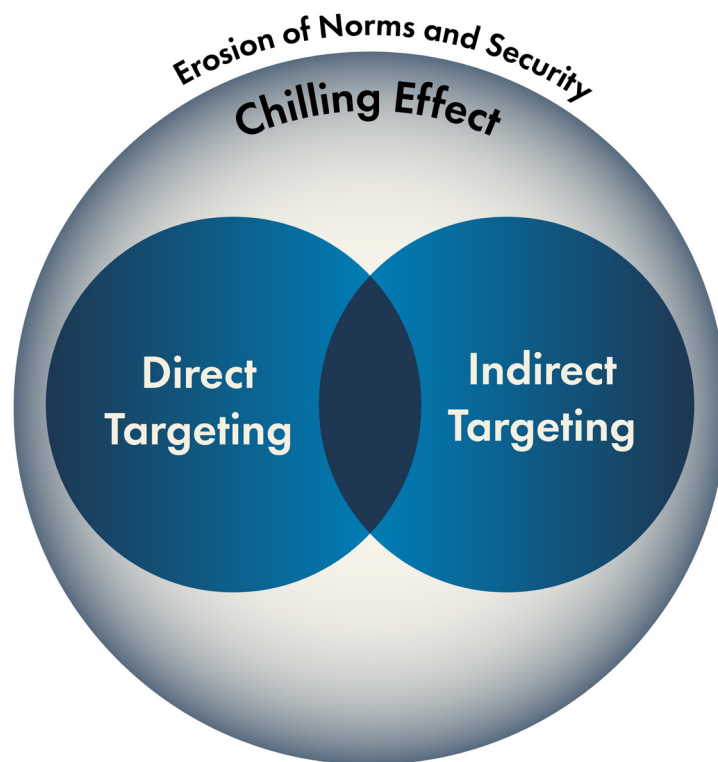


Semi-structured interviews were mostly based on the survey responses and were all conducted virtually. These included seven interviews for Saudi Arabia and eight for Egypt. In several cases, individuals shared security concerns around responding in writing to an online survey, and in these cases individuals were interviewed verbally. We adopted a trauma-centered approach during the interviews, meaning that interviewees' safety and well-being was our primary concern, as opposed to the collection of data. We paid special attention to stressors, offered to end interviews early or resume them later, and connected interviewees with mental health resources if needed. When requested, respondents' names and some identifying information were altered to protect confidentiality. Still, throughout the course of our research, we communicated with certain individuals who, despite the precautions taken, declined to speak or have their case included in the report for fear of being identified and targeted by the Saudi or Egyptian government.

We also draw upon legal documentation for eight additional cases, including official court documents made available by individuals or their lawyers and background or informal interviews with individuals or their family members, as well as secondary reports and sources and analysis of submissions to the United Nations and U.S. government documenting human rights violations or requesting the imposition of sanctions, respectively. The report also draws from official statements, social media and news media, and consultations with civil society organizations and experts working on human rights issues in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Chapter 3: Saudi Transnational Repression

We observed that Saudi Arabia engaged in both direct and indirect transnational repression, targeting individuals in the U.S. as well as carrying out acts inside Saudi Arabia with demonstrated intent of repressing speech and acts outside. Acts of TNR carried out by Saudi Arabia included physical harm, surveillance or threats against individuals in the United States; digital surveillance and harassment of individuals in the U.S.; and the pursuit of state-supported litigation in U.S. jurisdictions. Indirect acts included the detention of family members or loved ones as proxies, also known as “state hostage-taking”; prosecution of U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents or individuals in the U.S.; and unlawful travel bans that prevent the reunification of families. These direct and indirect acts are not mutually exclusive, and respondents may face both types of TNR.



3.1 Saudi Acts of Transnational Repression

Wrongful detention as transnational repression

The Saudi government’s acts of transnational repression are reflected in its wrongful detention of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents and application of unlawful exit bans against them. Such acts have not traditionally been understood as transnational repression since they occur within the perpetrating government’s respective borders. Yet, unlawful detention and imposition of travel bans against U.S. persons inside Saudi Arabia are most often carried out with the aim of curtailing rights and freedoms across borders (even if they have domestic repression purposes as well), and should thus be understood as tactics of transnational repression.

The detention of Americans or those with ties to the U.S. has increased in Saudi Arabia in recent years. In a previous report covering the period from January 2020 to September 2021, the Freedom Initiative identified five U.S. citizens who were detained in Saudi Arabia. In the time period covering September 2021 to December 2022, the Freedom Initiative identified at least six U.S. citizens who were detained:

- An elderly U.S. citizen, cited in our previous report, remains in detention and was fined and sentenced to prison time, along with his Saudi spouse who was not initially party to his court case.
- Saudi-American citizen Saad Almadi, who was not referenced in the previous report, was released from detention on March 20 after having spent 485 days in prison. Almadi was cleared of all charges after having been sentenced to 19 years in prison for social media posts he made while living in the U.S.
- U.S. citizen Carly Morris was briefly detained and now faces an unlawful 10-year travel ban. Morris has been trapped in Saudi Arabia with her young daughter since 2019 under the male guardianship system and was targeted after speaking publicly about her and her daughter's plight. We are aware of at least two other similar cases in which U.S. citizen mothers have faced travel bans or arrest warrants to prevent them from raising grievances about the male guardianship system.
- U.S. citizen Mohammed Salem was detained while performing umrah in November 2022; he was later released.
- U.S. citizen and former detainee Walid Fitaihi served the duration of his travel ban, which ended in 2022, but remains barred from exiting Saudi Arabia.
- U.S. citizens and former detainees Bader al-Ibrahim and Salah al-Haidar also served the duration of their travel bans, which ended in February 2023, but have not been able to exit the country.



Saad Almadi



Bader al-Ibrahim



Salah al-Haidar

- U.S. legal permanent resident Aziza al-Yousuf also continues to serve a travel ban as part of a 2018 sentence.
- The Freedom Initiative confirmed another U.S. citizen was detained outside of Riyadh but were unable to confirm reports that it was “wrongful.”
- The Freedom Initiative received reports of a U.S. citizen who was detained in the Eastern province from a credible source but were unable to confirm through a direct line of contact.

The detention of Americans or those with ties to the U.S. has **increased in Saudi Arabia in recent years.**

Other cases of wrongful detention have affected rights and freedoms in the U.S. Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan, who attended university in the U.S. and is the son and brother of American citizens, returned to Saudi Arabia to work in humanitarian aid and was forcibly disappeared in March 2018. He was later sentenced to 20 years in prison and a 20-year travel ban on terrorism charges related to the creation of an anonymous, satirical Twitter account mocking the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia. The account, which had a substantial following, was created while he was living in the United States, and his personal information was leaked to the Saudi government as the result of an illegal breach of Twitter by employees in California. Former Twitter employee Ahmad Abouammo was convicted in 2022 for spying on behalf of Saudi Arabia and selling the personal information of Twitter users to the Saudi government.¹⁵

Physical surveillance

Among survey respondents, four reported being physically followed while in the United States. In one such incident, Saudi activist Areej Al-Sadhan (the sister of Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan), Saudi activist and blogger Danah Almayouf, the Freedom Initiative's former Saudi Case Manager Bethany Alhaidari, and another dual Saudi-American citizen reported suspicion of being physically followed by a Saudi national working for the Saudi government while having dinner together in Washington, D.C.¹⁶ The individual sat adjacent to the group and placed two phones face down on the seat next to one of the women.



Bethany Alhaidari



Areej Al-Sadhan



Danah Almayouf

In a previous report by the Freedom Initiative, we documented a coordinated act of transnational repression against Virginia resident and Saudi Director at the Freedom Initiative Abdullah Alaoudh.¹⁷ Alaoudh is a legal scholar, lawful permanent resident of the United States, and the son of a prominent political detainee in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Salman al-Odah. Alaoudh is also the co-founder of NAAS, a pro-democracy political party founded by Saudi citizens living in exile. Alaoudh shared court documents which revealed that the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), a branch of the embassy responsible for student affairs, was using the heads of student clubs around the United States to monitor and surveil students and what could be portrayed (in the Saudi government context) as dissenting activities of Saudi citizens in the United States.



Abdullah Alaoudh

“In 2017, the Fairfax, Virginia–based SACM published a list of rules for students studying abroad in a Saudi state newspaper. The first rule on the list: no political or religious discussions, and no media interviews while studying abroad. I was invited to speak at a book club event on campus in 2016. There, an individual approached me and told me he had been sent by SACM to report back on my comments. The student warned me not to say anything critical about Saudi Arabia. He also told me that there was another student present at the event who was also told to report back to the Cultural Mission on the event.”

Another Saudi citizen living in the United States reported being followed to her car from outside of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C. She stated that an individual working at the embassy was trying to convince her to enter the embassy. When she refused, the embassy employee physically pulled her, and she was forced to break away and run to her car to escape. She believes the incident was a physical attempt to get her back to the country.

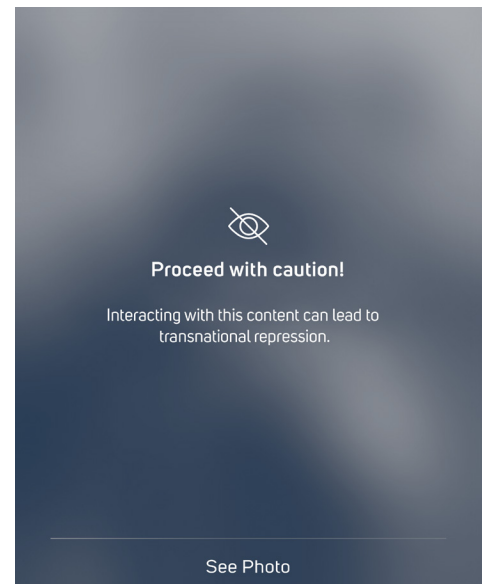
Digital surveillance

While surveillance technology has consistently been used to monitor Saudi activists and was famously exposed during investigations into the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, digital surveillance is often more difficult to detect in real time. Still, our research identified instances in which online surveillance resulted in serious consequences for individual rights and freedoms. The majority of survey respondents stated that they did not communicate with their family or friends in Saudi Arabia due to the likelihood that their conversations were being monitored, and they expressed fears of putting themselves or their loved ones at risk. Over three-quarters of respondents stated that they stopped or adjusted their use of social media for fear that they would attract unwanted attention or face harassment on social media.

One student studying in the United States on a scholarship from the Saudi government stated that a new policy required them to declare all of their social media accounts and hand over access to Saudi officials prior to being approved for government scholarships to study abroad. The student explained that while he was not active on social media, a friend who was supposed to join him for studies in the U.S. was detained due to his social media activity.

Other forms of digital surveillance may indicate or lead to more nefarious activity. In August 2019, Rawan Abuzaid, a Saudi model residing in the United States, filed a defamation suit against Saudi activist and blogger Danah Almayouf in Manhattan’s Supreme Court. In the claim, Abuzaid sought “not less than 5 million dollars” in damages, because Almayouf had alleged she was a tool of the Saudi government, was homophobic, and worked as a prostitute.

