منصة العدالة الاجتماعية
Social Justice Platform

2018

A Year of Social and Economic Protests

The Reforms' Reckoning

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www.sjplatform.org

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Almost three years after the Egyptian state floated its currency and reduced energy subsidies, as part of a contentious "economic reform program" outlined in the terms of the IMF loan, more and more Egyptians have been pushed below the poverty line. The effect of these austerity measures is gradually spreading out to affect millions of Egyptians. And despite a trend to dismiss and undermine any type of dissent, and a tendency to demonize protests as forms of foreign intervention or egoistic sectoral demands, different groups of Egyptians continued to voice their concern, anger, and dissatisfaction via various tools in 2018.

On the occasion of Labor Day, the Social Justice Platform present the annual data collected on labor, economic, and social protests that took place in 2018, accompanied by preliminary comparisons, analysis, and reflection. Amid the ongoing restrictions on civil rights, press freedoms, and the ability to organize either socially or politically, we documented a remarkable count of 2,502 protests (39.33% more than 2017). These included strikes, production halts, demonstrations, and sit-ins, among other forms of protests carried out by workers, farmers, and many other protesting groups. We also documented a shockingly increasing tendency for self-mutilation, and sometimes suicide, as a form of protest.

More price hikes are expected in mid-2019 as Egypt receives the last portion of the IMF loan. This goes hand in hand with an increasingly militarized public sphere and an increasingly brittle organized opposition. But despite this, and despite the state's attempts to portray a "positive image" for the effects of the "economic reforms," thousands of civilians throughout the country have been protesting harsh conditions, notwithstanding firmer restrictions on the right to association. Civilians, workers, students, professionals, farmers, and villagers have not ceased to express themselves, demanding social justice and a better life.

Introduction

In January 2018, dozens of farmers in the Serso district of Daqahliya staged a sit-in and demonstrated in front of the governorate building, demanding the handing over of the lands they had owned since the 1960s.[1] And even though the Agrarian Reform Authority had previously declared the farmers owners of the land,[2] they accused the government of postponing all procedures to implement the verdict and legalize the status of the land, which has fallen into dispute since the times of Sadat. The protest, according to the farmers' testimony, was attended to by police forces and ended up being dispersed. A second incident occurred on December 31, 2018 south of Sohag, where an employee of al-Azhar committed suicide due to his inability to provide for his family.

These incidents, categorized as social and economic protests respectively, are only two of 2502 protest incidents recorded and documented by the Social Justice Platform (SJP) team in 2018. While the first incident demanded that the authorities intervene to implement a legal verdict that was issued in the protesters' favor, the second presents a form of protest which has boomed in 2018—"self-mutilation," through which victims protest the harsh economic conditions by inflicting harm on themselves.

In this report, we presents the annual data collected on labor, economic, and social protests that took place in 2018, while attempting to offer comparisons, analysis, and reflection. The aim of this report is to provide researchers, journalists, students, and interested persons with a database and a preliminary analysis of protests in Egypt, hoping for more public engagement, amid a trend to dismiss and undermine any type of dissent in the Egyptian public sphere, and a tendency to demonise protests as forms of foreign intervention or egoistic sectoral demands at a minimum.[3]

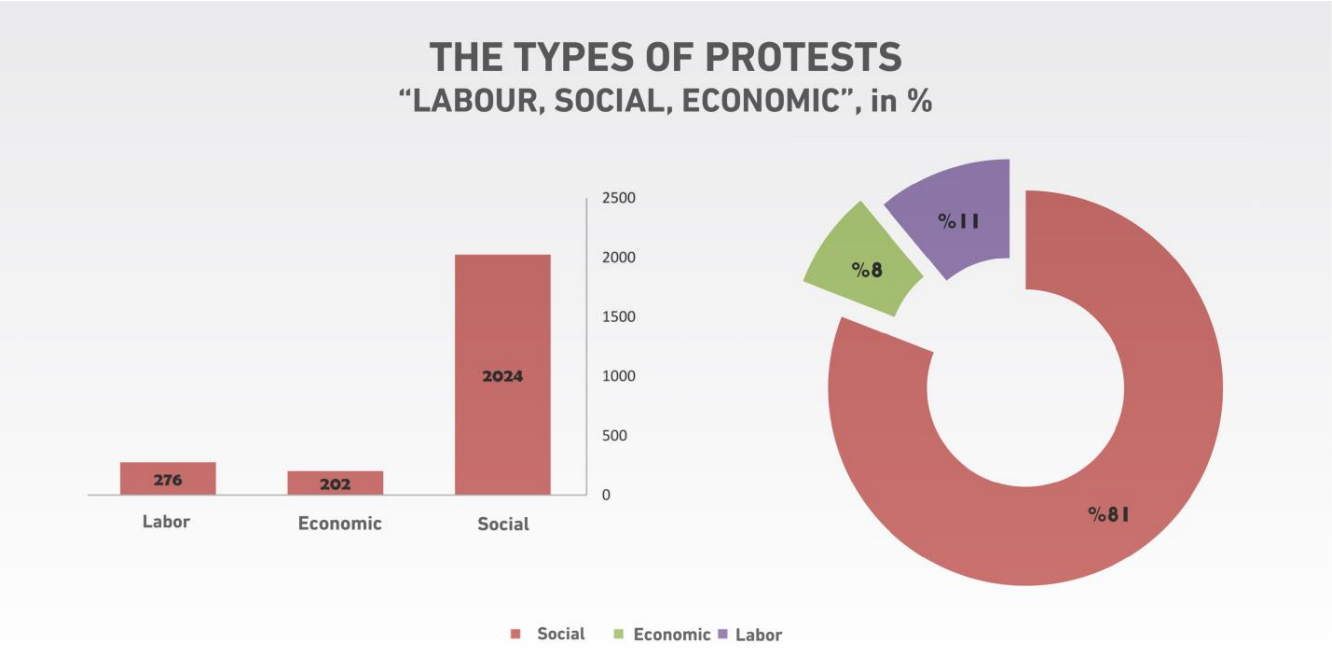
[1] Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, "Serso Farmers Crisis: Police Detains Woman and Baby, ECESR Lawyer Withdraws from Case" [in Arabic], April 26, 2015, https://ecesr.org/?p=769980.
[2] Mohamed Hamama, "Agrarian Reform Authority Asserts Land Ownership to Serso Farmers" [in Arabic], *Mada Masr*, July 13, 2015, https://bit.ly/2UrISHM.
[3] For example, pro-state TV presenter Ahmed Moussa claimed the 2017 strike by the Misr Spinning and Weaving workers was induced and manipulated by the Muslim Brotherhood. See "Trust Me on This: Muslim Brotherhood's Attempts to Make Use of the Mahalla Strike" [in Arabic], YouTube video, 6:13, Aug 19, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HUW4LvOneE.

Our ongoing effort to collect information and data on daily protests sheds light on the considerable limitations of any attempt to such documentation—including the issue of access to information. Thus, this report is mainly dependent on media reports from a different array of outlets; including governmental, independent, privately-owned, pro-state outlets, and outlets affiliated with political parties. This process of data collection was done keeping in mind two key aspects. While collecting data, we note a growing media tendency to ignore protests until a government body offers an official statement. This happens to preempt a possibility that the journalist and/or the news outlet be subjected to fines, imprisonment, or censorship. It is a case in point that while these lines are being written, nearly 500 websites are currently blocked[4] by the Egyptian government, some because of their acting as sources of information for different protests. In addition to this, comes the complete absence of any official or syndical database, and the usual limitations of media outlets which can sometimes ignore hyperlocal incidents—especially when in remote villages and away from Cairo, or protests that are held by minorities or disenfranchised society members.

This report depends on a methodology developed by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), in collecting and analyzing protest news stories related to economic, social, cultural, and labor rights. Adopting this methodology provides the opportunity to compare protests across the years, since 2010, and is therefore a first step towards providing longitudinal data on protest trends in Egypt.

Out of three protest categories (social, labor, and economic—see fig. 1), 2018 was dominated by social protests, with 2024 protests marking a noteworthy 80.90% of the total, while labor protests came second (276, 11.03%), and finally, economic protests were third (202, 8.07%).

[4] Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, "Blocked Websites List," accessed April 3, 2019, https://afteegypt.org/en/blocked-websites-list.



Overall Protest Trends: 2012–2018

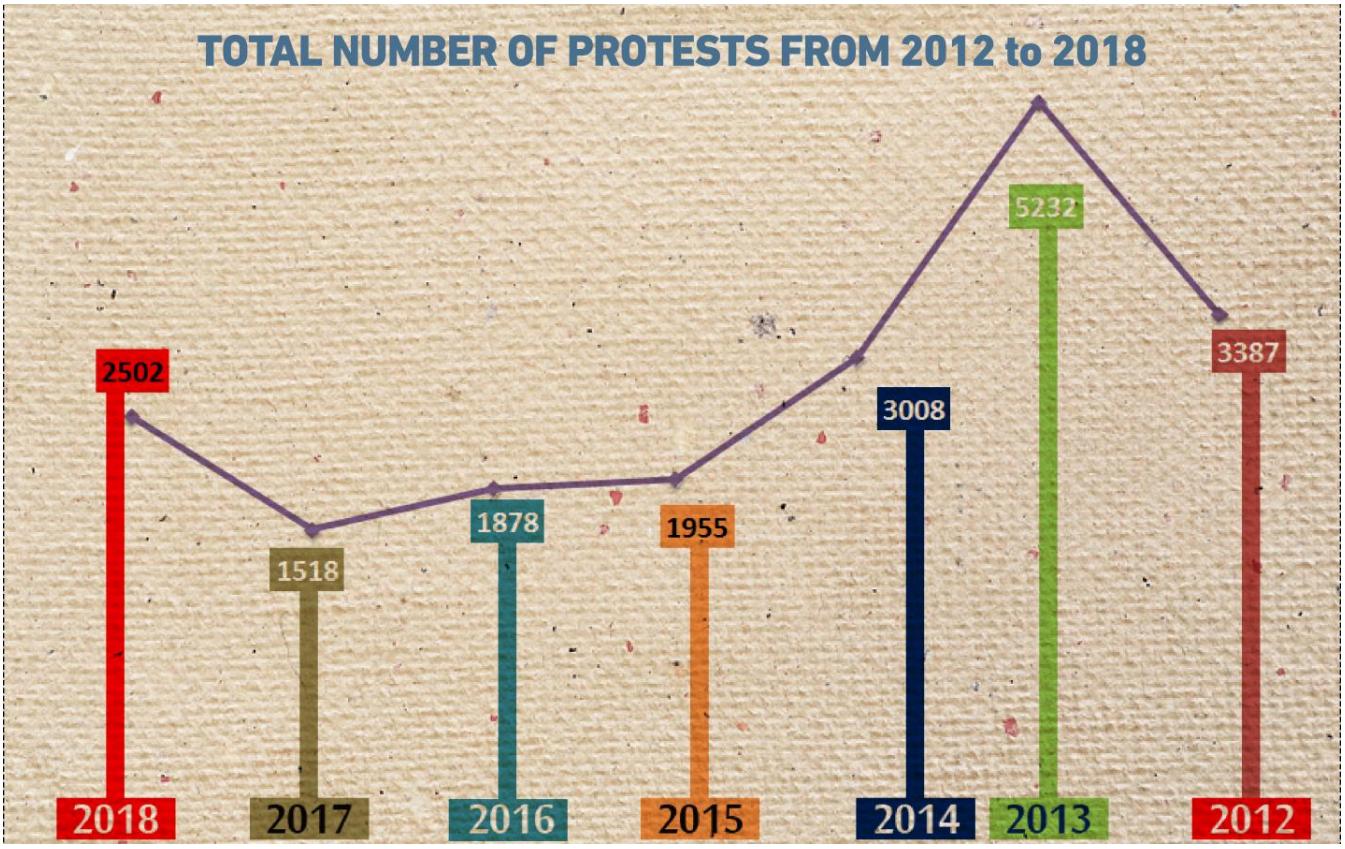
Observing and comparing the overall number of protests since 2012 can help contextualize protests of 2018. In 2012, the year leading to the military ouster of former president Mohamed Morsi, ECESR documented 3387 protests, including ones that combined economic, social, and labor demands with the political demand for ousting the Muslim-Brotherhood-affiliated president. Protests in 2013 saw a massive peak, reaching an unprecedented 5232 protests,[5] while witnessing steep and radical societal divisions and unmatched violence in the lead up to, and the period following, the military takeover.

