

Egypt ranks worst for women's rights in the Arab world

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The [Thomson Reuters Foundation](#) has released the findings of its third annual poll of women's rights in the Arab world.

The poll, which surveyed more than 330 gender experts in 21 Arab League states and Syria, reveals Egypt as the worst country in the Arab world for respecting the human rights of women. Iraq ranked second-worst, followed by Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

According to those consulted, despite the role of women in bringing about the Egyptian Arab Spring, entrenched patriarchal structures and the rise of Islamists mean that the anticipated gender equality in the country has not been realised.

One author [notes](#) that, "sexual violence, harassment and trafficking combined with a breakdown of security, high rates of female genital mutilation and a rollback of freedoms since the 2011 revolution put Egypt at the bottom of the poll".

Up to 99.3% of women in Egypt have experienced sexual harassment and 27.2 million women are subjected to female genital mutilation – the report points out that this is the largest number in any single country in the world.

Egypt comes ahead of Saudi Arabia, a country that has some deeply discriminatory laws against women, such as all adult females needing a "guardian", a woman's say in court being worth half that of a man, permitted polygamy for men, segregation of women, marital rape not being recognised, rape victims at risk of being charged with adultery, and an effective ban on women driving.

Saudi Arabia scored better however, in terms of reproductive rights (the contraceptive pill is available without prescription there).

Arab Spring countries Syria and Yemen, which ranked 18th and 19th respectively, have come out worse than Sudan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories and Somalia, which did better in terms of reproductive rights and sexual violence, political and economic inclusion, and the woman's position within the family.

The two other Arab Spring countries Tunisia and Libya came in 6th and 9th respectively.

Iraq, which was ranked as second worst by the poll, has a penal code that allows men who kill their wives to serve a maximum of three years in prison, and mass displacement there has left women vulnerable to sexual violence and trafficking.

The Comoros ranked best overall, and polled well across all categories apart from political representation – women have only 3% of seats in the national parliament. Oman (where FGM is still practiced and women inherit half of what a man can), Kuwait (which has no laws against domestic abuse and marital rape), Jordan (which ranked second-worst in the category of honour killings) and Qatar (where about 100 expatriate women are jailed annually for having children out of

wedlock) followed the Comoros at the top of the rankings.

For a more detailed analysis of the rankings see [here](#).

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