In the court documents, legal counsel for Abuzaid stated that Almayouf had “taken a strong public stance (through her social media accounts) against Saudi Arabia, its government and people.”¹⁸



In December 2019, Almayouf received messages on her social media account from a Saudi national who would later be arrested and identified by the FBI as Ibrahim Alhussayen. Alhussayen contacted Almayouf through direct messages on Instagram and offered to help her with the court case against her. He claimed that he had documents proving Almayouf was correct about Abuzaid, but that she would have to meet him in person to collect them.¹⁹ Alhussayen was later arrested on a federal warrant and pled guilty to lying to authorities during their investigation into his campaign of online harassment and threats against Saudi dissidents in the U.S and Canada, the majority of whom were women.²⁰

Threats and harassment

Five individuals reported receiving similar threatening phone calls or messages. Alaoudh explained that he receives near daily threats of violence online. He recalled:

“On June 22, 2022, a Pro-Saudi government account threatened that I will be assassinated! Another example was during the January 6 incident in DC. A tweet from an account with an avatar pic of King Salman says to me, “your end is soon. Now it is [our] chance to take advantage of the chaos and deaths in the U.S. so your end will be soon, you traitor.”

One dual U.S.-Saudi citizen reported to police in 2022 that she had received a phone call from an individual aligned with the Saudi government who threatened that “they” could kidnap her and her child from the United States and forcibly return them to Saudi Arabia, “even though they were U.S. citizens.”²¹ (The victim infers that “they” referred to the Saudi authorities.)

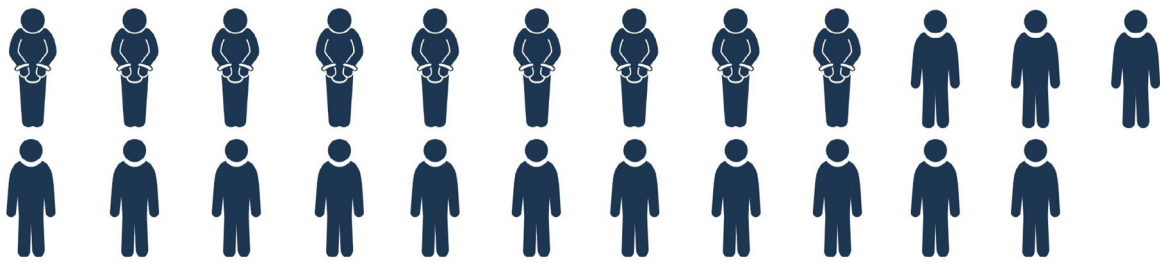
These threats are neither new nor uncommon. By the time women’s right to drive was recognized in Saudi Arabia, many of the women activists who had campaigned for this right were living in exile around the world. When the announcement was made in September 2017, several of these women, including at least one U.S.-based activist, received phone calls threatening that they would face repercussions if they commented publicly on the decision.²² Months later, Saudi authorities arrested seven women who had advocated for women’s right to drive, including Loujain al-Hathloul, who was kidnapped from the UAE and forcibly returned to Saudi Arabia.

Denial of documents

Four respondents reported that the Saudi Embassy or a consulate in the United States was delaying or halting their access to identification documents or paperwork due to their political views or association. Several explained that the Saudi Embassy was withholding or refusing to renew their passports or Saudi identity cards, or that they were offered a temporary passport that would only allow entry to the Kingdom. Several were told the only solution would be for them to return to Saudi Arabia to renew their documents there. None of the respondents felt safe to do so, and some believed it was a trap to get them to compromise their safety or to silence them.

Domestic prosecution for transnational targeting

Of the 23 people who participated in the survey, nine reported having active arrest warrants or sentences against them in Saudi Arabia, and five reported having active travel bans against them in Saudi Arabia. The majority could not elaborate further on details as they were often not properly served or able to participate in the legal proceedings. Only one respondent had freely entered and exited Saudi Arabia in the last year. One participant, Abdulrahman Alkhiary (who goes by Wajeeh Lion), was informed there was a “death sentence” against him in Saudi Arabia due to being “openly gay;” he explained that he still receives regular death threats online.



In another case which was recently reported, the Saudi government retaliated against an American woman who spoke with local media while in the United States about being a victim of a crime involving a Saudi citizen. When she relocated to Saudi Arabia, the woman faced criminal charges related to the comments she made to the media while in the United States several years prior. Such prosecutions are completely lawful according to Saudi Arabia’s law of procedure, which gives the nation one of the most expansive definitions of jurisdiction. Broad language in Articles 24 through 30 of the law of procedure allow the Kingdom’s courts to assert jurisdiction over almost any case involving a Saudi or a non-Saudi citizen, even if they have no residence in Saudi Arabia, so long as it does not involve real estate outside of the Kingdom. This all-encompassing jurisdiction, coupled with an absence of a statute of limitations, leaves anyone in the world vulnerable to Saudi Arabia’s jurisdiction, so long as a loose connection to Saudi Arabia can be established, regardless of how superficial.

Defamation and threats in media

Six individuals reported being defamed by the Saudi state-aligned media while they were living in the U.S. Several more reported that false statements were regularly made about them online.

Hussein ALGhawi, a journalist in Saudi Arabia who was connected to the online smear campaign against Jamal Khashoggi prior to his 2018 murder, hosts a popular show dedicated to pro-state commentary on foreign policy, and he has received sponsorship from Saudi state companies like Aramco. In 2021, ALGhawi used his show to target founder of the Freedom Initiative Mohamed Soltan and former Saudi Case Manager at the Freedom Initiative Bethany Alhaidari, alleging they were a terrorist and spy, respectively, and were running “five” organizations in Washington, D.C. responsible for slandering Saudi Arabia and Egypt. ALGhawi’s show has featured similar diatribes against Trita Parsi of the Quincy Institute, the U.S.-based human rights organization Democracy for the Arab World Now, Saudi scholar Hala Aldosari, researcher Geoff Goldberg, and others.

In August 2022, the Freedom Initiative reported that a 34-year prison sentence had been handed down by a Saudi court against Salma al-Shehab, a women's rights advocate and PhD candidate at the University of Leeds who was detained in January 2021 while on vacation in Saudi Arabia.²³ BBC News Arabic was one of the first outlets to cover the story and invited Alhaidari to speak on Salma's case. U.S.-based journalist for the Guardian Stephanie Kirchgaessner also covered the story extensively. Following the media coverage, former Saudi military official Abdulaziz bin Razn stated during an appearance on BBC News Arabic that he was disappointed with Kirchgaessner and the Guardian for covering the story. He claimed that the individuals working at the human rights organizations who reported on al-Shehab's case were "fugitives" wanted by the Saudi government and that their whereabouts were known. His comments should be understood as a threat against individuals working at U.S.-based organizations that reported on al-Shehab's case and suggest that those individuals were being surveilled. Kirchgaessner told the Freedom Initiative that "being mentioned by name by a Saudi official felt vaguely threatening and like just another intimidation attempt." She added: "It won't stop the Guardian's coverage of human rights abuses by Saudi Arabia."²⁴

Recent reports have documented FBI investigations into Saudi government officials' attempts to circumvent the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) by employing U.S. citizens to target regime opponents. In December 2021, journalist Ghada Oueiss, a longtime critic of the Saudi and Emirati regimes, filed a lawsuit in Florida against Mohammed bin Salman seeking damages on the basis that the Saudi government had recruited and paid U.S. citizens to harass and defame her online. One of the recruits was Sharon Van Rider, a U.S. citizen who stated in a deposition that she was "paid by an intermediary on behalf of [MBS] to circumvent the Foreign Agents Registration Act."²⁵



Ghada Oueiss

Transnational repression in U.S. courts

At present, lawyers are generally exempt from registering as foreign agents if they are acting on behalf of a foreign government, so long as their representation does not "attempt to influence domestic or foreign policies of the United States" or advance foreign interests.²⁶ However, "attempts to influence policy" on behalf of a foreign government were not always clear in the courtroom. Such attempts sometimes took the form of what would appear to be a normal civil lawsuit, despite the tremendous harm inflicted on targets. Additionally, attorney-client privilege limits transparency around the influence of foreign governments that may be paying legal fees.

Several respondents expressed concern that the Saudi government, with its vast financial resources, appears to be using litigation to deprive activists of financial resources, gain sensitive information during discovery and even mislead courts to sway opinions in their favor. Seven individuals said their greatest obstacle was that Saudi authorities supported the opposing side in litigation, which made their access to justice difficult. Others reported that lawyers and judges did not have enough understanding of the intricacies of Saudi Arabia, particularly as an authoritarian state, which one respondent described as "lawless."

“Being mentioned by name by a Saudi official **felt vaguely threatening and like just another intimidation attempt.**” – Stephanie Kirchgaessner, The Guardian

In other cases, discovery posed a risk to individuals who had been targeted by the Saudi government. In January 2023, during a lawsuit between Saudi-backed LIV Golf and the PGA, the PGA alleged that LIV Golf was using the lawsuit to seek information on the families of 9/11 victims.²⁷ In particular, they sought information about the nonprofit organization 9/11 Justice, a group of 9/11 victims and first responders who successfully worked with Congress on the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA) to hold the Saudi government accountable for the September 11 terrorist attacks. The PGA and 9/11 Justice alleged that the Saudi government was abusing the discovery process to spy on them.

Similar concerns were raised by the Freedom Initiative's former Saudi Case Manager Bethany Alhaidari during a civil lawsuit in Washington State. Alhaidari had expressed concern in court filings that Saudi government officials who had worked for the Ministry of Justice had submitted false information about Saudi law with the intention of misleading the court to rule against her in a civil matter, and that she was subject to discovery that could trace her and her colleagues' whereabouts.²⁸

Danah Almayouf expressed these concerns in the previously mentioned lawsuit from Abuzaid, or "Model Roz." Almayouf believed Abuzaid had the support of the Saudi government and reported being extremely concerned over requests to access her computers and personal devices as well as her WhatsApp, as it could reveal the identities and whereabouts of several other Saudi activists. This suspicion only grew when Alhussayen was arrested.²⁹ Almayouf's case raises concerns around the exploitation of U.S. courts for similar litigation. For instance, LIV golfer Patrick Reed has pursued a defamation lawsuit against the Golf Channel and golf commentator Brandel Chamblee for \$750 million due to Chamblee's comments that LIV golfers were "aligning themselves with a tyrannical murderous leader," referring to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS).³⁰

Golf commentator Brandel Chamblee faced a lawsuit after declaring that LIV golfers were aligning with a "tyrannical murderous leader."

Other court cases have more obvious ties to the Saudi government. Saad Aljabri is a former advisor to Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, and he has been living in exile since Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman deposed bin Nayef in 2017. In September 2017, Saudi authorities sought Aljabri's arrest through an INTERPOL red notice, which was found to be politically motivated and removed months later. Aljabri's two youngest children, Omar and Sarah, and his son-in-law, Hazem Almuzaini, have been wrongfully detained in an attempt to lure him back to the Kingdom. Aljabri himself faced a kidnapping and extradition attempt in Canada; it was foiled by the Canadian authorities.