The number of protests, however, have been steadily declining from 2014 to 2017 (see fig. 2), as the new regime, championed by former minister of defence and current president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, took over power and exercised its influence on the parliament, the government, the media, and politics in general, as well as issued laws and regulations that limited the maneuvers of the public sphere and civil society.

Despite a plethora of possible reasons for this decline in protests, it is arguably primarily the result of the state's crackdown, physical and legal, on any form of dissent and collective

[5] Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, *Protests Report 2013* [in Arabic], July 7, 2014, https://ecesr.org/?p=768677.

action, usually using nationalist rhetoric and citing the ongoing confrontation with Islamist militants and the rise of terrorism as justification. The total number of protests decreased i n 2014 to 3008 incidents, and the decline continued through 2015 (1955 incidents), 2016 (1878), and 2017 (1518).



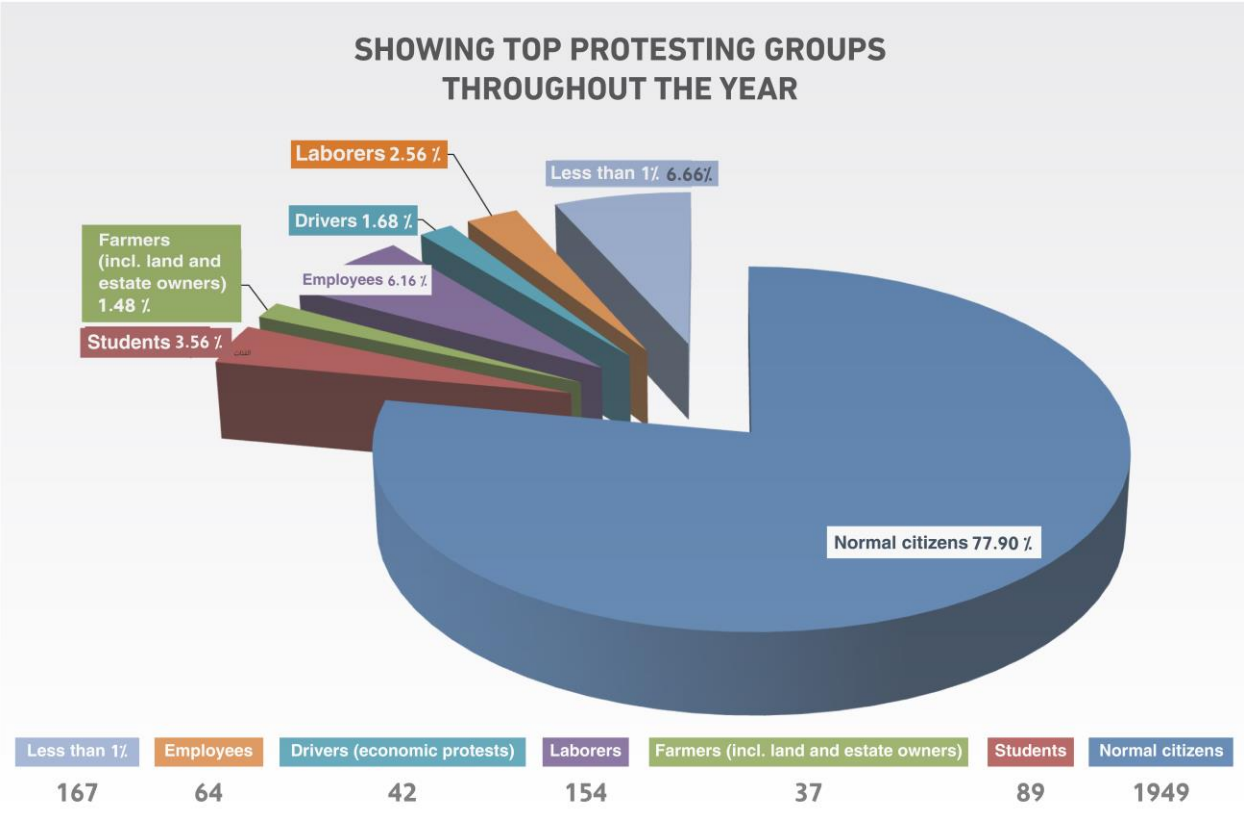
Amid all the ongoing restrictions on civil rights, press freedoms, and the ability to organize either socially or politically, 2018 scored a remarkable count of 2502 protests (39.33% more than 2017). That being said, the changing tactics that 2018 illustrates alludes to a historical moment of growing grievances at times of rising restrictions on civil and public spaces and actions.

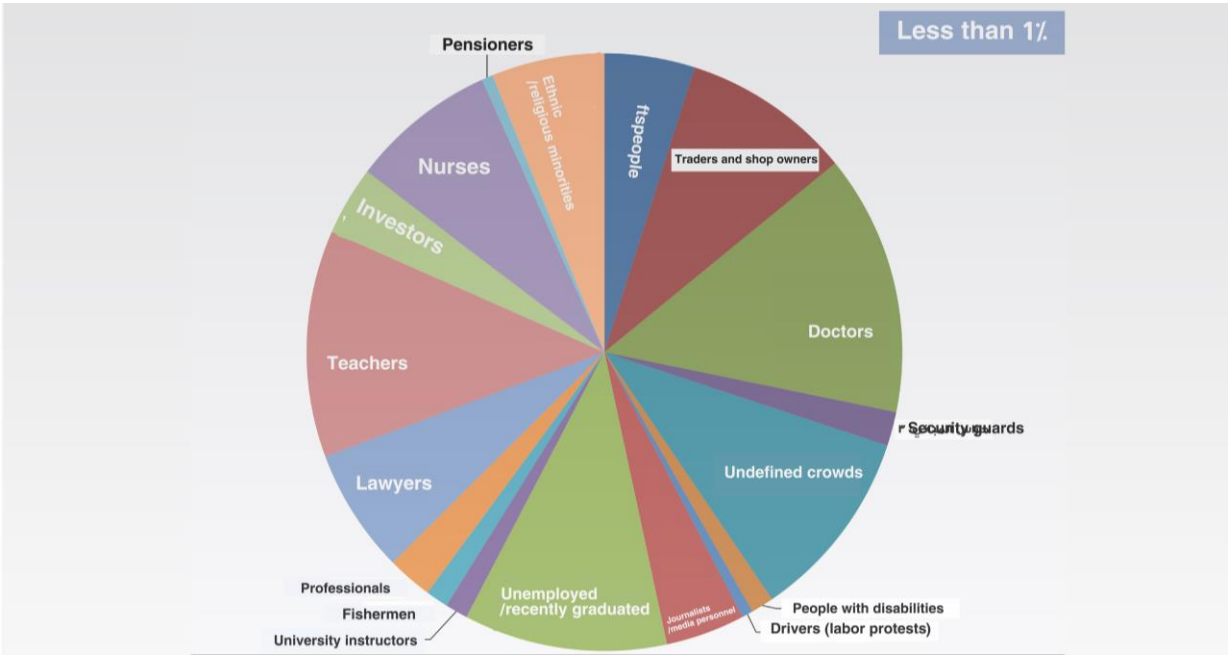
The Protesters

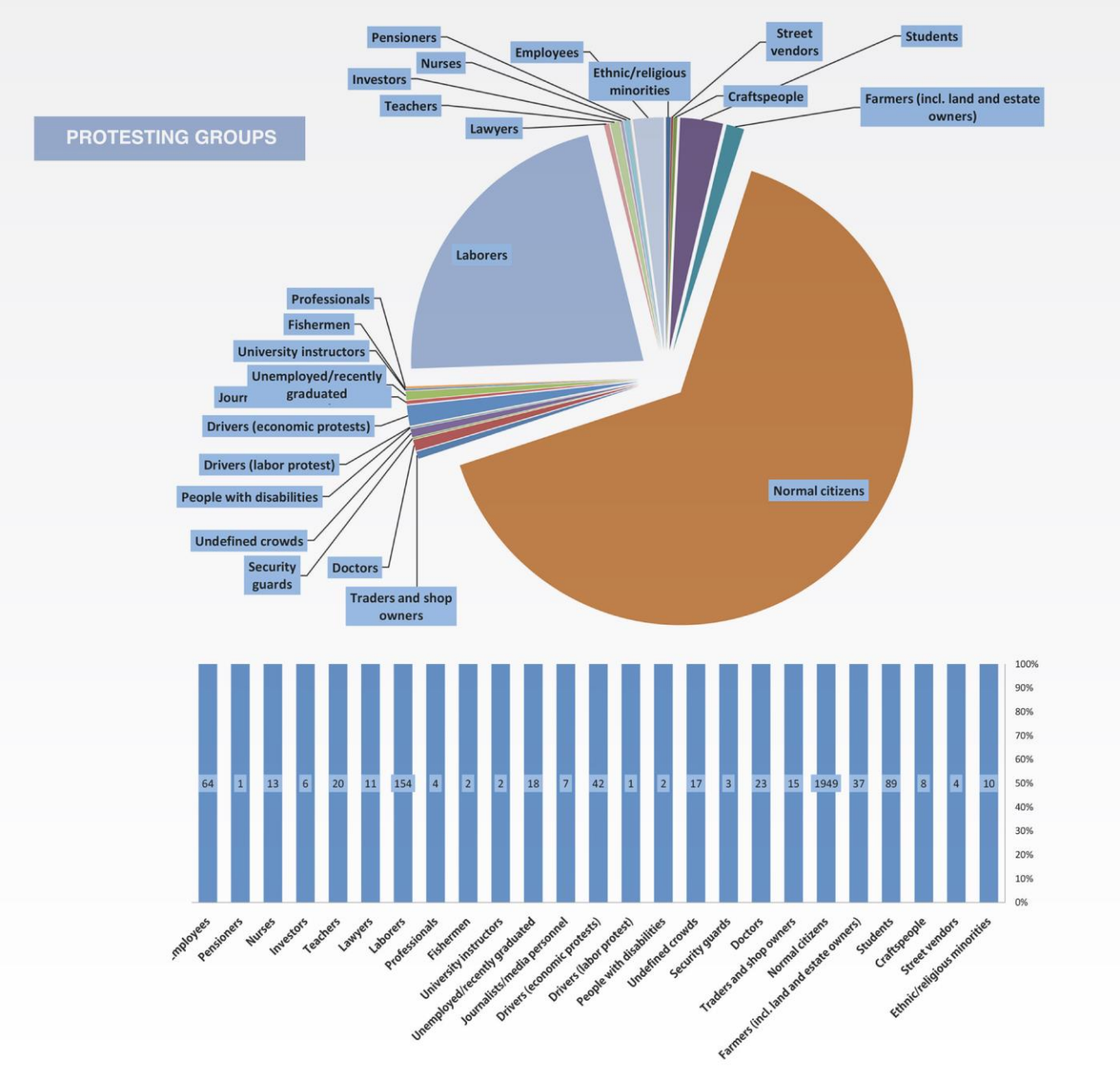
The main actors in these protests varied depending on the context of their demands and the rights they were claiming (see fig. 3). Protests for various civil demands were most prominent, as civilians demanded services; such as proper access to health, housing, education, water, roads, and sanitation. People also protested against rising living costs,

especially soaring food prices. These "civilian protesters" accounted for 77.90% of all protesting groups this year.

Workers came second, with nearly 154 industrial acts of protest, and accounting for 6.16% of the total. Next came students (89 protests, 3.56% of the total), and employees in different sectors (64, 2.56%).





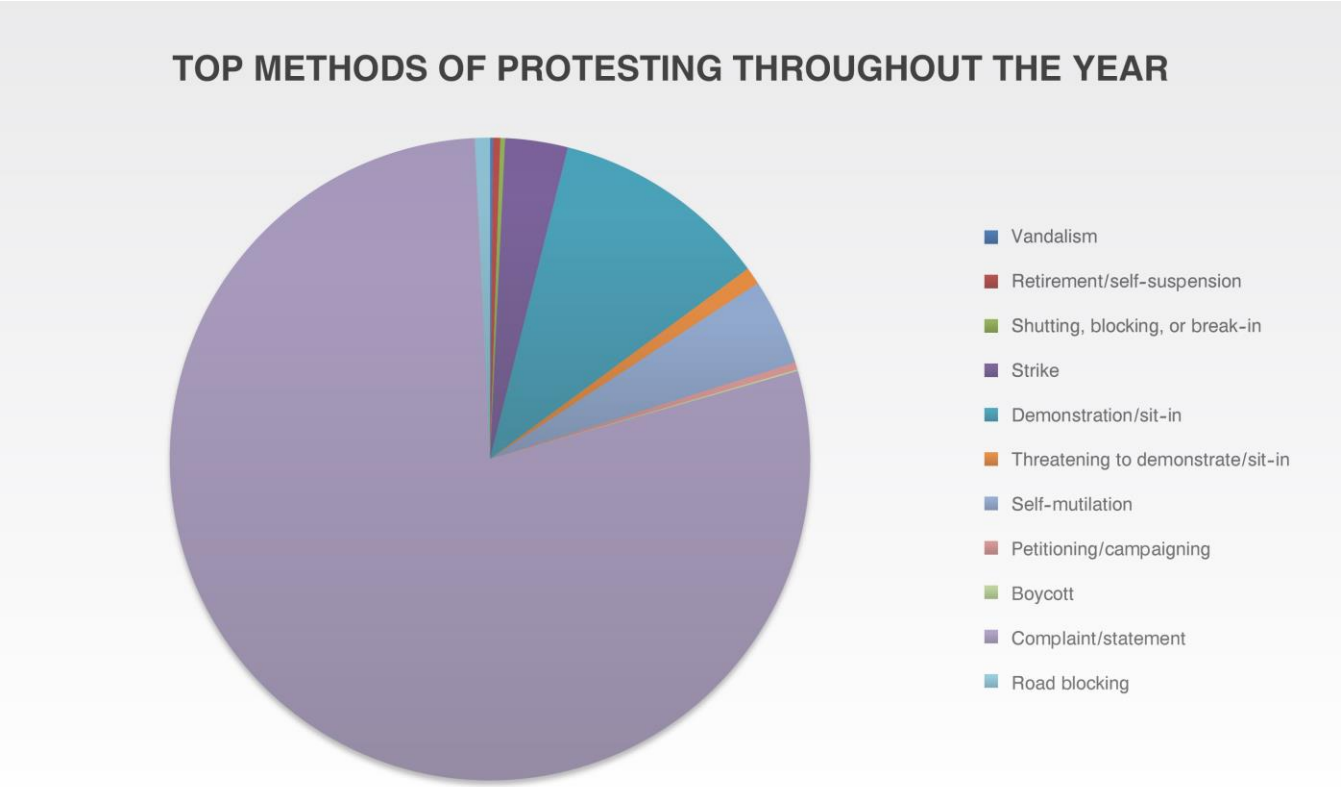


These protesting groups used a diversity of methods and tactics to voice their frustrations and demands: from written petitions and complaints, through striking, road blocking, and demonstrating, all the way to self-mutilation and even suicide as a form of protest.

"Filing a complaint, a police report, or issuing a public statement" was the top protesting method this year (see fig. 4), with 1968 incidents of protests, an absolute majority of these being undertaken through filing complaints and reports. This is unprecedented, and suggests that protesting groups currently resort to such method to voice their demands without standing accused of breaking the protest law. Demonstrations and sit-ins came second, with

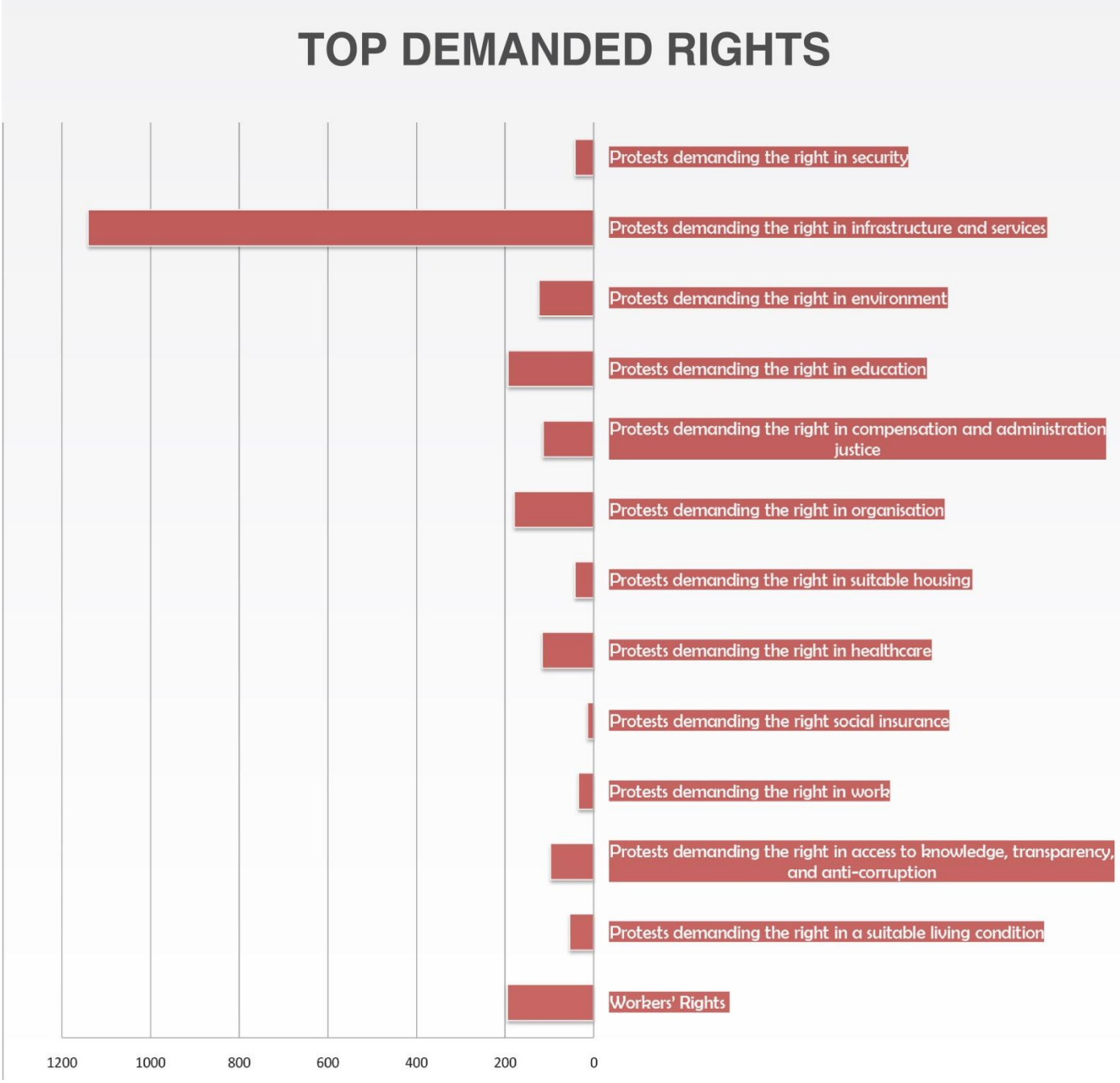
275 protests, followed by a shocking count of 109 acts of self-mutilation and 79 acts of suicide.

Finally, 79 strikes and production halts were recorded this year, marking the fourth most popular method of protests, followed by 22 acts of threatening to strike or staging a demonstration.



Protest Demands

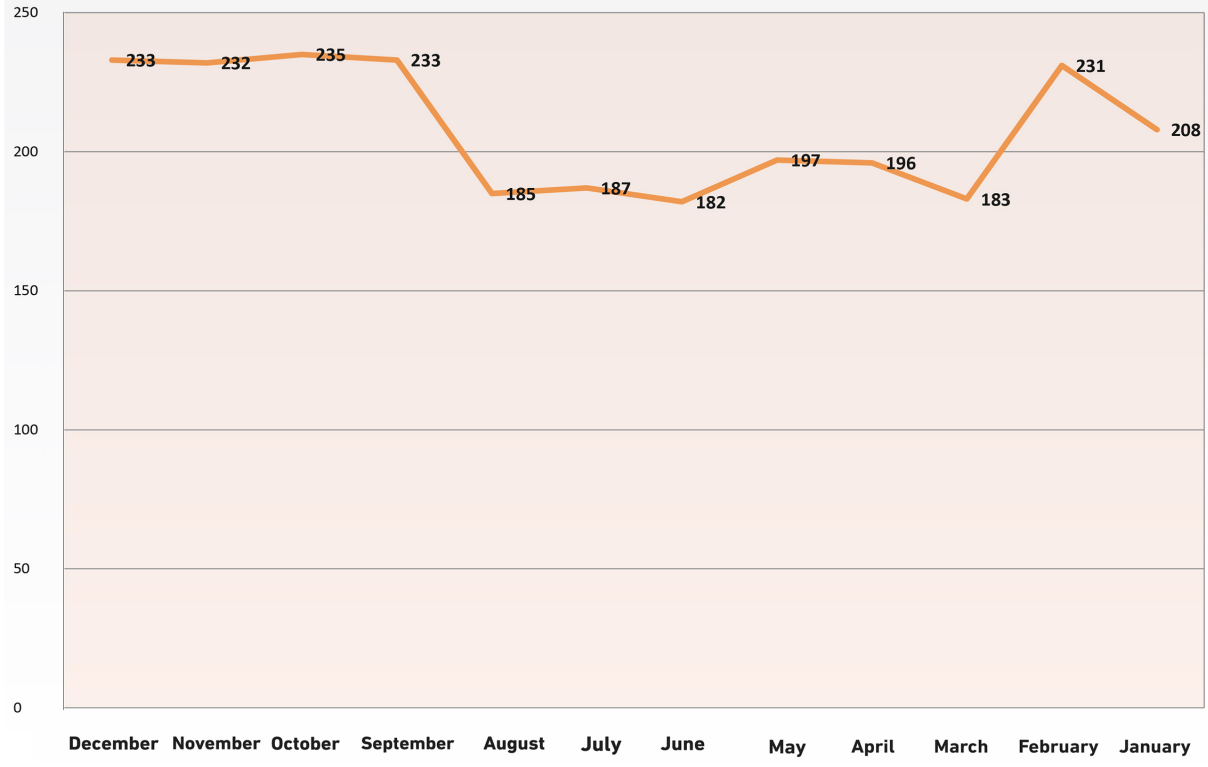
This brings us to what the various groups nationwide have been demanding. The most demanded right during 2018 was the right to accessible and functional infrastructure and public services (1140 protests, see fig. 5). This includes several sub-demands; from roads improvement to sewage maintenance. The second most demanded right was the right to security; ranging from securing churches to limiting the danger of stray dogs. Groups have also demanded better education and health services, as well as fairer contracts and work conditions, particularly voiced through industrial actions.



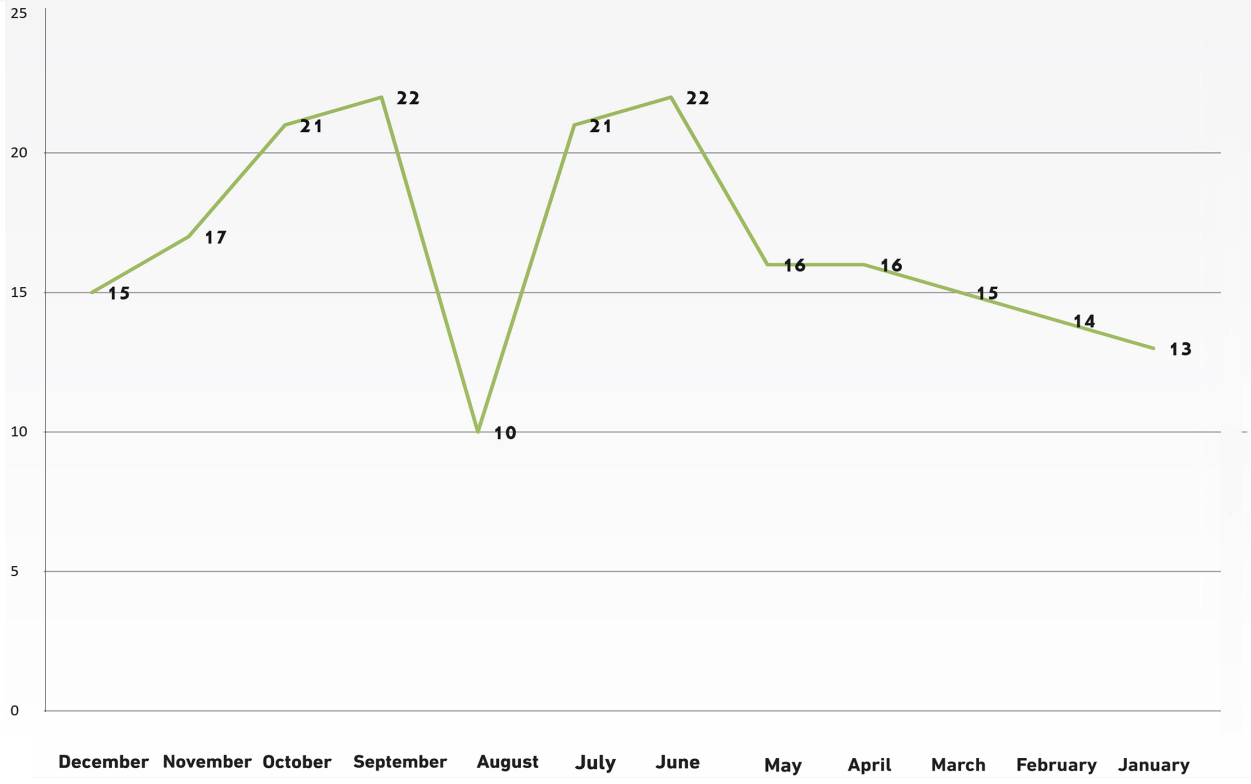
The Months of 2018

2018 set off with 208 protests in January, the majority of which were social protests (162 incidents, see fig. 6). October scored the highest count of protests (235), followed by September and December (233 each), after which came November (232) and February (231).