When attempts to render Aljabri to Saudi Arabia failed, MBS pursued a strategy of litigation. In March 2021, lawyers for the Kingdom filed a court case on behalf of Sakab Saudi Holding Company, a government company, against Aljabri in a Massachusetts court, claiming that he was wanted over missing funds which were allegedly misused during his time in the Interior Ministry. Aljabri responded that he could not defend himself without disclosing state secrets involving counterterrorism activities the company was funding in cooperation with the CIA. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines filed a statement supported by the Justice Department invoking state secrets privilege, informing the judge that exposing certain facts of the case could cause exceptionally grave harm. The case was subsequently dismissed by the judge, but nevertheless revealed the vulnerability of U.S. courts to litigation seeking to punish foreign governments' political adversaries.³¹



Sarah and Omar Aljabri

State hostage-taking

Three survey respondents had a family member who was detained, and five reported that family members had been threatened with detention in Saudi Arabia as a reprisal against them for exercising a protected right while in the United States. Six reported having had family members in Saudi Arabia who were harassed or threatened in retaliation for exercising a protected right while in the United States.

These coercive acts may also be paired with direct targeting. In addition to facing direct threats and surveillance, at least 19 members of Abdullah Alaoudh's family have been placed under travel ban in retaliation for his political views and outspoken criticisms of the Saudi government's human rights abuses.

Similarly, Sarah and Omar Aljabri, the youngest children of Saad Aljabri and the brother and sister of U.S.-based Khalid Aljabri, were detained in March 2020 and sentenced to lengthy prison terms in November 2020. They continue to be held incommunicado. Saad Aljabri states that the children have been used as bargaining tools to try to lure him back to the Kingdom, where he would likely face imprisonment and possibly death.

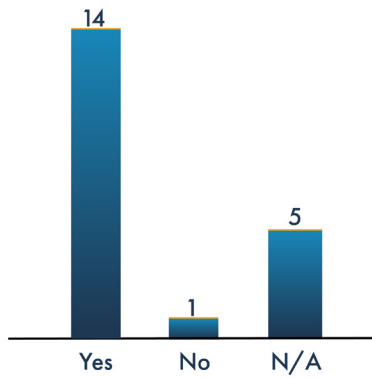
3.2 Impact

Chilling effect

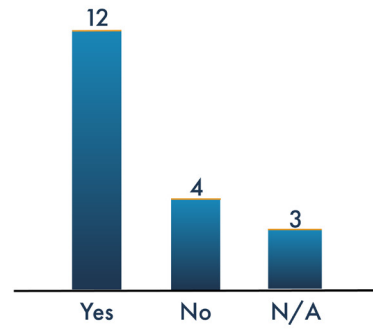
Transnational repression is not only experienced as an actual act of repression. It also carries a chilling effect, where fear of repressive actions by the Saudi government has led to self-censorship, limited social engagements and deterred career growth.

The majority of survey respondents reported that they had to abandon or limit work or studies due to fears that the Saudi government would retaliate against them or their loved ones, and 88% specified that they would be detained when they returned to Saudi Arabia if they continued certain work or studies. Nearly half of respondents said they produced work under a different name, and some said they did not engage in a field or space that they wanted to for fear that the Saudi government would retaliate against them.

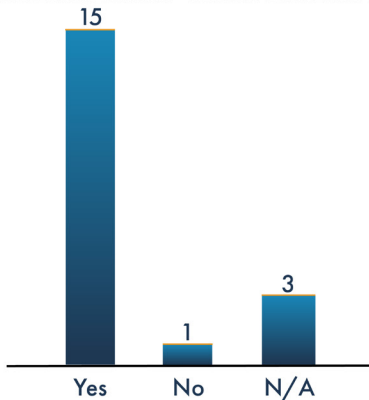
Abandoned Work or Studies for Fear of Repression?



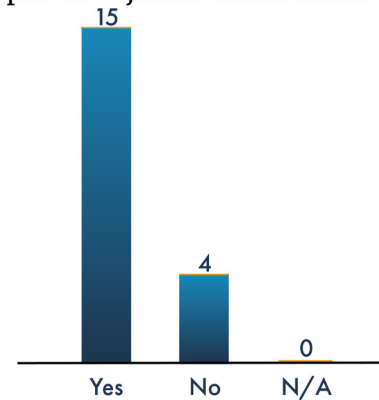
Selective about Making Friends for Fear of Surveillance?



Hesitant to Contact Saudi-based Friends and Family?



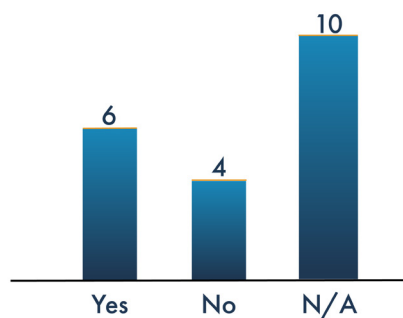
Stopped or Adjusted Social Media Use?



Economic cost

The economic cost of Saudi transnational repression may be impossible to accurately assess given the difficulty of calculating lost opportunities, but nearly all participants — 85% of respondents — reported significant financial costs due to their activities or views. These included reports of material losses such as a home, a business, property, access to bank accounts or investments, and loss of a job or benefits from that job. More than half reported losses due to hefty legal fees related to repression in Saudi Arabia, and 85% reported having to pay for therapy or increased visits to the doctor due to the impact of transnational repression. Most had assets in Saudi Arabia that they could not access.

Sold Assets in Saudi for Concerns over Access?

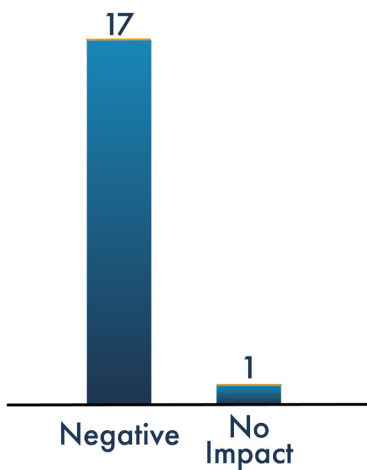


Fourteen respondents estimated that transnational repression had cost them more than \$50,000. Eight respondents estimated the amount of their losses as a direct result of transnational repression at more than \$8.9 million, or an average cost of more than \$1.1 million.

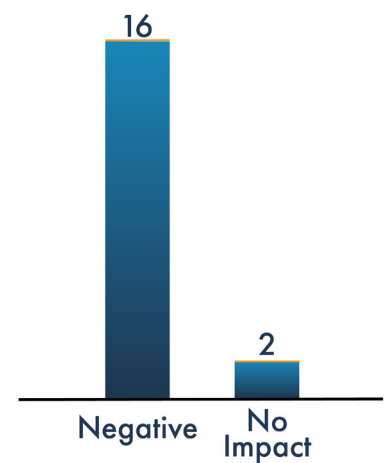
Psychosocial impact

Whether or not they reported direct incidents of TNR, most respondents said that transnational repression by the Saudi government had a negative impact on their mental health and well-being, their marriage or family relationships, and their relationships with friends and colleagues at work. Fourteen respondents were separated from a parent or a sibling, and four were separated from their spouse or their children. One woman reported not being able to see her minor children in three years. Another woman residing in the United States who was separated from her husband due to his wrongful detention said the most difficult part of their ordeal was that her children had been made orphans by Saudi authorities, who she said were trying to kill her husband. Nearly all reported painful memories associated with Saudi Arabia and feeling isolated from others while in the U.S. The second most common symptom reported by respondents was difficulty sleeping or difficulty imagining a life where they could achieve their goals.³²

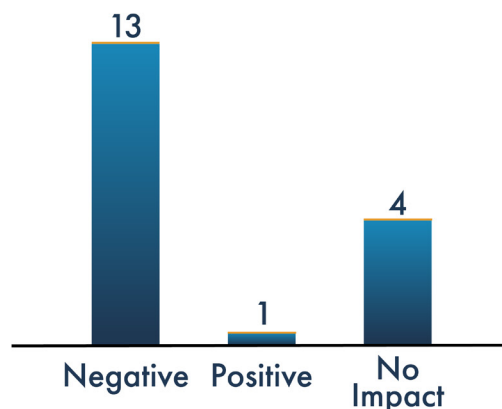
Impact on Mental Health and Well-Being



Impact on Physical Health



Impact on Marriage



Chapter 4: Egyptian Transnational Repression

Acts of repression carried out by the Egyptian government included the abuse of international bodies to arrest Americans, surveillance and harassment on U.S. soil, defamation of activists and civil society, refusal to grant identification documents, and the seizure of assets.

Respondents to our survey reported a wide range of abuses that could be broadly categorized into two types: instances of transnational repression where the target and impact are outside of the perpetrator state's borders, and instances of transnational repression where the target is based outside the perpetrator state's borders, but where the repressive act is conducted mainly within those borders. These categorizations are not mutually exclusive, as one could be surveilled abroad while also seeing their families detained by national authorities.

4.1 Acts of Transnational Repression

Wrongful detention as transnational repression

Egypt continues to detain two U.S. legal permanent residents, Salah Soltan, who is the father of the Freedom Initiative's founder Mohamed Soltan, and Hossam Khalaf. Both have been recognized by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention as having been arbitrarily detained. Both men also have large families of U.S. citizen children and grandchildren, some of whom have been vocal in calling for the release of their loved ones. Salah Soltan and Khalaf continue to be held in solitary confinement, subjected to medical neglect and denied the right to communicate with their lawyers. Both have seen their health deteriorate significantly.



Salah Soltan



Hossam Khalaf

Physical surveillance

Instances of surveillance have included the monitoring of public events, particularly at universities, where filming speakers and attendees may be commonplace. A group of Egyptian advocates in the U.S. reported being surveilled in Washington, D.C. by a presumed embassy operative.³³ These advocates were all U.S.-based, and some of them were asylees. They had arrived in D.C. to meet with an official Egyptian delegation that had organized meetings with civil society and members of the diaspora.

During our interview, one of the attendees of these meetings reported being followed by someone as they walked around the city. The presumed embassy operative followed her and a group of colleagues into a restaurant and sat in the booth closest to them. When the group started talking about names of Egyptian officials, the presumed operative leaned in much closer, presumably to eavesdrop.

Another respondent reported seeing “mukhabarat”³⁴ intimidating two Egyptian PhD students who were presenting their research on the Nubian and Coptic minorities at the annual Middle East Studies Association (MESA) conference in Washington, D.C.” The respondent added that the “spy who was posing as an academic, literally told the students they shouldn’t be doing research on the topics they were presenting on and claimed MESA had no ‘mandate’ to allow this type of research.” One New York-based intellectual also reported that he gave a lecture at the City University of New York and later received a call from the organizers that someone from the consulate was filming the event.