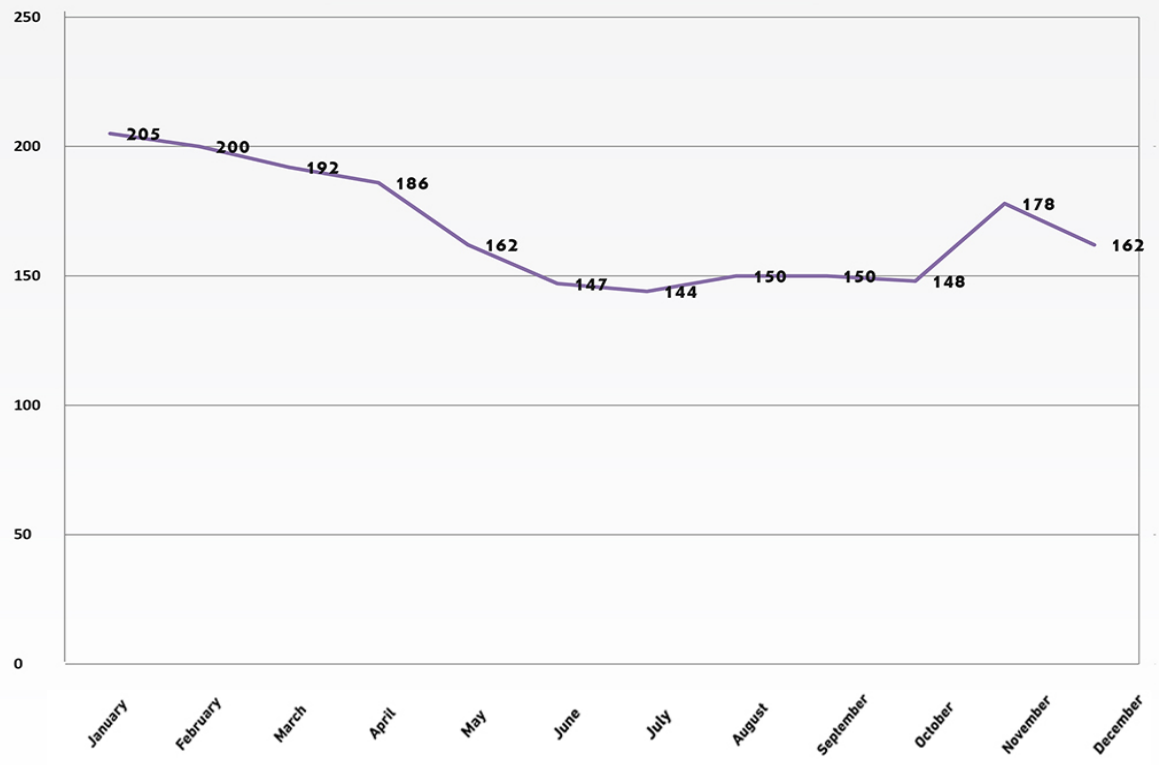
PROTESTS' DISTRIBUTION OVER 12 MONTHS



ECONOMIC PROTESTS, SPREAD OVER THE YEAR



SOCIAL PROTESTS, SPREAD OVER THE YEAR



LABOUR PROTESTS, SPREAD OVER THE YEAR

	December	November	October	September	August	July	June	May	April	March	February	January
LABOUR	13	15	22	25	13	19	16	31	30	20	39	33

However, labor protests peaked in January (33) and February (39). This graph apex at the year's beginning may be explained by overdue profits, a common issue with all business sectors—governmental, private, public, or public enterprise.

A decline in the number of protests can be seen starting February—simultaneous to the start of the Sinai 2018 military operation and the heavy deployment of armed forces on the streets. Second to last came March (183)—concurrent with Egyptian presidential elections—after June, of 182 protests.

The months from April to July saw close fluctuations, with 196 protests for April, 197 for May, 182 for June, and 187 for July.

In June, Egypt announced steep increases in fuel and cooking gas prices,[6] as part of the country's economic reforms and austerity measures justified by the need to overhaul the country's ailing economy. This happens to be the same month of the 2018 FIFA World Cup which largely engaged the public's attention, and is also the month with the lowest number of protests (182). Of these protests, 22 were of economic nature, and 16 were labor protests (second only to December and August with 13 labor protests each).

After the end of August, protests per month peaked in October (235 protests), with September and December following closely (233 protests each).

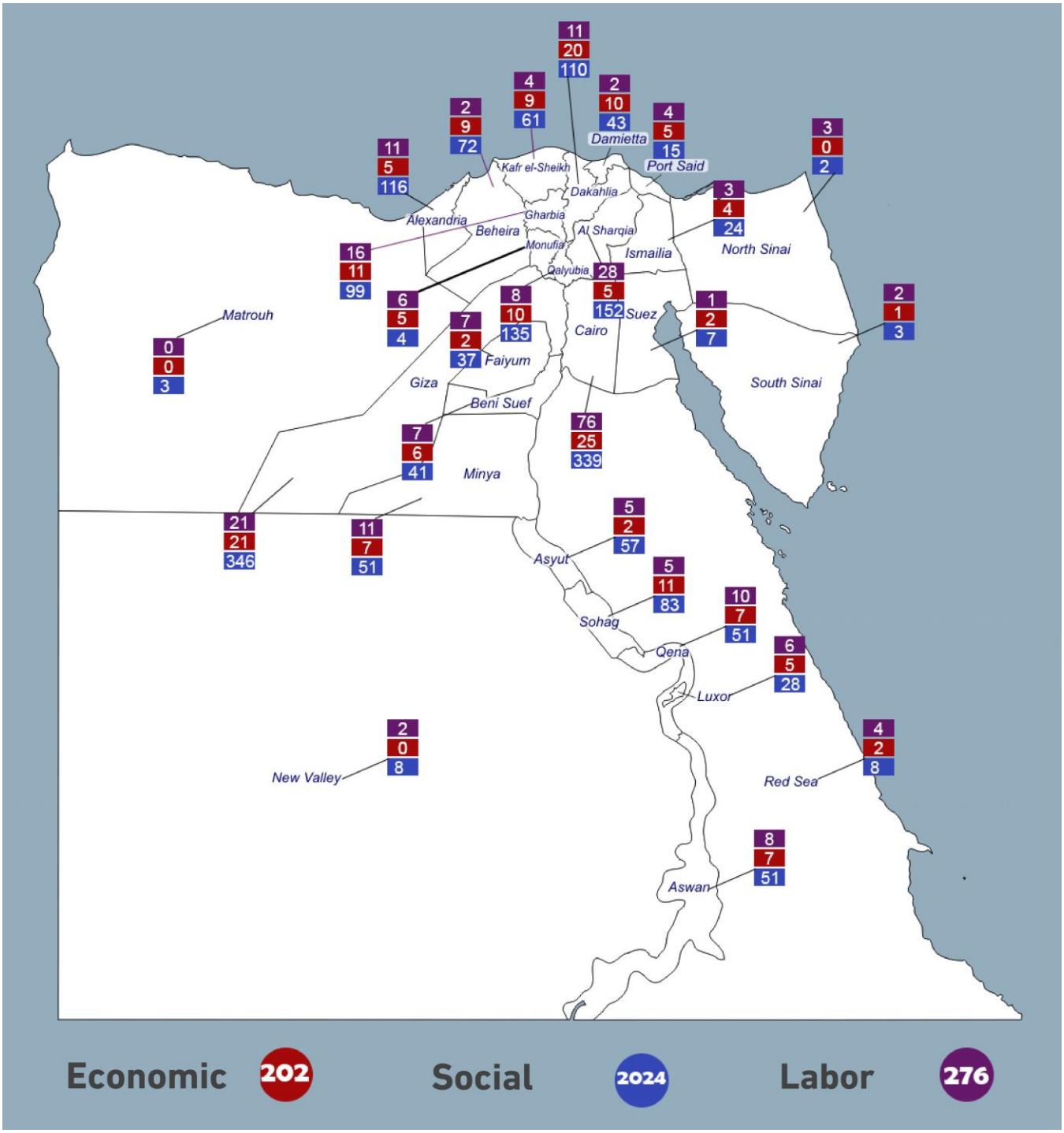
[6] *Reuters*, "Egypt Hikes Fuel Prices in IMF-backed Austerity Drive," Jun 16, 2018, https://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFL8N1TI054.

A Geography of Protests

Governorate	Labor	Economic	Social	
Cairo	76	25	339	440
Alexandria	11	5	116	132
Gharbiya	16	11	99	126
Giza	21	21	346	388
Beheira	2	9	72	83
Sharqiya	28	5	152	185
Daqahliya	11	20	110	141
Kafr al-Sheikh	4	9	61	74
Minufiya	13	11	78	102
Suez	1	2	7	10
Qaluybiya	8	10	135	153
Minya	11	7	51	69
Assiut	5	2	57	64
Sohag	5	11	83	99
Red Sea	4	2	8	14
Luxor	6	5	28	39
New Valley	2	0	8	10
Port Said	4	5	15	24
Aswan	8	7	51	66
Beni Sueif	7	6	41	54
Ismailiya	3	4	24	31
Undefined	6	5	4	15
Fayoum	7	2	37	46
Qena	10	7	51	68
Dumiat	2	10	43	55
North Sinai	3	0	2	5
South Sinai	2	1	3	6
Marsa Matrouh	0	0	3	3
Total	276	202	2024	2502

The capital city of Cairo came first with 440 protests in 2018, marking 17.59% of the year's protests (see table 1 and fig. 7). This is hardly surprising with Cairo's population of 19.5 million people in mind. The number, however, is a considerable increase compared to 2017 (243 protests). Cairo's labor protests scored a remarkable 17.27% of its overall protests, higher than any other city. But first place was reserved for social protests (77.05% of the total).

Giza came second (388 protests, representing 15.51% of the year's protests). Giza witnessed 346 social protests, second only to Cairo's 339. Giza's labor protests (21) came third after Cairo and Sharqiya. Giza shows an outstanding 146% increase in the total number of protests compared to 2017 (with 158 protests).



Thirdly came Sharqiya (185, 7.39%), but with more labor protests (28) than Giza. Next came Qalubyia with 153 protests and 6.12% of the country's total.

Gharbyia came 7th (126 protests, only 16 of which were labor), despite being home to several industrial and economic activities in the Delta, while Alexandria saw 132 protests.

459 protests took place in the impoverished Upper Egypt collectively: Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Luxor, Beni Sueif, Aswan, and Qena, counting for 18.34% of the country's total protests—nearly a 2% decrease from 2017.

In the Sinai Peninsula, which is divided into a North and South governorates, taken together with the Red Sea governorate, only 25 protests were documented, marking 0.88% of the country's total protests.

An In-depth Look

Labor Protests

The word "labor" does not exclusively designate factory workers, and hence the category is open to all kinds of labor and employee-employer relationships, regardless of the type of the protesting sector—private, government, public, or public enterprise sector. Reasons for protesting can vary: delayed payments, demanding wage increases due to price hikes, or demanding permanent contracts as with the case of temporary workers.

Historically, the labor movement in Egypt has been one of the main levers for popular protests preceding popular uprisings, as exemplified by the 2008 massive Mahalla labor protests before the 2011 revolution, and the wave of strikes in the 1970s leading up to the 1977 uprising. It can be argued that the current government has learned its lesson and started to employ all its powers, security, and judiciary, to quell any labor movements, and suppress any organised independent syndicates. This siege of labor movement and organizing has been common with all post-2011 regimes—from the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, in power from February 2011 till June 2012, to the Muslim Brotherhood government (June 2012–July 2013), and the Adly Mansour government (July 2013–June 2014), then finally under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (June 2014–present). With this siege in place, the state-affiliated Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) has come back on the scene,[7] dominating

[7] In January 2018, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) held a conference to politically support current president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ahead of presidential elections, encouraging workers to vote. See "ETUF Holds

the discourse of syndicates and labor, and acting as the state's representative for the workers, not the workers' representative for the state.

The Press, Engineers, and Lawyers Syndicates, all became spearheaded by individuals acting as representatives of the state. The newly elected head of the Press Syndicate, Diaa Rashwan, is a case in point, being a pro-state journalist and the current Chairman of the State Information Service—which has been the state's mouthpiece in condemning and responding to critical reports by foreign media outlets and human rights organizations. Rashwan was elected and supported by the state in 2019—after the syndicate became a source of political resistance between 2016 and 2017, when it spearheaded protests against the Tiran and Sanafir maritime agreement with Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the Engineers Syndicate, one of the country's biggest professional organizations, has been dominated by the state-supported "Engineers for the Love of Egypt" coalition, which won over socialist coalitions.

In this context, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued on 2017 Egypt's new labor unions law,[8] which triggered criticisms from the International Labour Organization (ILO),[9] and was accused of siding with the ETUF and abolishing several rights of independent syndicates.

Several articles of the law either complicate measures of independent syndicates were they to "legalize their status,"[10] or practice systematic restrictions on the rights and freedoms of syndicates on several levels, whether in the governmental and public sectors, government's administrative apparatus, civil service workers, or seasonal labor.

2018 Labor Protests

276 labor protests were documented in 2018, counting for 11.03% the year's protests. In comparison with the last five years, an ongoing decrease in labor protests is easily observable (see fig. 8)—from 2239 labor protests in 2013, to 1609 protests in 2014, then 933 in 2015, 751 in 2016, 450 in 2017, and finally 276 in 2018.

Conference in Sisi's Support" [in Arabic], YouTube video, 5:29, Jan 30, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBR12V4pwtQ.

[8] *Youm7*, "Al-Sisi Approves Egypt's New Labor Unions Law" [in Arabic], Dec 18, 2017, https://bit.ly/2YJWZYc.

[9] *Mada Masr*, "Egypt Blacklisted Again by International Labor Organization," Jun 7, 2017, https://madamasr.com/en/2017/06/07/news/u/egypt-blacklisted-again-by-international-labor-organization.

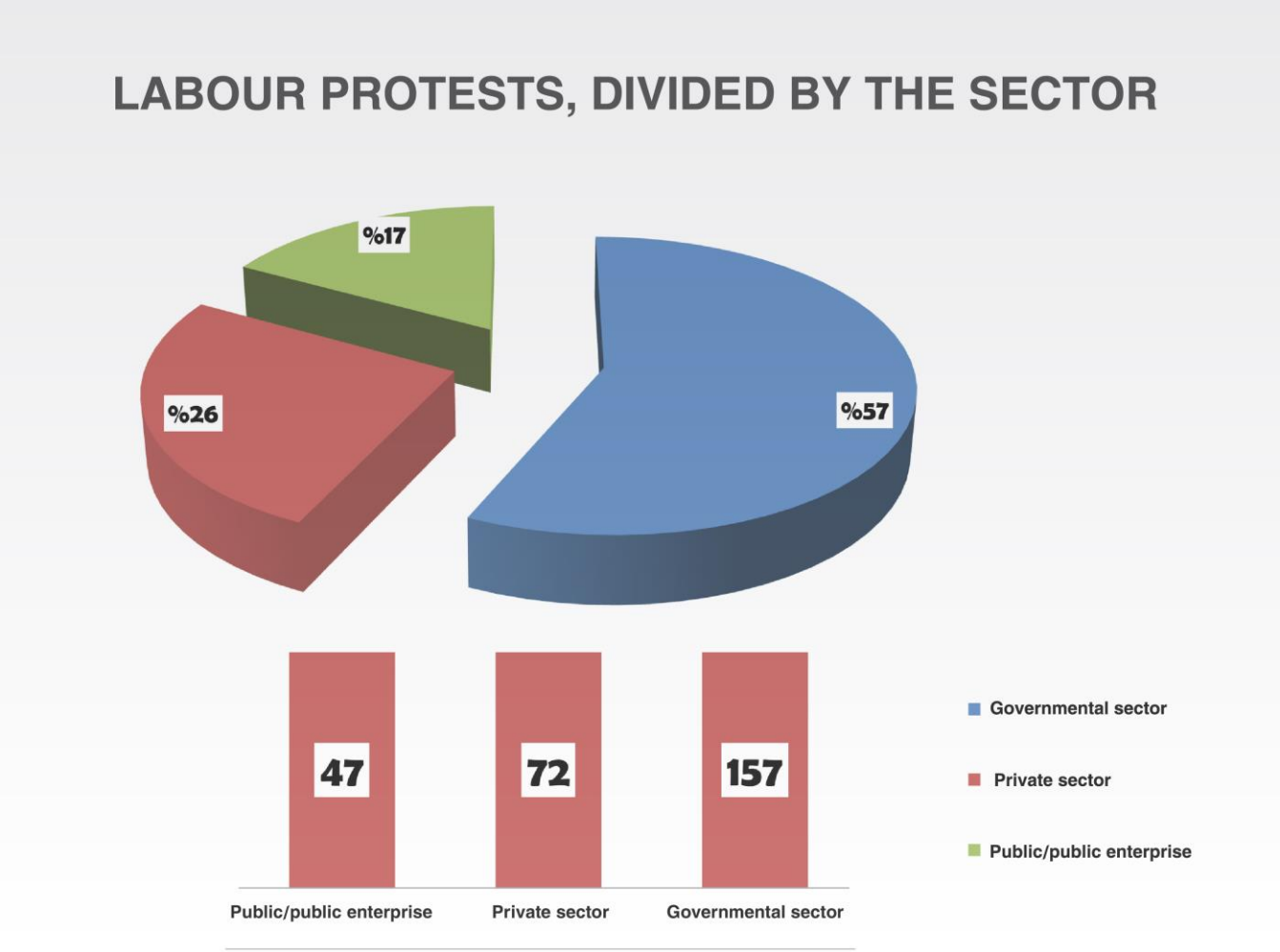
[10] Social Justice Platform, *Trade Unions Law and Implementing Regulations Contravene the Constitution and International Conventions*, Oct 15, 2018, https://bit.ly/2uGykGc.

The average number of labor protests per month in 2018 was 23 protests. However, throughout the year, labor protests remarkably fluctuated, with February marking the top (39 protests), and December and August marking the least (13 protests each).

The curve starts at a rather high point, marking the second biggest count of 33 protests in January, then peaking at 39 protests in February. Fluctuations then occur between March and August, with an average of 21 protests in each month. September then scors 25 protests, after which a decline starts, until the year ends with only 13 protests in December.

Protests in the governmental sector came first and amounted to 56.88% of total labor protests (see fig. 9), keeping the same rank as 2017, when it amounted to 67.5% of the total. Similarly, protests in the private sector in 2018 continued second-place, with 26.09% of total labor protests, compared to 17.3% in 2017.

Out of the 276 protests, a majority of 157 actions were taken by workers in the governmental sector, while 72 were taken by workers in the private sector, and finally, 47 were taken in the public sector/public enterprise sector.



Out of the aforementioned 157 incidents of governmental sector protests, the graph (fig. 10) averages at 13 protests per month, reaching its maximum in May (23 protests), and minimum in December (5). Most of these protests were recorded in Cairo (38), followed by Minya (11), and Gharbyia (10). Meanwhile, no protests were recorded in Marsa Matrouh or Suez. In Beheira, Minya, the New Valley, and North Sinai, governmental sector protests accounted for 100% of all labor protests in each governorate.

In the private sector, the average rate of protests was 6 per month, reaching maximum in February (13), followed by September (11), January (10), while scoring minimum in November (3).

Cairo maintained the highest count of private sector protest (22), followed by Sharqyia (17), while Ismailia, Qualybyia, and Suez scored the lowest.

The public sector/public enterprise sector recorded 47 protests, 17.03% of the total number of labor protests in 2018. Similar to the other two types of labor protests, public sector/public enterprise sector scored the top number of protests in Cairo with 16 protests, which makes 21.05% of protests in the sector. The average of protests per month is close to 4, reaching its maximum in October (7 protests) and minimum in March, April, and June (3 each).

Protesting Groups and Methods of Protesting

Several methods of protesting were used by laborers to present their demands or signal dissatisfaction with certain policies or practices within their institutions, offices, workplaces, companies, or governmental/private apparatuses.

Seven cases of resignation or self-suspension were documented in 2018 (see fig. 11), three of which were undertaken by doctors or journalists, citing dissatisfaction with certain policies/practices in their institutions. Two other cases of occupying or storming a workplace were documented, both by contracted workers in the government—one protesting the

mismanagement of their company by the CEO, and the other protesting verbal abuses from their director.

Despite the risk workers go through in executing such protests, which can subject them to prison sentences, detention, dismissal, or early retirement, 47 strikes and production halts, and 85 demonstrations and sit-ins, were documented throughout the year. The category of workers who participated in these 130 protests ranged from seasonal and temporary laborers to contracted employees. 10 of these 130 protests saw resulting police intimidation or interference.

Further 14 cases of workers threatening to protest or strike were documented, nine of which demanded monetary compensation for relocation, late salaries and bonuses, or equal treatment to permanently contracted workers.

Also, 20 cases of self-mutilation, including hunger strikes, were documented, all in the governmental sector, protesting relocation, demanding equal financial rights to higher ranking employees, or protesting salary cuts. Five of these self-harm protests were held by teachers, six by workers and employees, six by doctors and nurses, and one by a recent

graduate—seasonal labor—who wanted to be hired by the Ministry of Higher Education. More reflection on the self-mutilation category will be discussed with economic protests.

Meanwhile, 100 protests took the shape of releasing a statement, or filing a report or complaint, and these are dispersed across all sectors and all kinds of labor. Complaints ranged from demanding the Minister of Manpower to intervene in favor of hiring temporary workers, to demanding late bonuses from the previous year, calling for the right to receive pension, demanding the return of suspended colleagues, calling for administrative reforms in the Ministry of Petroleum, protesting being barred from receiving bonuses, and more generally calling upon senior officials to intervene to solve problems. It is worth noting that only 10 of these complaints were channelled through syndical bodies, organizations, independent or state-owned syndicates. The great majority of these complaints were documented under the "right to be compensated" category.

Applying these methods of protests on the labor's three sectors, we see that the public sector/public enterprise sector witnessed 17 cases of filing complaints and reports, two cases of threatening to strike or stage a sit-in, 27 cases of strikes and production halts, and only one case of mass resignation.

Meanwhile, the private sector witnessed 25 complaints/reports filing, all by workers either protesting suspension, urging commitment to financial agreements, or calling upon senior officials to stop oppressive measures by the businesses owners. The private sector also saw 41 cases of demonstrations and sit-ins, as well as three cases of resignations of employees protesting administrative policies.

The governmental sector, dubbed by some as Egypt's old dinosaur,[11] witnessed 58 complaints by various categories of labor—ranging from factory workers, to education employees, Imams at the Ministry of Religious Endowments, part-time teachers, researchers at the Ministry of Agriculture, pensioners, or hospital workers. The sector also included the 18 aforementioned cases of self-mutilation. It also included 64 sit-ins, demonstrations, and

[11] The term "dinosaur" is often used by commentators criticizing the massive number of employees in the government. See Lamees al-Hadidy, "The Administrative Dinosaur" [in Arabic], *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, Apr 14, 2014, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/429004.

strikes, each of which involved more than a dozen protesters, except for a few with a single protester.

The increasing number of protests in the governmental sector is not a surprise, and is highly speculated to continue growing, considering the possible reaction (or fury) awaiting the state's discussed and publicized plans to reduce the number of government employees, yet to be implemented.