Physical surveillance is mostly discreet. Five respondents reported being surveilled by embassy affiliates, but in only two cases did the individual reveal themselves as working with the Egyptian authorities. One dissident based in the east coast shared that he had been threatened by an associate and co-organizer of several pro-democracy working groups and initiatives. “We had a family dinner he shared with us...and as we were saying our goodbyes he leaned over and said ‘Abdelfattah [el-Sisi] says go with [the] flow or you’ll drown.” Egyptians in New York City, where there is a large Egyptian-American population, report overtipping servers at coffee shops in Steinway, Queens, so that they would share any suspicious questions they may get about them.

Egyptians in Steinway, Queens offer large tips so servers share any suspicious questions they may get about them.

At times, however, physical surveillance is more overt. We have also identified individuals who have repeatedly appeared at public events as pro-democracy or pro-human rights, only to later participate in counter-protests orchestrated by the embassy. At a public event marking the anniversary of the death of Egyptian queer activist Sara Hegazy in Washington, D.C., event organizers reported men surveilling the event and speaking in Egyptian Arabic. At a November 2022 pan-African rally (which the Freedom Initiative co-sponsored), a man was seen observing and filming the rally while speaking into an earpiece in Egyptian Arabic. Shortly thereafter, a crowd of counter-protesters arrived to shout down the rally.

While there was no way to immediately verify the men’s relationship to the embassy, these incidents are not coincidental. In an interview for this report, a former Egyptian diplomat noted that these practices are not done by consular affairs staffers or employees seconded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁵ Rather, Egyptian embassies often operate as cover to officers working for Egypt’s several security agencies: State Security “el-amn el-watany”, general intelligence and military intelligence. While the use of embassies as cover for intelligence operations is not unusual, he added that these agencies view their presence in foreign embassies as a sign of their relative power and orient their activities to spying on dissidents or the diaspora. This is consistent with instances we have documented in which dual nationals who visit the Egyptian embassy to renew documents are questioned by political officers in the embassy, often about their political activity in the U.S., which serves as a reminder that they are being watched.

Threats and harassment

Death threats have been used as a tactic to suppress dissent by U.S.-based activists and persons, including prominent critics of the current regime. Death threats come at different degrees of sophistication. One interviewee pointed to death threats he received over email where the sender shared his physical address and threatened to harm him. Other threats are made through comments on social media posts or direct messages on those platforms. Threats have also been directed over the phone by people who identify as security officers. One dissident reported being told, “I know where you live. You know what we can do to you,” implying the ability to harm.³⁶ One survey respondent based in the U.S. shared that she received a call telling her she was no longer welcome in the country.

“I know where you live. You know what we can do to you.” – Phone threat to Egyptian dissident in the U.S.

Denial of documents

Three individuals reported that the Egyptian embassy either denied them consular services or that their services were severely delayed.³⁷ One U.S. legal permanent resident shared that they had applied to renew their passport at one of the U.S.-based consulates. While this process typically takes between three and six months according to other interviews we conducted with Egyptians in the U.S., the passport of the interviewee in question remained confiscated for two years. Consular staff responded that the delay was bureaucratic in nature and could not be circumvented.³⁸ A similar situation arose with Dartmouth professor Ezzedine Fishere. In 2021, Fishere applied to renew his national ID (which is necessary to obtain a regular passport) and was denied. He then applied to get a birth certificate and was told by civil affairs employees that his name was blocked for security reasons and no document will be issued until this security block is removed by the Minister of Interior.³⁹

These practices left residents vulnerable and led to fears of statelessness, with individuals unwilling to return to Egypt for fear of detention and unable to live their lives freely without access to their identification or immigration documents. Although it is difficult to document whether this trend is increasing globally, we have noted more reports of this nature than in the past, either due to the growing number of Egyptians in exile and/or because the practice is becoming more common.

Domestic prosecution for transnational targeting

Egypt also uses its own politicized courts to prosecute Americans or individuals residing in the U.S., rendering them unable to return home safely. This is evident in the case of Aly Mahdy, an Illinois-based dissident who facilitated the publication of a video of detainees being tortured inside al-Salam First police station. Upon the release of the video by the Guardian, the detainees filmed in the video were re-arrested and sentenced to lengthy prison terms on charges of spreading false news; Mahdy was added to the national terrorist list, tried for terrorism-related crimes and sentenced to life in prison in absentia.⁴⁰ Mahdy, who hosts a popular YouTube channel, has spoken publicly about the fact that his father has also been detained and tortured as an act of reprisal against him for his vocal criticism of the el-Sisi government.



Aly Mahdy

Sherif Mansour, MENA Program Coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists, belongs to a large family of Egyptian–Americans who fled Egypt after being targeted for their religious beliefs (Mansour’s father, Dr. Subhy Mansour, is a leader of the Quranist group). Mansour himself is an outspoken rights advocate and critic of the el–Sisi government. In August 2020, Egyptian authorities detained Reda Abdelrahman, one of Mansour’s cousins, in an act of state hostage–taking intended to silence Mansour. Abdelrahman was released in early 2021, but continues to be banned from travel, denied the ability to exit Egypt after several attempts; Sherif and his father continue to face terrorism–related allegations.



Sherif Mansour

Many other U.S.–based persons face sentences in Egypt. In a wave of arrests and mass trials between 2013 and 2015, activists, scholars and others were added to cases, tried and sentenced in absentia, sometimes to life in prison or to death, including former professor of political science at Georgetown University Emad Shahin, who was sentenced to death in 2015.⁴¹



Emad Shahin

Abuse of international intelligence sharing mechanisms

While awareness of the abuse of INTERPOL notices by authoritarian states has grown, politicized cross–border arrests persist. Egyptian–American dual national Sherif Osman was detained in the United Arab Emirates and initially processed in an INTERPOL facility; Emirati authorities told him that his arrest was based on a red notice issued by the Egyptian authorities. After the media began reporting on his arrest, local authorities reported that Osman’s detention was in fact based on a request by the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC), an intelligence sharing body associated with the Arab League.⁴² Osman was charged with inciting against government institutions in Egypt. These accusations were in reference to calls for protests he made while in the U.S. While this was not the first time international legal mechanisms were abused at the behest of Egyptian authorities, it was the first time those mechanism had been used against a U.S. citizen. Osman was detained for 44 days before he was freed. His release came after a visit by four unnamed Emirati officials who told him the release orders were issued from “high up.”⁴³

Defamation and threats in media

Targeting across borders has also taken the form of media attacks on U.S.–based activists, scholars or other members of civil society. Particularly in a context in which even “private” media is either state–owned or under close state control, these messages either imply direction from or the tacit approval of the Egyptian state.⁴⁴ On November 29, 2020, a news broadcast on Egypt’s TeN TV featured a segment on the “five most dangerous organizations attacking Egypt from the U.S.” They described the work of the Freedom Initiative, the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, the Project on Middle East Democracy, Democracy for the Arab World Now, and the Belady Foundation. The segment referenced a letter from U.S. Senators and Members of Congress condemning the detention of civil society workers in Egypt and suggested the organizations had received funding from the Muslim Brotherhood to orchestrate it. The segment referenced several U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents by name, including Mohamed Soltan, Mai El–Sadany, Ramy Yaacoub, Sarah Leah Whitson and Aya Hijazi.⁴⁵

Egyptian television hosts have frequently described
U.S. NGOs as agents of terrorism.

Following their participation in a Senate briefing in 2019, well-known actors Khaled Abol Naga and Amr Waked were labeled as terrorists and traitors and subjected to an onslaught of homophobic attacks. Additionally, they were expelled from their professional syndicates, which cited their reliance on “foreign powers to conspire against Egypt’s security and stability.”⁴⁶ In addition, Waked was tried by a military court in absentia for his activism abroad and sentenced to eight years in prison, underscoring that attacks and threats in the media may be followed by prosecution. Similarly, Aly Mahdy was described as a “paid Muslim Brotherhood stooge” on pro-regime TV host Mohamed El Bazz’s program before being prosecuted and sentenced to life in prison in absentia.⁴⁷

State hostage-taking

The state’s tactics to silence dissent include repressive measures against family members within the perpetrator state’s borders. In other words, the state uses repression by proxy to target those outside its reach. The Egyptian government has repeatedly detained the family members of individuals residing outside Egypt or banned their loved ones from travel in retaliation for their activism abroad. Not only was Aly Mahdy’s father detained in reprisal for his vocal opposition to el-Sisi’s human rights abuses, but he was also subjected to particularly cruel and inhumane treatment when Mahdy continued to publicly criticize the regime.

We have documented travel bans against two U.S. citizens, one of whom is a minor, in retaliation against exiled family members who engage in activism in the U.S. and elsewhere outside Egypt. Despite using their U.S. passports, the two U.S. citizens were banned from leaving Egypt and informed that further attempts to travel could lead to their immediate arrest. The spouse of one of these individuals was later detained and questioned about their exiled family member. Upon reaching out to U.S. officials, they were advised to be “good guests of the country” and hire a local Egyptian lawyer to resolve the issue.

Another prominent U.S.-based activist and researcher spoke publicly on a panel hosted by a U.S. organization on the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution. The following day, state security officers raided his family home in Egypt. The Freedom Initiative’s founder Mohamed Soltan faced similar retaliation after he filed a lawsuit against his alleged torturer, former Egyptian PM Hazem El-Beblawi. Egyptian authorities detained six of his family members and cracked down on his detained father, Salah Soltan, who was serving a life sentence in prison. Salah Soltan remains in detention, and Egyptian authorities continue to subject him to cruel and inhumane treatment in an effort to deter his son’s activism.⁴⁸

Seizure of assets

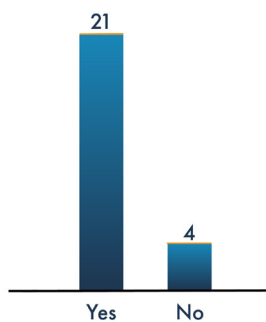
Egyptian authorities’ also attempt to curtail dissent by increasing its economic cost. In our interview with a former diplomat, he described how he was denied his pension by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Egypt. He noted that while he was based in the U.S., a series of bureaucratic measures were levied against him in 2019 after he published an op-ed with the Washington Post. Upon publication, he was notified that the article crossed “red lines” and that a decision had been made to fire him and withhold his pension. He added that this was unprecedented in the ministry, which housed a number of dissenters that had never been penalized in such a way. Another U.S.-based dissident reported that he was tried in absentia, subsequently added to government terrorist lists, and had his bank account frozen and apartment seized. Over 30% of survey respondents reported having transferred, removed or sold assets in Egypt out of concern that they would not be able to access them.