According to the country's official statistics agency—the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS)—in a report from October 2017, "the number of employees in the government sector amounted to 5 million in 2016/2017, down from 5.8 million in 2015/2016, a decline of 13%."

The expected cuts are part of Egypt's commitment to the International Monetary Fund, which supports Egypt's economic reform program with a 12-billion-dollar loan. The Fund expects the country to limit public spending, as well as further decrease the unemployment rate.

The government has also been releasing several proposals to reduce workdays for employees in the state administrative apparatus, with no decrease in salaries, aiming to "rationalize spending and reduce traffic congestion," according to one proposal by Egyptian Cabinet which was widely circulated in the media in 2018.

Such statements were also fueled by a speech by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in 2015, in which he voiced dissatisfaction with the current figure of 7 million government employees, claiming the state only needs 1 million.

Lately, a newly applied civil service law [PDF, Arabic] has made such cuts easier to implement. The law grants an institution the right to directly dismiss employees based on their annual appraisals for two consecutive years. This way, a weak evaluation opens the door for dismissal. The important questions to follow and investigate are what will 2019 have in store for governmental employees, how would they organize in case they staged protests, and finally what would the state's response be if its very year-long loyal bureaucracy rises up?

Economic Protests

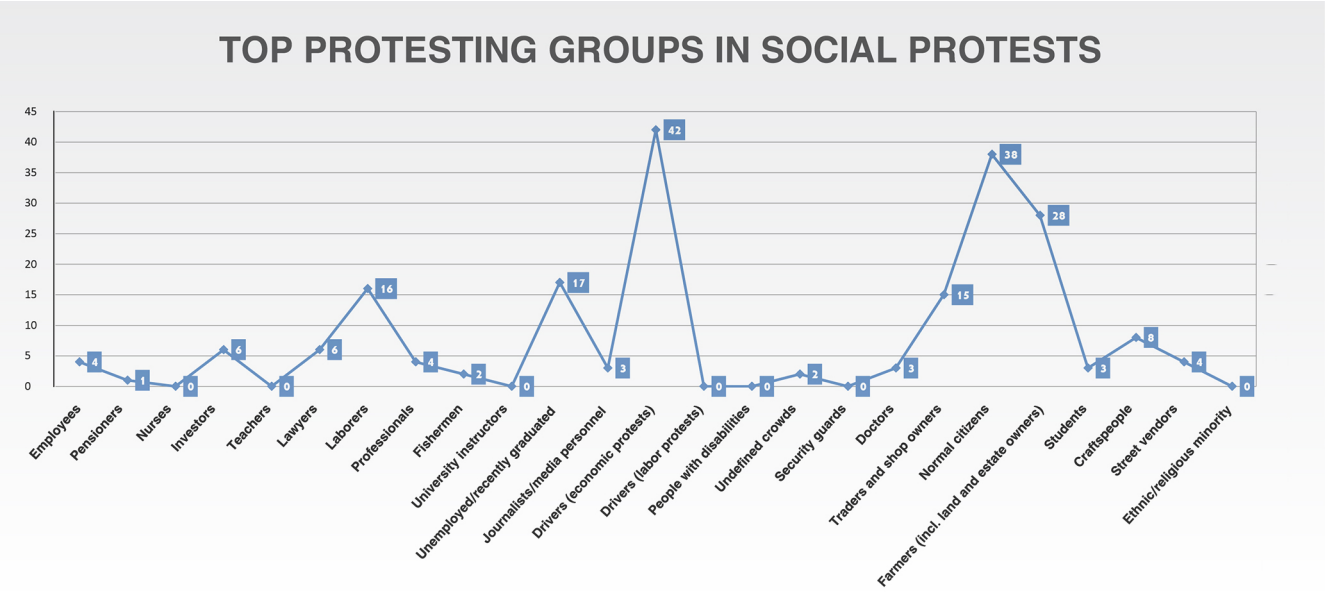
We define economic protests as those related to the labor as well as the working conditions of personnel in non-official establishments; such as private taxi drivers, street vendors, farmers, or even graduates and unemployed people who are demanding jobs. These protests are often not limited to the relationship between laborers and their business owners.

These protests are mostly linked to government policies and their effects on the economic interests of different groups; such as small business owners or professionals. For example, journalists protesting the new laws of the Supreme Media Council, which will regulate press and media work, is categorized as an economic protest. On the other hand, if journalists in a certain newspaper stage a sit-in to protest late salaries, this will be a labor protest. Therefore, economic protests are related to entire sectors, whose economic interests and sources of livelihood are affected by governmental decisions. For example, if farmers protest that sewage water is overflowing their lands and affecting their crops, this is an economic protest, but if they protest that sewage water is malodorous or spreading infections, we consider this to be a social protest.

By these measures, we documented 202 economic protests in 2018, marking an 8.07% of the year's protests. Protests per month averaged at 17 and peaked at 22 twice: once in June (see fig. 12), concurrent with a new wave of price hikes in essential food goods, fuel, gas, diesel, and transportation, and then again in September. July followed closely with 21 protests.

The minimum number of protests was recorded in January (13 protests), while in the third, fourth, and fifth ranks came respectively November (17), May and April (16 each), and December (15).

Cairo scored the maximum count of protests (25), which is nearly one-eighth of all the economic protests of the year. Giza came second (21), followed by Daqahylia (20). No economic protests were recorded in Marsa Matrouh, North Sinai, or the New Valley. In the Canal cities, 11 protests were recorded. Finally, Upper Egypt witnessed 45 protests.



Protesting Groups and Methods of Protesting

The categories of civilians and farmers collectively held 38 economic protests, 25 of which demanded government interference to renovate roads and bridges, purify agriculture water and/or allow it to reach their lands, or issue medicine for cattle. Some of them protested the lack of governmental facilities, like water or infrastructure, and some protested time-torn sewage facilities or an abundance of snakes in their agriculture lands. All these grievances affected the process of agriculture, either by harming the crops, the farmers themselves, or their access to the land—hence affecting their livelihoods.

Shop owners and traders were another group of various protest motives. Most prominent in this category were owners of bakeries who sell subsidized bread, and are facing ongoing problems with the Ministry of Supply, concerning prices, receiving their wheat share, and maintenance of the digital cards system that civilians use to buy their share of bread.

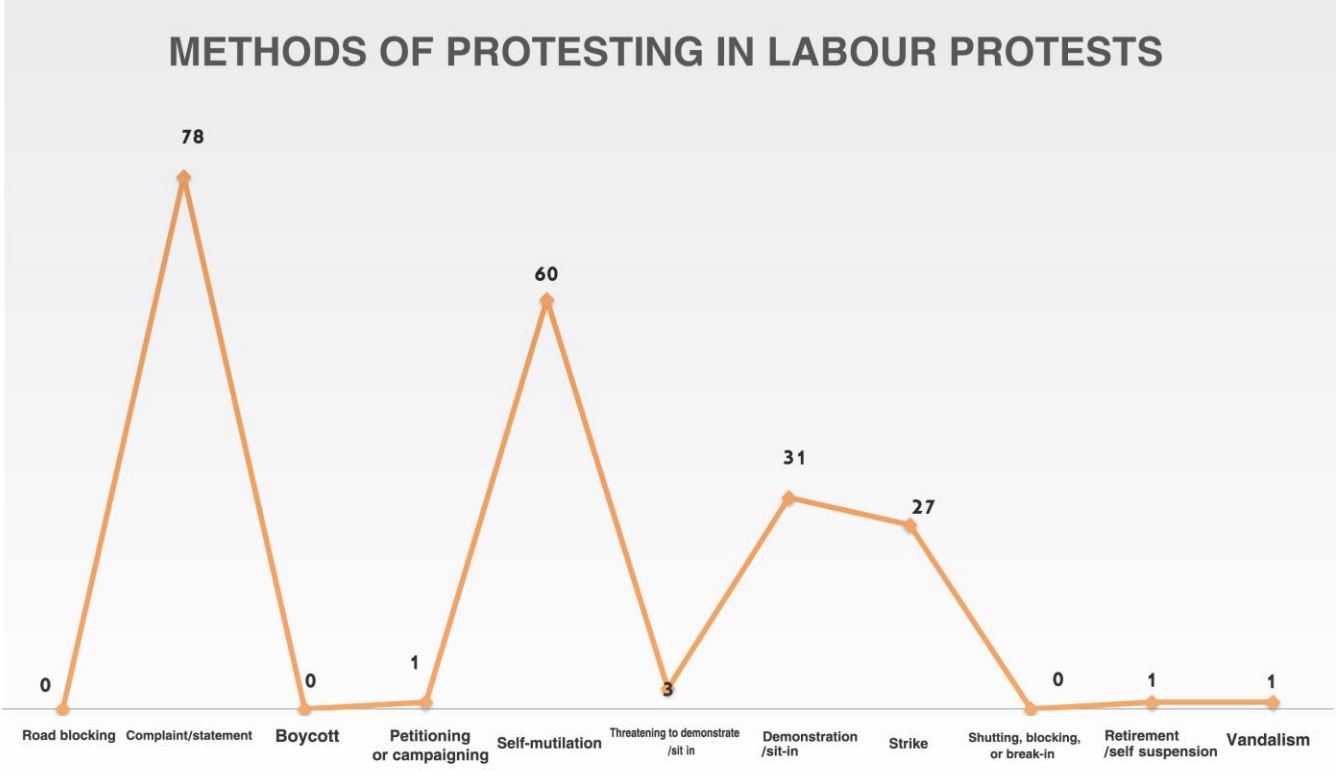
Shop owners, grocers, butchers, fish vendors, and registered vendors of subsidized food products or imported products, all managed to stage 15 protests, demanding government intervention to stop certain practices (like putting down cattle diagnosed with a certain disease), protesting the inefficiency of the computer system used by subsidized-goods retailers, refusing to pay higher governmental fees, or demanding legalization in the case of kiosks.

Fishermen in the Red Sea governorate held a protest demanding that officials in the administrative and security sectors clearly mark areas where fishing is banned. This case goes back to 9 February 2018, when the military operation Sinai 2018 started in the peninsula, restricting movement for all transportation, both land and sea, consequently impairing fishing movement. During protests which took place in March of the same year, the protesters, mostly fishermen and members of the Hurghada Fishermen Association, called on the government to make it clear where it is safe to fish, as the ban has negatively affected the income of hundreds of fishermen and their families.

As for drivers, two factors made them a distinguished protesting group in the past years—a phenomenon calling for more detailed (and possibly extensive anthropological) research. The first reason is the series of price hikes resulting from the government's decision to raise subsidized government-set fuel prices, ending with a 17–66% increases in gasoline and diesel prices, and thus forcing the drivers to raise their tariffs, so that their labor remains economically profitable, when a litre of gasoline 92 rose from EGP 5 to EGP 6.75, and gasoline 80 and diesel both from EGP 3.65 to EGP 5.50. The second reason was the vast expansion of peer-to-peer commuting like Uber and Careem, modern mobile-based taxi services allowing riders to order a car directly to their location through the power of GPS.

These two reasons urged white taxi drivers to protest, while the first of them alone motivated microbus and minibus drivers to protest as well.

In 2018, 18 protests were staged by drivers between June and July, demanding the government to increase the tariffs of the ride. Usually, in cases of price hikes, media reports on the status of microbus stations and feature officials and officers checking on passengers and drivers to see whether there were any problems. And with each price hike, tariff increases are always late to be issued, leading to fights, arguments, and strikes among the drivers and passengers. These protests often include acts of striking, halting work, gathering, or threatening to strike (see fig. 13). Strikes calling for governmental approval of higher tariffs took place this year in Beni Sueif, Damanhour, Talkha, Mansoura, Luxor, Daqahliya, Qalyubiya, Fayoum, Minufiya, and Kafr al-Sheikh.



A protest held in January by car owners using Careem mobile application demanded late payment for the rides they made. Another took place in October when car owners working with Careem and Uber protested demanding legalization of their status to avoid harassment and fines.

Lawyers also had their share of protests, mostly voicing anger against conditions preventing them from efficiently doing their work . These protests often include tension with judges, policemen, and members of the prosecution. The protests are often concerned with work in courts, police stations, and lawyers' access to defendants. In the past years, they protested being assaulted, and sometimes shot, by policemen.

Six protests were staged by lawyers, some by demonstrating, some by filing a complaint, and others by staging a sit-in. The demands mainly tackled refusal of new registration conditions for the Lawyers Syndicate, which hinders many lawyers attempting to renew their membership IDs and practice their profession. Other protests were objecting to a decision by the prosecution to separate lawyers from their clients in the courthouse, and another still protested the assault of a fellow lawyer, demanding the court to guarantee lawyers' safety while doing their work.