4.2 Impact

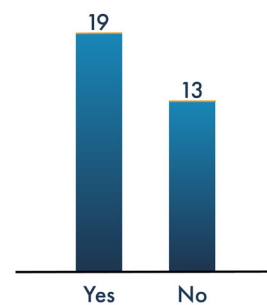
Chilling effect

Over half of respondents reported feeling hesitant to contact family and friends in Egypt; more than three-quarters reported that they were careful in what they say in communications with family back home; and around half reported stopping or adjusting their social media use to not draw negative attention from Egyptian authorities. Moreover, while only about one-third reported monitoring what they said in private settings for fear that it would be reported back to the Egyptian government, half of our respondents said they monitored what they said in public. These responses indicate that the Egyptian government’s attempts to curtail freedom of speech, association and assembly in the U.S. have been successful.

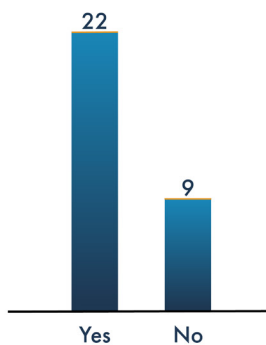
Abandoned Work or Studies for Fear of Repression?



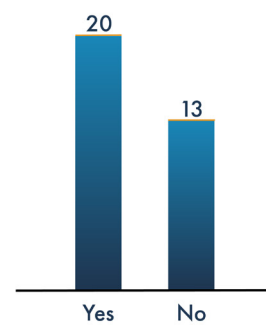
Selective about Making Friends for Fear of Surveillance?



Hesitant to Contact Egypt-based Friends and Family?



Stopped or Adjusted Social Media Use?



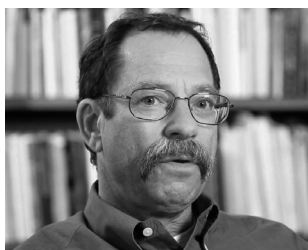
This chilling effect extends to a larger network than just members of the diaspora. Beyond direct forms of repression and targeting of individuals and their families, instances of repression carry broader chilling effects for communities of U.S.-based persons with economic and social ties to Egypt. People changing or abandoning their planned work or studies to enter Egypt safely was one of the most frequently reported chilling effects associated with TNR. Over half of respondents noted that they have changed the course of their work due to fears of what would happen to them if they returned to Egypt.

One respondent noted the case of Giulio Regeni, an Italian scholar who was tortured to death by Egyptian officials in 2016:

“After the killing of Giulio Regeni I put off research trips to Egypt out of fear that I might also be subject to state repression, kidnapping, or murder.”⁵

Professor Joel Beinin is a renowned scholar of Egyptian labor movements and spent significant time in Egypt from 1969 to 2013. While he reported having been harassed and interrogated by intelligence officials under Mubarak, he has not returned to Egypt since 2013. He explained:

“I have not been to Egypt since 2013, mostly due to uncertainty about how I might be treated by the authorities. The Egyptian state’s abduction, torture, and murder of Giulio Regeni looms large for me since I have also studied and written about contemporary labor movements.”



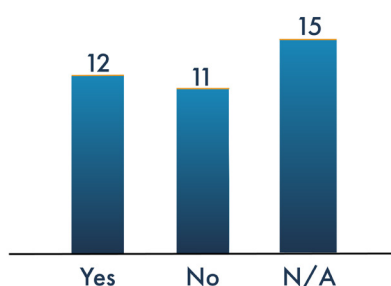
Joel Beinin

Respondents to our survey shared fears that they themselves would be detained if they returned to Egypt and that their colleagues would be harassed by virtue of their association. Twenty percent of the respondents expressed fears that their family would face harassment in Egypt.

Economic cost

Transnational repression often imposes an economic cost that includes expenses related directly to the impact of TNR, assets seized by the perpetrator state or even lost income related to repression. The most significant cost associated with TNR was paying for counseling or therapy for the victim or their family member. One important cost was the fear of sending remittances to family back home, on the basis that those transactions could be used as evidence of criminal activity involving foreign entities and agents. Other costs reported by respondents included being unable to access assets in Egypt or having their assets frozen under politicized charges. While most respondents incurred costs under \$50,000, five lost over \$100,000 as a result of TNR.

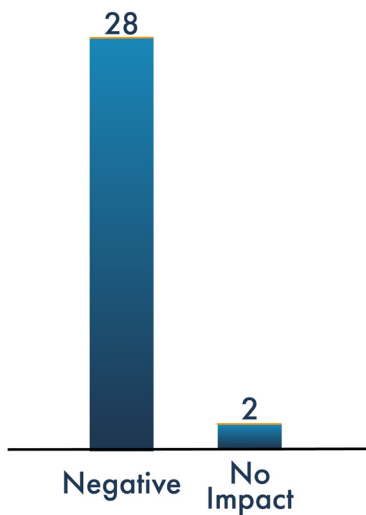
Sold Assets in Egypt for Concerns over Access?



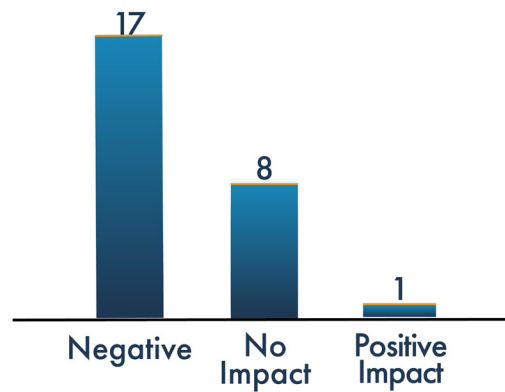
Psychosocial impact

The significant economic and psychosocial toll that TNR takes on victims speaks to an increasingly frightening security environment. These abuses not only alter the behavior of U.S. citizens and persons, but also have a direct impact on their health and well-being. Three-quarters of survey respondents reported negative impacts on their mental health, just over half reported a negative impact on their relationship with extended family, and less than half reported a negative impact on overall physical health and well-being and/or on their marriage or personal and intimate relationships. When asked about some of the implications of being subjected or exposed to instances of TNR, 59% of survey respondents reported multiple symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

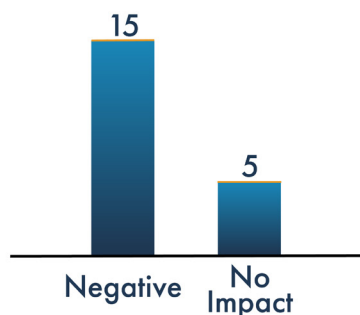
Impact on Mental Health and Well-Being



Impact on Physical Health



Impact on Marriage



Chapter 5: Policy and Response to Transnational Repression

Combatting transnational repression and protecting victims poses significant challenges for the U.S. government and law enforcement. For one, while it is not a new phenomenon, instances of transnational repression have increased in recent years, particularly with rapidly advancing technology, and thus pose an evolving threat to human rights and national security. Perpetrating governments have increased efforts to suppress and harass opponents at the same time as they have become more cautious and innovative about the way they engage in transnational repression, as has been detailed in the wide range of examples throughout this report. Additionally, because transnational repression typically spans across multiple jurisdictions (or even across country borders), it can be difficult for the U.S. government to identify and protect victims or vulnerable populations, anticipate and prevent violations from occurring, or to hold perpetrators accountable through domestic remedies. Despite these challenges, law and policymakers have started to take initiative to find legislative or policy solutions that tackle issues of security, foreign policy and accountability, among others.

5.1 Codification and Criminalization of Transnational Repression

In December 2022, Representative Adam Schiff, along with eight other members of congress, introduced House Resolution 9460, the Stop Transnational Repression Act, which would criminalize transnational repression.⁴⁹ The act defines transnational repression as:

“...any effort intended to intimidate or coerce, including by fear or force, a person to take an action in the interest of a foreign government...or take an action to forebear from exercising a right guaranteed to the person by the Constitution of laws of the United States.”⁵¹

The bill included crimes committed against U.S. persons and those in the U.S., as well as any person who could be deprived of any rights, privileges or immunities or is secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of the United States. The legislation drew upon the FBI’s definition of transnational repression as well as definitions and research from civil society organizations Freedom House and Citizen Lab, and it acknowledged that authoritarian governments were “increasingly and aggressively” engaging in transnational repression.⁵⁰

While transnational repression often involves actions that are already prohibited under U.S. law, the bill recognized that the backing of foreign governments rendered these activities more egregious, seeking to formally define and criminalize transnational repression under federal law and ensure more active tracking and reporting on instances of transnational repression in the United States. The bipartisan bill was introduced in the House during the 117th Congress with 11 cosponsors and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary and Foreign Affairs, but it was never passed into law.

In May 2021, Senator Roger Wicker introduced the Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention Act (TRAP Act), the purpose of which was to “counter efforts by foreign governments to pursue, harass or otherwise persecute individuals for political and other unlawful motives overseas.”⁵² The bill was introduced in the Senate and sent to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), before being integrated into the National Defense Authorization Act for the fiscal year of 2022 and signed into law in December 2022. The bulk of the initial bill focused on further collaboration and oversight of INTERPOL, recognizing that certain member states had been engaging in abuse of INTERPOL’s database and processes; INTERPOL’s charter forbids the organization from “undertaking any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character.”⁵³ The TRAP law thus seeks to improve transparency in INTERPOL and requires detailed reporting on INTERPOL notices and violations, as well as sources of INTERPOL funding. It also proposed amending the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to include reporting on attempts by countries to misuse international law enforcement tools for politically motivated reprisal against specific individuals located in other countries, though this language was not passed into law.⁵⁴

Though the TRAP Act helps to prevent abuse of INTERPOL, governments in the Middle East and North Africa are already finding ways to disseminate notices and arrest warrants and carry out extraditions outside of INTERPOL’s frameworks, as discussed in Section 4.1, “Abuse of international intelligence sharing mechanisms.” In the 1980s, the Arab League established the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC) in Saudi Arabia. The body was involved in at least two recent arrests: Egyptian–American dual citizen Sherif Osman, who was arrested in the UAE in November 2022 and returned home to the U.S. in late December, and Saudi national Hassan al–Rabie, who was arrested in Morocco in January 2023 and extradited less than a month later after Moroccan courts upheld Saudi Arabia’s request.

5.2 Improving FARA

Under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), individuals representing the interests of a foreign government, including lobbyists and the media, are required by law to declare so. The enforcement of FARA is critical for transparency around foreign influence efforts in the United States and thus protects the democratic process. In December 2021, the Department of Justice sought public comment on the exceptions to FARA, specifically on changing key regulations such as the exemption for persons qualified to practice law.⁵⁵ Lawyers representing foreign government interests either directly or through third parties are not currently required to declare or register as an agent of a foreign government, despite being used as such in front of judges.⁵⁶ The legal exemption has limitations; for example, attorneys must register if they agree to provide legal representation to further political activities or to influence agency personnel outside of a judicial proceeding, provided that those efforts relate to attempts to influence U.S. policy or to a foreign government’s political or public interests, policies or relations.

One obvious limitation to the exception is that many lawyers based in the U.S. may not realize that they are engaged in repressing dissent on behalf of a foreign government, particularly in civil suits which may seem unrelated at face value, and if they are not privy to the subtle repression tactics of authoritarian regimes.

5.3 Accountability Efforts

Within the U.S., legal reform has also included initiatives to punish perpetrators. In 2021, Senator Ben Cardin and Senator Marco Rubio introduced the Revealing and Explaining Visa Exclusions for Accountability and Legitimacy Act, or REVEAL Act. The bill would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to permit the State Department to make public records of incidents in which an individual who was involved in acts of transnational repression or other human rights abuses was refused a visa to the United States.⁵⁷

In February 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the launch of the Khashoggi Ban, which would impose visa restrictions on individuals who, acting on behalf of a foreign government, were “engaged in serious, extraterritorial counter-dissident activities, including those that suppress, harass, surveil, threaten or harm journalists, activists or other persons perceived to be dissidents for their work or who engage in such activities with respect to families or other close associates of such persons.”⁵⁸ The visa restriction came pursuant to Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Seventy-six Saudi citizens were banned in relation to Jamal Khashoggi’s murder in February 2021, but the identities of the alleged perpetrators were not made public, and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman was not among them.⁵⁹ Since then, the Biden administration has used the Khashoggi Ban against Belarusian nationals and individuals apparently working on behalf of the Russian government.⁶⁰ Apart from the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, the U.S. government has not publicly announced the application of the Khashoggi Ban against perpetrators of transnational repression in Saudi Arabia or anywhere else in the Middle East and North Africa, despite the documented accounts from victims.

Both Executive Order 13818 (2017) and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act of 2016 allow for sanctions to be applied against foreign government officials (or other non-state entities, in most cases) determined to have been involved in human rights violations. While these pave the way for accountability, in practice they are difficult to implement in the context of transnational repression, as most acts do not meet a threshold of gravity to be considered “serious” or “gross.” Finally, the Levinson Act of 2020 includes a sanctions mechanism for those who engage in the wrongful detention of an American abroad. A 2022 Executive Order “enhanced” the sanctions authority, though to date no Levinson Act sanctions have been announced.⁶¹

5.4 Challenging Abuses in U.S. Court

At the same time U.S. officials and agencies have worked to carry out reform or novel initiatives to address transnational repression, several individuals and organizations have taken to United States courts in order to pursue litigation against perpetrators of transnational repression. Yet challenges remain, both political and legal. The primary obstacle to those seeking accountability has been the matter of sovereign immunity, as was evidenced in the cases of *Soltan v. El-Beblawi* and *Cengiz v. Mohammed Bin Salman* described below. A secondary, but no less impeding, obstacle concerns a foreign state’s interests: The judiciary of the United States functions upon the assumption of reciprocity and judicial independence, making it difficult when individual cases come up against production of evidence involving an authoritarian state for whom the legal system is viewed as an extension of authoritarian rule.

The Khashoggi Ban allows for visa restrictions against individuals who engage in “serious, extraterritorial counter-dissident activities, including those that suppress, harass, surveil, threaten or harm journalists, activists or other persons perceived to be dissidents for their work or who engage in such activities with respect to families or other close associates of such persons.”

Both obstacles were most evident in *Cengiz v. Mohammed bin Salman*, a case filed in a U.S. district court by Jamal Khashoggi's fiancée and Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) against Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for his responsibility in Khashoggi's murder. The civil suit was brought under the Torture Victim Protection Act (TVPA), which allows civil claims in U.S. courts against foreign officials deemed responsible for torture and extrajudicial killings. Common law has dictated that heads of state typically enjoy immunity from civil cases in the United States. Judges usually rely on the executive branch to make recommendations on immunity, interpreting this as an exercise of their constitutional authority over foreign affairs. At the time of filing, Mohammed bin Salman was the Crown Prince and therefore not the head of state. The King is the head of state in Saudi Arabia, which is an absolute monarchy without elected heads of state. According to Article 56 of Saudi Arabia's Basic Law of Governance, the King also serves as the Prime Minister. However, in September 2022, MBS was appointed as Prime Minister by the King. In November, the U.S. Department of State wrote a letter stating that as the Prime Minister, MBS was a sitting head of government and therefore immune. The letter recommended the Department of Justice suggest immunity to the district court judge.⁶² The timing of the appointment, days before an October 3 deadline for the U.S. government to offer a recommendation, was therefore critical to the question of immunity for Mohammed bin Salman.⁶³ Yet, the courts did not appear to consider the manipulation of a legal system in order to procure a desired outcome in U.S. courts as relevant to the question of immunity, or at least did not reference this consideration in their decision.

Similar complications with accountability due to immunity arose in a TVPA lawsuit brought by Mohamed Soltan (a board member of the Freedom Initiative) against former Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem El-Beblawi in 2020. The case was ultimately dismissed without prejudice in September 2021 after the U.S. government recommended immunity in April of the same year, on the basis that El-Beblawi was serving as Egypt's representative to the International Monetary Fund at the time of the filing.⁶⁴ Several of Soltan's family members were detained in Egypt throughout the court's consideration of the case in apparent retaliation for the lawsuit, further emphasizing the risks faced by those who seek accountability and the coercive measures that authoritarian governments will undertake to suppress the pursuit of justice.

While cases targeting foreign officials have proved difficult to mount, some success has been seen against third party companies that assist those foreign officials in carrying out transnational repression. In January 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court denied a writ of certiorari from NSO Group, whose Pegasus software was connected to several cases of digital monitoring and spyware against dissidents.⁶⁵ NSO Group attempted to claim immunity from the lawsuit by stating that the company's actions were "performed on behalf of unnamed governments." The ruling, which came from *META's* lawsuit against NSO, stated that "NSO is not entitled to immunity, and this case is not worthy of this Court's review."⁶⁶ Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul similarly filed a case against former U.S. government officials and a cybersecurity company called DarkMatter that contracted with the United Arab Emirates to hack her phone and steal information to surveil dissidents within the UAE and Saudi Arabia.⁶⁷ The lawsuit is the latest legal challenge to the cyber-surveillance industry, which often sells hacking services used by authoritarian regimes to break into the phones of political opponents, journalists and human rights activists.

5.5 Law Enforcement

Identifying and combating transnational repression also requires significant involvement from all levels of U.S. law enforcement. At the federal level, there is a transnational repression fusion center housed within the FBI, which is the primary law enforcement entity investigating specific cases. The FBI encourages victims of transnational repression to report incidents to their tip line, and any such incidents that are noted as potential acts of transnational repression — whether or not they rise to the level of crimes — are reviewed by the fusion center.⁶⁸ The fusion center, which was created in 2022, marks a significant response to the increasing instances of transnational repression carried out in the U.S., as it provides a central body that can monitor potential violations across nationwide bureaus. The cell has also adopted a training and orientation component, which engages local bureaus and law enforcement bodies and raises awareness about acts of TNR. In addition to the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established a unit to specifically address transnational repression.

In 2022, the FBI created a transnational repression fusion center to improve its identification of abuses and bolster inter-agency work to address them.

While federal law enforcement has become increasingly aware of the threat of transnational repression, local police forces may not have the same level of awareness or be adequately equipped to respond to incidents of TNR or report them to the FBI. For example, one Saudi activist reported that a Saudi government official threatened to kidnap her in her rural U.S. town last year; however, she never heard back from federal agents about her case. In another case, the Egyptian government allegedly used an unregistered foreign agent, Pierre Girgis, to surveil local activists and influence the New York Police Department (NYPD) regarding Egyptian dissidents. Per an indictment, Girgis received private information from the NYPD.⁶⁹ While Girgis was arrested, neither the NYPD nor the DOJ took any public action to address the NYPD's role in passing information and meeting with Egyptian intelligence officials.

Federal law enforcement's ability to effectively combat transnational repression depends on victims coming forward to provide information about their cases — a relationship between vulnerable communities and police agencies that requires trust. In addition to incidents like that of the NYPD and Girgis, the wide scope of the FBI's surveillance of mosques and Muslim and Arab American communities in the aftermath of 9/11 has led to distrust of federal and local law enforcement among a demographic at high risk of TNR. As a result, many who may be vulnerable to transnational repression by Saudi Arabia and Egypt may also be unwilling to report individual cases to the FBI or local police.

5.6 Foreign Policy

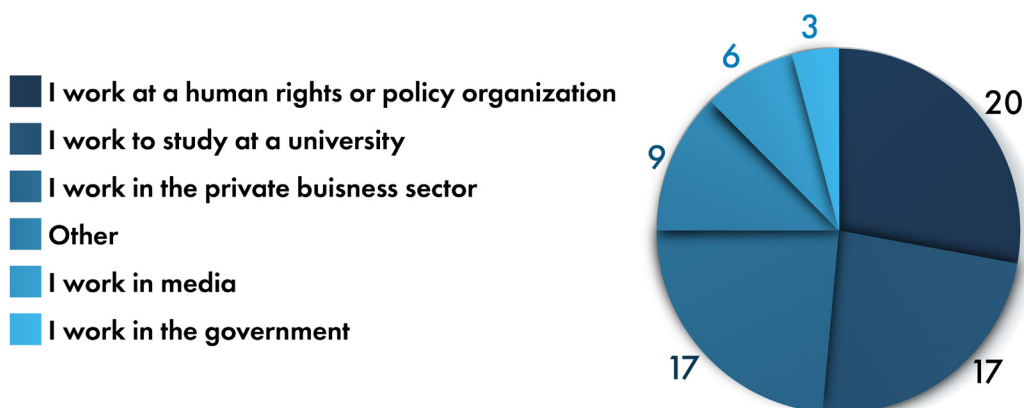
Transnational repression has increasingly become a concern for U.S. bi- and multilateral relationships, and the U.S. government's response to transnational repression in Egypt and Saudi Arabia is situated within the U.S. government's broader foreign policy, one that has clearly identified Egypt and Saudi Arabia as strategic partners to the United States and its geopolitical interests. President Biden's trip to Jeddah in July 2022, during which he met personally with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and "bumped fists" with MBS, offered an undeniable sign of these leaders' proximity to the administration. These dynamics are reflected in an apparent reticence to hold these authoritarian partners to account for their acts of transnational repression. Shortly after Biden's visit, the State Department released a new risk category in its travel advisories, warning Americans about the risk of wrongful detention when traveling to certain countries. The list included Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea and Venezuela — countries that are political adversaries to the U.S. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two countries with a track record of detaining Americans, are noticeably absent.⁷⁰ While Biden and other senior officials confirm that they raised human rights concerns in discussions during and after the Jeddah trip, the State Department subsequently supported MBS' claim to immunity in the Cengiz case, and Biden warmly embraced el-Sisi in Washington, D.C. on the sidelines of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.⁷¹

Chapter 6: Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Findings

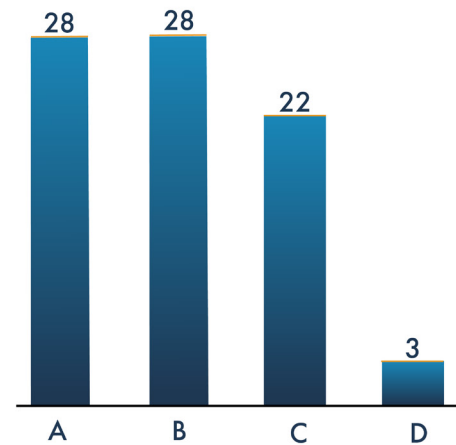
- **Transnational repression is an explicit product of authoritarianism and relies on its systems of incarceration:** Egypt and Saudi Arabia’s long arm of repression would be impossible to maintain if not for the credibility of their threats to arbitrarily detain, torture, disappear or even murder within their own borders. Acts of extraterritorial violence, while they receive a great deal of public attention, are exceedingly rare, and most transnational repression involves the threat of harm upon return or harm to loved ones or assets in country.
- **Egypt and Saudi Arabia have become more innovative and emboldened in TNR:** Participants felt that the Saudi government in the last year has been emboldened to engage more aggressively in acts of TNR without fear of consequence. The use of litigation to target dissidents that could not be lured back to Saudi Arabia also represents a novel TNR strategy. As the U.S. government has focused on the return of Americans detained abroad, both Saudi Arabia and Egypt have in turn detained family members as hostages.
- **There is no “typical” TNR victim:** Our research identified political and human rights activists, dissidents, journalists and political opponents as targets of transnational repression, as well as individuals without a public profile and who did not fall under any of these categories. A common denominator among the targets was that they may have witnessed or experienced violations in Saudi Arabia or Egypt or had special knowledge of violations that could be damning if brought to public attention. Where they did not have a public profile, victims of TNR often had access to influential individuals in the United States, including members of civil society and policymakers.