Investors and owners of businesses staged six protests in 2018, all of which were complaints filed to officials. Two of these protests had to do with the tourism business: In the first, hotel owners demanded diesel generators to replace the collapsed electricity towers which fell due to a sand storm in Aswan. While in the second, tourism investors in South Sinai demanded that the "town of St. Catherine in the Sinai peninsula be included in the development plans for the coming period." Two other protests involved owners of the private spinning and weaving companies in Mahallah and Shubra al-Kheima, demanding government intervention to help reoperate their factories.

Suicide as a form of protest

Suicide, which we categorize under self-harm, was remarkable of 2018. This year, the SJP team tried to document suicides of economic or social bases—by victims suffering financial hardships or protesting economic or social government policies.

Amid lack of official numbers, it is worth mentioning that the collected information depends solely on media reports. Hence, some other published reports were disregarded for lack of concrete information and credibility. Keeping in mind the social and religious stigma surrounding suicide in Egypt, some incidents might be covered up as natural deaths or accidents, although some other particular deaths would be sometimes reported as suicides. Hence, reports of suicides citing "psychological issues" were not counted, as cited reasons might include relationship problems, suffering from abuse, forced marriage, or psychological disorders. These include some of the well-known suicide incidents where victims jumped under subway trains. However, these cases will be subject to discussion and evaluation by the SJP team to improvise a method for confirming and documenting such incidents, and to find a suitable framework for them to be counted.

That being said, we documented 57 suicides and three failed attempts. All reports of these cases cited financial hardships, and victims ranged from government employees to skilled laborers, workers, shop owners, unemployed individuals, drivers, civilians, street vendors, students, craftsmen, and farmers.

Despite the considerable and shocking number, the state's reaction, or lack thereof, has been even more shocking. In July for example, around four suicide incidents were reported and all took place in different stations of Cairo's underground metro. In response, the Metro spokesman Ahmed Abdel Hady was quoted by several media outlets, calling on people with suicidal tendencies to "stay away from metro stations," as those aren't a place for the "psychologically disturbed" to "delay the lives of millions of citizens."

Added to these 57 cases were another 22 cases documented under social protests, raising the suicide count to 79. These 22 cases were all students, committing suicide due to exam anxiety, dissatisfaction with or anxiety about their grades, or perceived lack of test preparation. All victims were Egyptian high school students, enrolled in "Thanaweya Amma"—Egypt's secondary school certification system, required for applying to colleges or higher institutions. Every year, cases of nervous breakdowns, depression, fainting, anxiety, tension, lack of sleep, fear, and stressfully intensive preparations are reported during the examination season.

The 22 suicide cases took place in the same year the country is gearing up to apply a new system of education and to counter exam leakage, a phenomenon that has been common in the last three years, where questions and answers of the tests are leaked online before exams start.

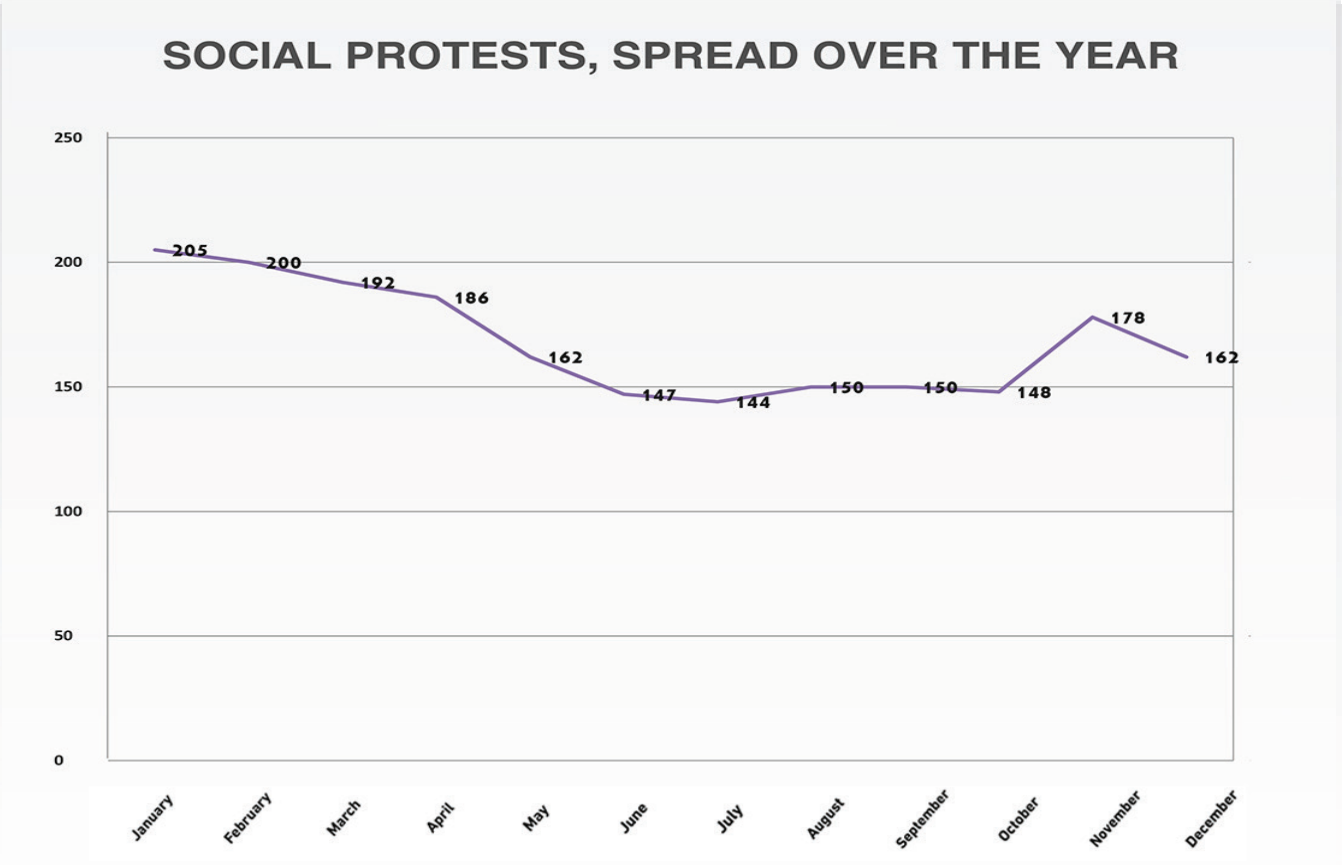
Social Protests

Social protests reflect a general deterioration or complete lack of services provided to citizens—such as health, education, infrastructure, housing, or security. These protests are usually held by citizens demanding government intervention to solve problems of pollution affecting drinking water. Most of these protests are not linked by time or geography but staged without prior organization. Despite growing restrictions on various protest methods, manifest in the criminalization of all marches, demonstrations, and means of expressing dissent since the ratification of the Protest Law (act 107/2013), citizens have not ceased demanding their rights, particularly in times of austerity and decreasing quality of services.

The significance of social protests is that they are not politicized and mostly not organized, as they are neither mobilized by political parties or similar groups, nor are they organized by syndicates or political leaders. Dissatisfaction with services is the main focus of social protest, a category that is growing since the military takeover of power in July 2013.

In 2018, social protests dominated all other categories, with 2024 protests marking 80.90% of the total, compared to 64.3% in 2017.

Social protests peaked in the last three months of the year (see fig. 15), with December scoring the highest count of 205 protests, November following with 200 protests, and finally October (192).



Geographically, Giza had the lion's share of social protest, followed by Cairo (339). Qalyubiya (135) follows by a wide margin, and was followed by Alexandria (116). Upper Egypt collectively witnessed 335 protests, and the canal cities 59.

No governorate was free of social protest, with North Sinai scoring the lowest count of only two.

Protesting in North Sinai

The low number of protests *reported* in North Sinai is due to its inaccessibility to journalists, media personnel, and independent researchers, because of the current insurgency the Egyptian military is engaged with. Harsh conditions have surrounded North Sinai residents throughout 2018, who were subject to the grave consequences of the army's lockdown policies that allegedly aim to confine the movement of Sinai-based militants. Independent media website Mada Masr reported that since the military operations started on 9 February, civilians suffered a severe shortage of food products, forcing the state to organize queues to distribute rations of vegetables, milk, and yoghurt. The food crisis went on for four months, until later in June, when the army allowed in food cars on a regular basis. Similarly, the governorate suffered lack of fuel, leading taxi drivers to stop working and public transportation to lower the number of daily trips.

Rights demanded in social protests

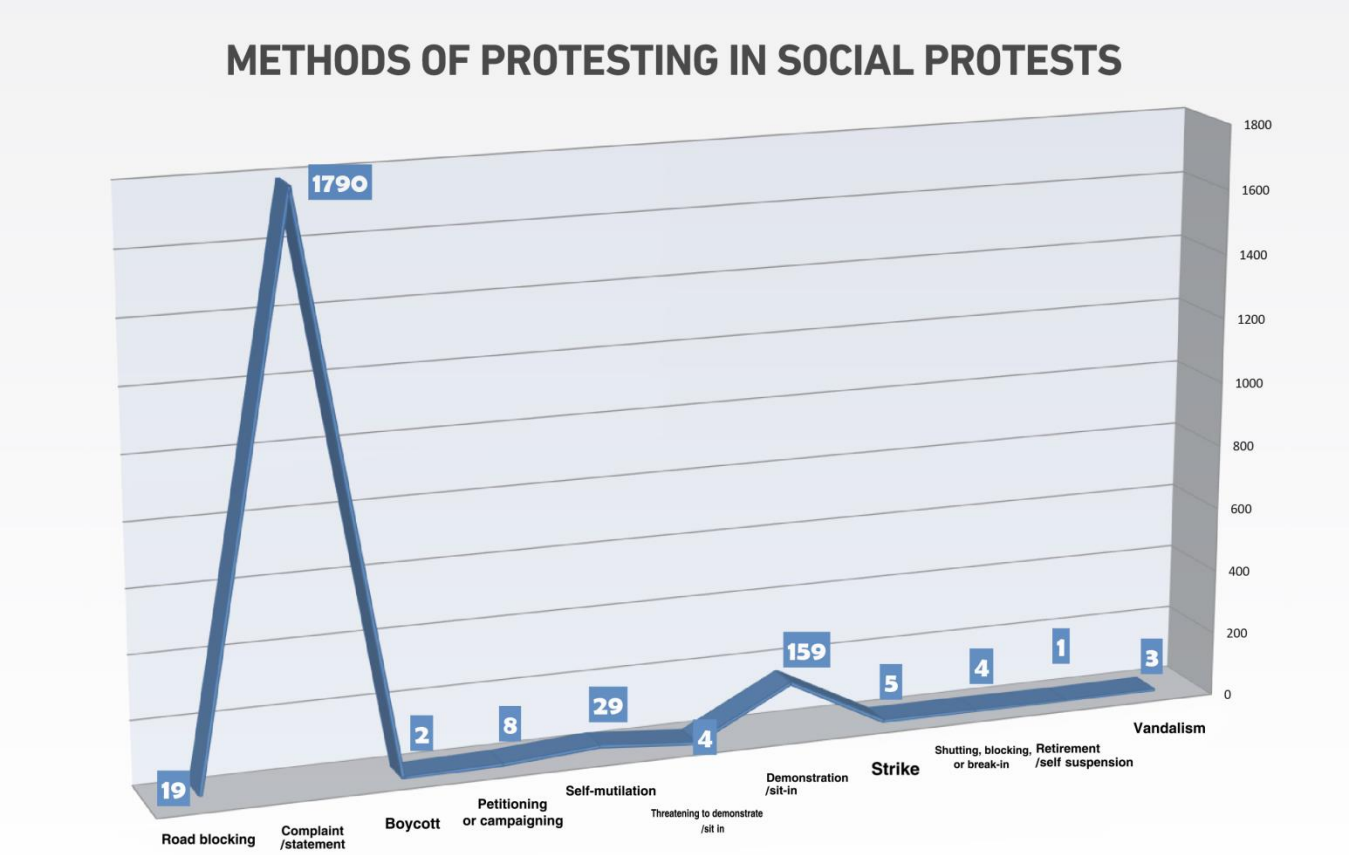
When statistically analyzing social protests with respect to rights demanded, we can conclude that the deteriorating level of services provided to civilians was trigger to most of these protest actions.