Respondents’ Professions and Identity Markers



Respondents' Professions and Identity Markers

- A. I identify as a member of the Egyptian or Saudi diaspora
- B. I identify as Egyptian or Saudi
- C. I do not identify as a member of the Egyptian or Saudi diaspora
- D. Other



- **TNR is affecting individuals and communities across the U.S.:** Among the 72 respondents from across the United States who reported personal or professional ties to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, fewer than one-third reported that they had never been subjected to repression in the U.S., and only one reported that repression had no impact on their behavior. This wide geographic and demographic spread has made identifying and combatting TNR more difficult. Reports to U.S. authorities may not be taken as seriously for those who are not public figures typically identified as targets of TNR. This was the case with some victims in rural areas, where law enforcement agencies were not prepared to deal with threats.
- **Neither the strategic alliance that both countries share with the U.S. nor the “friendliness” of relations deterred acts of transnational repression:** Respondents reported incidents of TNR that ranged from over five years prior to as recently as late 2022. This period has seen significant shifts in U.S. policy toward Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Friendlier relations under former president Donald Trump were tempered with President Biden’s campaign promises to make MBS a “pariah” and offer “no blank checks” to el-Sisi. Today, as we note in Section 5.6, administration officials have emphasized Egypt and Saudi Arabia’s strategic partnership and have privately shared beliefs that closer ties may lead to greater influence on a rights agenda. Yet, despite these warmer ties, respondents reported no decrease in acts of TNR, with 19 acts reported from September 2021 to 2022, compared to 23 in the four years prior.
- **An erosion of trust between victims of TNR and the U.S. agencies tasked with protecting them has created obstacles to effectively addressing TNR:** When experiencing transnational repression, only half of respondents reported it to local law enforcement and very few to federal law enforcement. They were much more likely to report instances to nonprofit organizations, with eight respondents having reached out to NGOs. Most respondents appreciated congressional offices but were frustrated by responses from the Department of State. Those who said they chose not to report incidents of TNR explained that there was nothing that they felt could be done to help them, and 10 respondents said they did not feel they had access to justice in the United States. When asked why they did not report abuses, one person responded, “Who am I?” Another responded: “The legal system failed me and allowed and enabled the Saudi government to abuse me.”

The [U.S.] legal system failed me and **allowed and enabled the Saudi government to abuse me.**” –
Anonymous respondent

6.2 Recommendations

Taking the above into consideration, we propose that addressing transnational repression requires combatting the root of repression (i.e., authoritarian regimes' insistence on absolute control over public discourse and dissent), as well as mitigating its effects. Tackling authoritarianism through strong bi- and multilateral policies that leverage material and diplomatic resources to promote respect for rights must be paired with legislation, law enforcement approaches and awareness activities to identify, protect and seek justice for victims domestically.

For Congress

- Pass legislation that defines transnational repression, outlines criminal penalties and provides additional appropriations for enforcement. Sens. Jeff Merkley, Marco Rubio, Ben Cardin, and Bill Hagerty introduced the Transnational Repression Policy Act (S.831) in March 2023, which achieves many of these aims and several additional goals. We urge Congress to support this bill, as congressional efforts to address TNR had been largely piecemeal prior to this legislation.
- Appropriate funds for the creation of an inter-agency task force on TNR to improve coordination within the U.S. government.
- Expand the Levinson Act to include wrongful detention of American family members as acts of state hostage-taking and ensure that Levinson Act criteria are applied fairly to those detained by allied countries.
- Take seriously reports of TNR from constituents and use public platforms to call out these abuses, especially when done by allied countries like Saudi Arabia or Egypt.
- Appropriate funding that may be used to support U.S.-based activists, human rights defenders and others in exile and at risk of TNR.
- Renew unclassified reporting requirements (slated to sunset in 2025) for the Attorney General and the Secretary of State to report biannually to Congress about the abuse of INTERPOL red notices and make the reports required on an annual basis.

For the State Department and White House

- Carry out regular coordinating meetings with relevant agencies to discuss the threat of TNR and ensure that sufficient consideration is given to TNR perpetrated by allied and hostile states alike.
- Arrange regular meetings with civil society and victims of TNR to stay informed of changes to patterns and tactics.
- Call out instances of TNR publicly and frequently, especially when conducted by allied countries. TNR from adversarial countries like China or Iran receives warranted attention, but the executive branch must send strong signals to allies that TNR will not be tolerated.

- Increase the use of existing sanctions authorities to target individuals implicated in TNR violations and do not shy away from announcing sanctions publicly for further deterrence.
- Expand upon reporting in the Country Reports on Human Rights by covering all forms of TNR (rather than only those that relate to denial of a fair trial, and standardize these sections across countries).

For the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Department of Homeland Security

- Where possible, seek maximum sentences for perpetrators of crimes that involve TNR to deter engagement in the behavior, as seen in the case of *the United States of America v. Ibrahim Alhussayen*.
- Expand on existing FBI training and awareness programs to help local law enforcement agencies understand TNR and protect local citizens, especially where large diaspora communities are present.
- Work with trusted interlocutors to rebuild trust within communities vulnerable to TNR.

Civil Society

- Provide trainings for local communities, diaspora groups and supporters to demystify the concept of TNR and improve reporting to U.S. law enforcement.
- Develop relationships with law enforcement to serve as a conduit between diaspora communities and relevant agencies.
- Develop materials to orient potential victims of TNR to their rights.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

- **AIMC:** Arab Interior Ministers Council
- **DOJ:** Department of Justice
- **DHS:** Department of Homeland Security
- **FARA:** Foreign Agents Registration Act
- **FBI:** The Federal Bureau of Investigation
- **LPR:** Legal permanent resident
- **MBS:** Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Prime Minister
- **NAAS:** National Assembly Party
- **SACM:** Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission
- **SFRC:** Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- **TNR:** Transnational repression
- **TRAP Act:** Transnational Accountability and Prevention Act of 2021

Endnotes

1. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Transnational Repression,” n.d., Accessed February 22 2023, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counter-intelligence/transnational-repression>.
2. Alaoudh joined the Freedom Initiative on March 13, 2023 and did not contribute to the research or drafting of this report.
3. Dana M. Moss, *The Arab Spring Abroad*, Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 71, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108980036>.
4. Gerasimos Tsourapas, “The Long Arm of the Arab State,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 2 (January 26, 2020): 351–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1585558>.
5. Elizabeth Linzer and Nate Schenkkan, “Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach,” Freedom House, February 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Complete_FH_TransnationalRepressionReport2021_rev020221.pdf.
6. Mohamed Mandour, “A Homeland Lives Within Us, But We Cannot Live in It: Egyptian Organizing and Activism from Exile,” *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, March 23, 2022, <https://timep.org/2022/03/23/a-homeland-lives-within-us-but-we-cannot-live-in-it-egyptian-organizing-and-activism-from-exile/>.
7. In March 2021, a German court convicted “Amin K.,” as an Egyptian General Intelligences Service agent who had infiltrated the German government’s press office and collected information about diaspora communities. In January 2022, the Department of Justice arrested Pierre Girgis, an Egyptian intelligence agent who had worked closely with the New York Police Department and collected information about activists in New York. See the *United States v. Pierre Girgis, Sealed Indictment*, January 5, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/press-release/file/1460931/download>.
8. Human Rights Watch, “Egypt: Families of Dissidents Targeted,” November 19, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/19/egypt-families-dissidents-targeted>; Dana M. Moss, Marcus Michaelson, and Gillian Kennedy, “Going after the Family: Transnational Repression and the Proxy Punishment of Middle Eastern Diasporas,” *Global Networks* n/a, no. n/a, accessed July 27, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12372>.
9. Gerasimos Tsourapas, “Transnational State Practices and Authoritarian Politics,” *Handbook on Transnationalism*, January 18, 2022, 128–40.
10. Dana M. Moss, “Voice After Exit: Explaining Diaspora Mobilization for the Arab Spring,” *Social Forces*, June 18, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sozo70>; Josua and Edel, “The Arab Uprisings and the Return of Repression”; Steven Heydemann, *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2007).
11. May Darwich, “Creating the Enemy, Constructing the Threat: The Diffusion of Repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East,” *Democratization* 24, no. 7 (2017): 1289–1306.
12. Larry Diamond, Marc F Plattner, and Christopher Walker, *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy* (JhU Press, 2016).
13. Borzou Daragahi, “‘They’ll be cut’: Egyptian minister threatens to behead dissidents abroad,” *The Independent*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/egypt-minister-behead-critics-dissidents-abroad-nabila-makram-a9019481.html>.
14. Alexander Dukalskis et al., “Transnational Repression: Data Advances, Comparisons, and Challenges,” *Political Research Exchange* 4, no. 1 (December 31, 2022): 2104651, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2022.2104651>.
15. United States Attorney’s Office Northern District of California, *United States v. Ahmad Abouammo*, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/united-states-v-ahmad-abouammo>.
16. Bethany al-Haidari contributed to this research and authorship of this report.
17. The Freedom Initiative, “Friend or Foe? Saudi Arabian Government Repression in the US and Worldwide,” October 2021, https://thefreedomi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FI_SaudiReport_09-21_v9-1.pdf.
18. *Abuzaid v. Almayouf Et al.*, Supreme Court of the State of New York, *Summons*, August 9, 2019, p. 2.
19. Interview with AlMayouf, September 9, 2022.
20. Isabel Debre, “Arrest of Saudi for lying to FBI shows kingdom’s reach in US [sic].,” *Associated Press*, July 19, 2022, <https://qnews.com/article/middle-east-canada-arrests-dubai-united-arab-emirates-9do4fff334bfc0702c9dca186b01c3f3c>.
21. Interview with Saudi-American citizen.
22. Sigal Samuel, “‘Mixed Feelings’ About Winning the Right to Drive,” *The Atlantic*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/saudi-arabia-women-driving/541275/>.

23. The Freedom Initiative, “Saudi Women’s Rights Activist and Mother of Two Sentenced to 34 Years in Jail,” Press Release, August 12, 2022, <https://thefreedomi.org/statements/saudi-womens-rights-activist-and-mother-of-two-sentenced-to-34-years-in-jail/>.
24. Interview with Stephanie Kirchgassner.
25. Karen Pfenniger, “From Trump Supports to a Human Rights Attorney: the Digital Influencers Who Harassed a Journalist,” Forbidden Stories, February 16, 2023, <https://forbiddenstories.org/story-killers/digital-influencers/>.
26. For more, see section on “Exemption from Legal Representation:” ”When Lawyers Become “Foreign Agents:” ”How FARA Impacts Law Firms,” The National Law Review, June 11, 2022, <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/when-lawyers-become-foreign-agents-how-fara-impacts-law-firms>.
27. Erik Larson, “Saudi-Backed LIV Golf Is Using PGA Suit to Get Data on 9/11 Families, Court Told,” Bloomberg, January 4, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-04/saudi-backed-liv-golf-using-pga-suit-to-get-data-on-9-11-families-court-told?leadSource=verify%20wall>.
28. AlHaidari v. AlHaidari, Superior Court of Chelan County. For more on the case, see MK Family Law, “Case Update (2021): AlHaidari v AlHaidari, OCCJEA and human rights,” May 18, 2021, <https://familylawcrossborders.com/case-update-2021-alhaidari-v-alhaidari-uccjea-and-human-rights/>.
29. Debre, “FBI Arrests Saudi Man.”
30. Homero De la Fuente, “LIV golfer Patrick Reed files defamation lawsuit against Golf Channel and commentator Brandel Chamblee,” CNN.com, August 18, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/18/sport/liv-golf-patrick-reed-lawsuit-spt-intl/index.html>.
31. A similar situation has played out in Canada, where Sakab is pursuing a suit against Al Jabri in Toronto. In that case, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service requested a filing that would prevent sensitive information from being used in the case. The case is ongoing. For more, see Henry Schuster, “The legal war in ‘prince v. spy,’” CBS News, July 10, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mohammed-bin-salman-alleged-plot-saad-aljabri-60-minutes-legal-war-2022-07-10>
32. The preponderance of systems associated with post-traumatic stress disorder prompts a need for further research and attention on the psychosocial effect of transnational repression.
33. Interview with Egyptian rights advocate in January 2023.
34. “Mukhabarat” refers to officers from Egypt’s General Intelligence Services, though it may also be used to refer to intelligence officers more generally.
35. Interview with former Egyptian diplomat, November 2022.
36. Interview with Aly Mahdy, April 2021.
37. While these U.S.-based incidents are more recent, they are commonplace in countries with larger exile and diaspora populations. Several activists in Turkey, which is home to one of the largest Egyptian expatriate and exile communities, shared that either they or their immediate families were denied passport and national ID renewals in their local embassies and consulates. They are told to “go back to Egypt and renew their paperwork there.” This is the case both for people who have served sentences in Egypt or have been added to cases and tried in absentia, as well as vocal critics who have not faced official charges.
38. Interview with Egyptian in exile, February 2023.
39. Interview with Ezzedine Fishere.
40. “For publishing footage alleging to show torture, nine sentenced to life by terrorism court,” Mada Masr, December 1, 2022, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2022/12/01/news/u/for-publishing-footage-alleging-to-show-torture-nine-sentenced-to-life-by-terrorism-court/>.
41. Emad El-Din Shahin, “Sentenced to Death in Egypt,” The Atlantic, May 19, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/05/death-sentence-egypt-emad-shahin/393590/>.
42. The AIMC was also the body responsible for facilitating an arrest warrant of Saudi activist Hassan al-Rabea in Morocco in January 2023. Al-Rabea was swiftly deported to Saudi Arabia, despite urging from the UN Committee Against Torture to halt his extradition. For more on the AIMC and its role in extraditions, see: “Understanding the Arab Interior Ministers’ Council of the Arab League and its role in transnational repression,” MENA Rights Group, March 9, 2023, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/aimc>.
43. Interview with Sherif Osman in January 2023. For more on Osman’s case and the role of the U.A.E. see MENA Rights Group, “Political commentator Sherif Osman facing extradition from UAE to Egypt after calling for protests during COP27,” published December 22, 2022 and updated February 7, 2023, <https://www.menarights.org/en/case/sherif-osman-and-Mohamed-Mandour>, “From Egypt, Sisi’s Long Arm of Repression Targets Americans Too, Just Security, January 9, 2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/84687/from-egypt-sisis-long-arm-of-repression-targets-americans-too/>.
44. Reports Without Borders states: “virtually all media are under direct control of the state, of the secret services or of a handful of millionaire businessmen with influence in ruling circles.” See Reporters Without Borders, Egypt, <https://rsf.org/en/country/egypt>.
45. See also segments from Nashaat ElDeehy that labels Mohamed Soltan a terrorist, “Know that he is a terrorist and the son of a terrorist,” Ten TV, November 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjrfCJJ6Nv4>.
46. “Actors accused of ‘high treason’ after meeting with US lawmakers,” ABC News, March 27, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/egyptian-actors-accused-high-treason-meeting-us-lawmakers/story?id=61978935>
47. “Mohamed ElBazz reveals reality of Aly Mahdy and details about Eli Cohen,” AlNahar TV, February 12, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12SEkCiq1NQ>

48. During a July 2021 visit to the US, the Director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate, Abbas Kamel, lobbied US senators to detain Soltan in the U.S., citing a signature by U.S. embassy officials in Cairo that conditioned his release and transfer to the U.S. on serving the rest of his life sentence in the United States. The incident underscores how different forms of transnational repression (direct and indirect) are not mutually exclusive. See Nahal Toosi, “In D.C. visit, Egypt spy boss claims U.S. agreed — in writing — to jail American activist,” *POLITICO*, July 12, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/07/12/egypt-spy-boss-jail-american-498983>.
49. Stop Transnational Repression Act, H.R. 9460, December 7, 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/9460/text?r=16&s=1>.
50. *bid.* Section 4 (d)(4).
51. The Bill referenced the FBI’s definition of TNR as “foreign government transgression of national borders through physical and digital means to intimidate, silence, coerce, harass, or harm members of diaspora and exile communities.” (*Ibid.*) The FBI describes TNR on its website as “when foreign governments stalk, intimidate, or assault people in the United States.”
52. I The Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention Act of 2021, S. 1591, May 12, 2021, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-117s1591s/html/BILLS-117s1591s.htm>.
53. *Ibid.*, Sec. 2. (5) & (6).
54. *Ibid.*, Sec. 6 (2) (k).
55. Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, “Justice Department Solicits Public Comments on Possible Regulatory Modifications to Foreign Agents Registration Act,” December 8, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-solicits-public-comments-possible-regulatory-modifications-foreign-agents>.
56. 22 U.S. Code § 613(g).
57. Revealing and Explaining Visa Exclusions for Accountability and Legitimacy Act. S. 2392, July 20, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2392/text?s=2&r=2&q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22%5C%22transnational+repression%5C%22%22%5D%7D>.
58. Anthony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, “Accountability for the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi,” Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, February 26, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/accountability-for-the-murder-of-jamal-khashoggi/>.
59. Mariam Berger, “FAQ: What Biden did – and didn’t do – after U.S. report on Khashoggi’s killing by Saudi agents,” *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/02/27/faq-what-biden-did-didnt-do-after-us-report-khashoggis-killing-by-saudi-agents/>.
60. Anthony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, “Promoting Accountability for Human Rights Abuses Perpetrated by the Governments of Russia and Belarus,” Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, March 15, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/promoting-accountability-for-human-rights-abuses-perpetrated-by-the-governments-of-russia-and-belarus/>.
61. Executive Order on Bolstering Efforts to Bring Hostages and Wrongfully Detained United States Nationals Home, Office of the President of the United States of America, Joseph R. Biden, July 19, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/07/19/executive-order-on-bolstering-efforts-to-bring-hostages-and-wrongfully-detained-united-states-nationals-home/>.
62. Letter from Richard C. Visek, Acting Legal Adviser of the United States Department of State, RE: Cengiz v. Mohammed bin Salman (D.D.C. 20-cv-3009), November 17, 2022, https://docs-cdn-prod.news-engineering.aws.wapo.pub/publish_document/9672edo1-b76f-4383-8fb6-968926f6d79a/published/9672edo1-b76f-4383-8fb6-968926f6d79a.pdf.
63. Stephanie Kirchgassner, “Mohammed bin Salman named prime minister ahead of Khashoggi lawsuit,” *The Guardian*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/27/mohammed-bin-salman-named-prime-minister-ahead-of-khashoggi-lawsuit>.
64. Spencer Hsu and John Hudson, “Biden administration upholds former Egyptian leader’s immunity from torture lawsuit by U.S. citizen,” *The Washington Post*, April 5, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/egypt-torture-lawsuit-immunity/2021/04/05/31d74746-93d9-11eb-a74e-1f4cf89fd948_story.html.
65. Jessica Davis, “Supreme Court denies NSO Group appeal; Meta’s spyware claims lawsuit can proceed,” January 9, 2023, *SC Magazine*, <https://www.scmagazine.com/news/device-security/supreme-court-denies-nso-group-appeal-metas-spyware-claims-lawsuit-can-proceed>.
66. *Ibid.*
67. “Saudi activist Loujain al-Hathloul files lawsuit claiming 3 former U.S. officials helped hack her iPhone before she was imprisoned, tortured,” *CBS News*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/loujain-al-hathloul-lawsuit-former-us-officials-hacking-prison-torture/>.
68. See the FBI’s Tip Line at tips.fbi.gov.
69. *United States v. Girgis*.
70. The Foley Foundation, for instance, reported that Egypt and Iran had detained more U.S. nationals than any other country in the world since 2001, including U.S. citizen Mustafa Kassem, who died in detention in 2019. See Cynthia Tselepis Loertscher, *Bringing Americans Home*, The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, <https://jamesfoleyfoundation.org/american-hostage-report-2022>.
71. “Sisi meets with Biden on sidelines of US-Africa Leaders Summit,” *Egypt Independent*, December 16, 2022, <https://egyptindependent.com/sisi-meets-with-biden-on-sidelines-of-us-africa-leaders-summit/>.



The End

The Freedom Initiative is a 501(c)3 organization based in Washington, D.C., advocating to end systems of wrongful detention in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Freedom Initiative
1101 New York Avenue NW
Washington, D.C.



For more information, please visit
www.thefreedomi.org