Rights demanded in documented social protests	Count
Infrastructure and services, including drinking water, sanitation, roads, and electricity/gas	1110
Education	193
Security	178
Organization	154
Clean environment	123
Healthcare	116
Access to information, transparency, and anti-corruption	85
Housing	40
Suitable living conditions	15
Social insurance	14
Compensation and administrative justice	13

Protesting Groups and Methods of Protesting

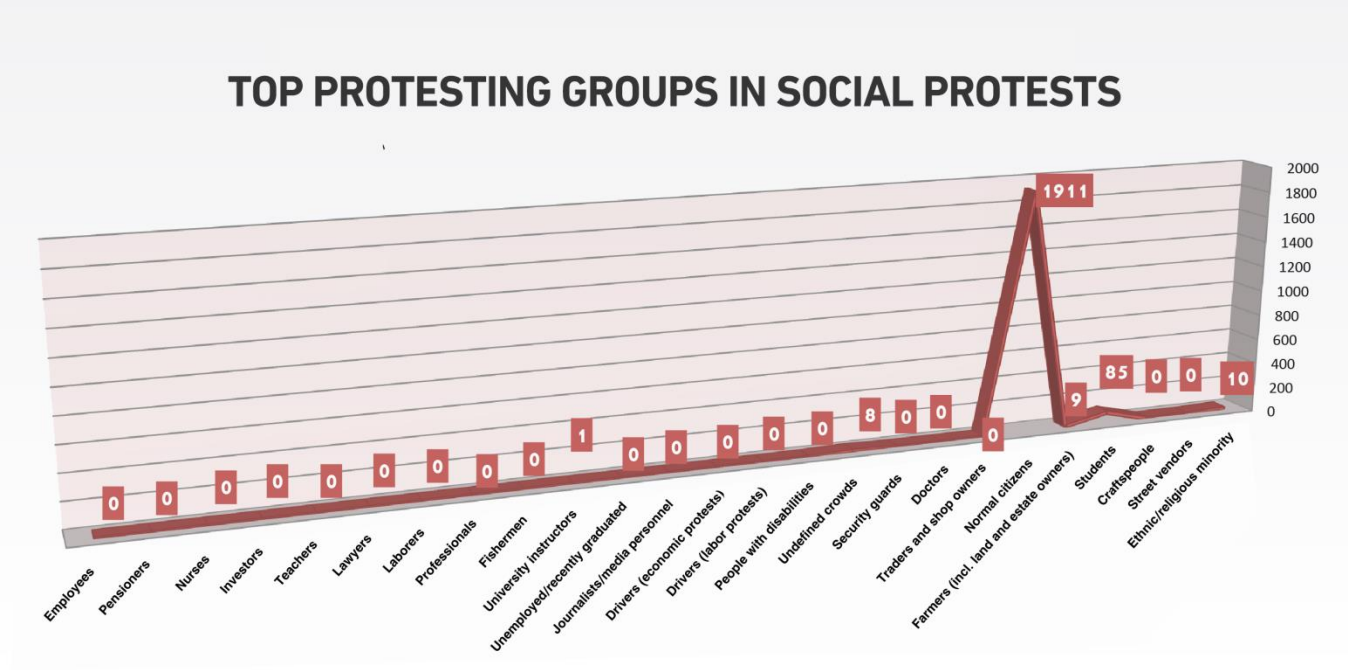
We documented 19 incidents of road blocking (see fig. 16), two of which were carried out by university students (see fig. 17) in the privately owned Cairo-based Future University and the government-owned Aswan University, demanding, in separate incidents, better transportation to and from campus, and a pedestrian bridge to prevent car accidents. The rest of the 17 protests which included road blocking were carried out by civilians, 13 of which demanded the right to security, as protesters called upon the authorities to build speed bumps in some cases, or counter what they called the danger of stray dogs in others. Some other protesters blocked roads to urge security forces to do their jobs properly and to investigate certain accidents, like a child disappearance, the collapse of a high-voltage tower, or a water outage. In one of the incidents, protesters demonstrated after the killing of a worker in an exchange of fire with the police.

This year's highest category of documented protests included complaints, filing reports, or issuing statements, to request some action from the government, or show dissatisfaction with a certain service or complaining about infrastructure flaws in their surrounding environments. We documented 1790 complaints in 2018, and this high number is arguably due to two reasons. First is that petitions, reports, or statements offer a safe and secure method to address demands, were a large number of people to voice a concern, demand, or dissatisfaction without having to be physically present on the street to avoid security harassment or legal prosecution. Second is that more and more newspapers and media outlets, including popular newspapers like the state-owned *al-Ahram*, the privately-owned websites of *Youm7*, *al-Watan*, and *Veto* are opening the door for readers to "complain" or report problems in their areas, in an attempt to "give voice to underreported struggles."



We also documented 159 demonstrations and sit-ins, 18 of which were by students. Another four protests were held by members of the Coptic community, which is often represented as quiet and acquiescent to violations or lacking services, such as security or damaged roads leading to places of worship. Two protests included demonstration, in May and December, and both were held by monks of the St. Samuel monastery in Minya. The first demanded that the authorities end what they called a siege on the roads leading to the monastery. The second demanded more security measures, after masked gunmen opened fire on a group of Egyptian Christians travelling by bus through Minya in November, killing seven people. The protesters, also monks, called upon the authorities to secure and repair the road leading to the monastery to prevent further attacks. A previous attack in the same area in May 2017 left nearly 30 people dead.

In another protest, in complaint form, Coptic Christians urged the government to issue a law for their civil affairs. A few other complaints were filed by Coptic Christian citizens throughout the year in Beheira, Minya, Luxor, and Helwan, protesting radicals' attacking church-affiliated, or other buildings and facilities where prayers are held.



Dozens of this year's protests were intertwined with price hikes. Most prominently, several demonstrations took place in May in metro stations—to protest the ticket price increase—in which 20 people were arrested and referred to the country's state security prosecutor. The small but powerful protests at metro stations across Cairo took place after fares more than tripled for some commuters, as the government tightens spending and implements IMF-backed economic measures.

In November 2016, Egypt floated its currency and reduced energy subsidies, as part of a contentious economic reform program outlined in the terms of an IMF loan. Since then, the Egyptian pound has approximately lost two thirds of its value and inflation has soared to record highs in what is widely acknowledged to have been a "challenging" adjustment period.

Implemented by the government for the World Bank and IMF rescue package, the reforms included the application of a 14% VAT, all while fuel prices rose, the Egyptian pound collapsed, and inflation soared. Taken together, these factors led to a cumulative increase in consumer prices of 54% from December 2016 to mid-2018,[12] an increase still running.

[12] More information on the connection between political repression and regressive austerity measures in Egypt can be found in a previous report: Social Justice Platform, *The Human Rights Impact of Economic Reform Policies*, Jul 22, 2018, https://sjplatform.org/economic-reform-policies/?lang=en.

However, these price increases were not accompanied by a rise in wages, thus pushing more and more Egyptians below the poverty line.

Protests demanding transparency and an end to police brutality

During 2018, five protests were held against police brutality, demanding judicial transparency and the serving of justice after police-related deaths. One of these protests was in Sharqiya, two in Cairo, one in Aswan, and another in Damietta.

The first four protests show the following pattern: a prisoner is announced dead, his or her family gather around either the police station or the hospital where the body is, and pro-state newspapers publish reports citing anonymous police sources—either denying torture allegations, claiming the victim died of a circulation failure, had a criminal record, or died from a drug overdose. The four protests included a demonstration in front of governmental buildings. Three of them included minor clashes with police forces, and one included riots. In previous years, the majority of deaths in detention that were investigated and had policemen held accountable—even slightly—all included demonstrations and riots which forced the officials to take the demands seriously. One example is the killing of lawyer Kareem Hamdy in 2015 in the Matariya police station, only put under investigation after lawyers protested in front of their syndicate. Another is the killing of a taxi driver in Cairo in February 2016 by a policeman, put under investigation after dozens of protesters demonstrated outside the Cairo Security Directorate.

In the first incident, the case of Mohamed Abdel Hakim—known as "Afroto"—who died in January 2018, dozens protested and rioted, grabbing media attention and leading to a full investigation that eventually took the policemen to court on accusations of torture. Before the investigation, pro-state and government media outlets reported that Afroto died due to an overdose of the strox narcotic. The court later sentenced one policeman to three years and another to six months in prison. Meanwhile, 99 of the protesters, the victim's friends and family, were sentenced to one year in prison each, on charges of "gathering."

A second case took place in June where dozens demonstrated after a man died in the Hadayek Al-Quba's police station while in custody. According to the investigation, nine

officers were accused of torturing him to death, in order to force him to confess to crimes of theft. The nine officers are currently standing trial.

The third case took place in Sharqiya in December, as demonstrators stood in front of the Dyarb Negm police station after a detainee died in custody. Riot police were deployed to prevent the victim's family from approaching the police station. Meanwhile, the media reported that the victim was detained on accusations of dealing narcotics. Some pro-state media, famous for proximity to police sources and security directorates, quoted fellow inmates of the victim denying he was assaulted, and claiming he fainted then died on his way to the hospital.

The fourth incident took place in Aswan, as dozens demonstrated in front of Aswan Public Morgue and threw stones at police cars after their relative died in detention inside the Aswan police station. According to media outlets, the victim was arrested on charges of narcotics possession.

The fifth incident was in June, and witnessed dozens of civilians from the city of Damietta demonstrating against violations by a certain lower-ranking police officer, demanding senior officials to investigate his actions and suspend him from work.

Conclusion

Following the international backlash that has been caused by the ouster of former islamist president Mohamed Morsi, the Egyptian state has taken steps to boost its image abroad.[13] The government began several media campaigns to promote tourism, underlining Egypt's exotic, natural, and historical dimensions, a narrative easily digested by foreign tourists or potential vacationers. The state has also spent millions of pounds on international conferences to promote young capitalists, also known as entrepreneurs, youth and women empowerment, and a self-narrative listing accomplishments, national projects, and ambitious initiatives, all to forge an image aimed at attracting foreign investment and encouraging international financial institutions to support Egypt with its neoliberal plans.

[13] Brian Rohan, "Egypt's Mukhabarat Hires Washington Lobbyists to Boost Image," *Associated Press*, Mar 6, 2017, https://bit.ly/2K4JzTn.

In order to make this PR campaign possible, several independent and critical media outlets were blocked, and dozens of bloggers and journalists detained on accusations of "spreading fake news."[14] Similarly, the state has adopted affiliated English-language websites[15] to report news of its achievements, inauguration of new projects, and efforts to empower civilians and improve the infrastructure, and to spread "positive vibes."

These attempts, however, come as the state continues to implement painful austerity measures since 2015,[16] which have not only affected the prices of essential goods, public transportation, fuel, food products, and other services, but also sliced the real value of stagnating salaries and savings into a third of what it used to be. In order to make these unpopular and regressive reforms possible, the state has had to outlaw dissent, and restrict organizing and protests. Despite this, thousands of civilians throughout the country have been protesting harsh conditions, whether they are social, labor, or economic; and despite growing restrictions on the right to association, civilians, workers, students, professionals, farmers, and villagers have not ceased to express themselves, demanding social justice and a better life. In fact, with growing restrictions on organized mobilization kept in mind, our documentation shows proliferation of unorganized protest movements, many of which used complaints, judicial, and media reporting channels as an alternative channel of protesting the daily injustices they face.

And finally, as Egypt receives the last portion of the IMF loan in 2019, more prices are expected to rise and more subsidies to fall. Combining this with no change in policies regarding service-providing, and continued closure of the public sphere, more dissatisfaction and protests should be expected, unless a real change takes place in the government's priorities and policies, putting the people of Egypt and their well-being first.

[14] Amnesty International, "Egypt: Open Air Prison For Critics," accessed Apr 3, 2019, https://bit.ly/2VhmhuA.
[15] Nearly 10 of almost 500 blocked websites were English-speaking outlets, most of which published content critical of the state and its policies. Later, the state provided unofficial support to English-speaking outlets; such as the privately-owned *Egypt Today*, affiliated with pro-state newspaper *Youm7*, as well as the privately-owned website *Egyptian Streets*, praised and promoted by the Egyptian state in several youth conferences as an outlet that promotes "positive news and tourism."
[16] Maged Mandour, "Sisi's Debt Crisis," *Sada*, Nov 20, 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/77756.

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