



HuMENA For Human Rights and Civic Engagement
HuMENA pour les Droits de l'Homme et l'Engagement Civique
هيومينا لحقوق الإنسان والمشاركة المدنية

Behind the Facade:

Understanding Human Rights Challenges in Bahrain

(2019-2024)

(A comprehensive report on the human rights situation in Bahrain)



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Report Purpose

This report highlights ongoing human rights violations in Bahrain, which continue despite the Bahraini government's claims to address such issues following the widespread crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in 2011. The report's time frame is from 2019 to 2024 and evaluates both the progress made and the recent challenges remaining in upholding human rights laws and principles. By delving into the complexities of human rights challenges, this research updates donors, policymakers, and international organizations with valuable insights into devising effective solutions and recommendations for the Bahraini government and international organizations. Through a comprehensive analysis of the causes of non-compliance with human rights laws, this research aims to contribute to academic literature and to efforts to promote and protect human rights in Bahrain and sustainable developments by human rights NGOs and other civil society organizations.

Methodology

The report utilizes a qualitative methodology, conducting thorough desk studies of diverse periodicals discussing human rights concerns and printed books and academic literature focusing on Bahrain's human rights record. The analysis encompasses the Bahrain Constitution as well as items derived from other international agreements and treaties. The results are enriched by semi-structured online interviews conducted with experts and the examination of legal documents and human rights reports spanning the period of six years (2019-2024).

The report covers Bahrain's legal framework, international human rights commitments, and a wide range of rights concerns, including women's rights, migrants' rights, the right to life, the right to nationality, and the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups. Additionally, it encompasses the protection of religious freedom, adherence to legal principles, the right to gather and form groups, the right to express oneself freely, involvement in political activities, suppression of civil society, and instances of unjustified arrests and summonses.

Key sources referenced in the report include the European Parliament resolution on Bahrain (June 2021), reports from the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and several international and regional human rights organizations such as CIVICUS, FrontLine Defenders, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International.

Additionally, it draws on reports from authoritative UN bodies, such as UN Special Rapporteurs, the Human Rights Council, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The report also incorporates official information from the Bahrain government and data from local Bahraini human rights groups.

This methodology guarantees a comprehensive and diverse examination of Bahrain's human rights situation, utilizing a broad range of reliable sources to offer balanced and supported conclusions.

1. Introduction

Bahrain has witnessed major uprisings nearly every decade since gaining independence from British rule in 1971. Discrimination, lack of democratic representation, and political prosecution have been the most common catalysts. The country's Shia majority (the Baharna and Ajam ethnicities) comprise an estimated two-thirds of the population and have long-standing grievances regarding discrimination and marginalization, particularly in the context of representation and equal citizenship rights. The ruling Al Khalifa family, in power since 1783, has faced criticism for persecuting the country's political opposition, civil society activism, and reformists.¹ The Bahraini government and the allied Gulf Cooperation Council's response to widespread protests in 2011, part of the broader Arab Spring movement, drew condemnation from human rights groups for the brutal tactics implemented. This included extrajudicial killings, torture, the arbitrary arrest of thousands of protesters, unfair trials, and the demolition of Shia mosques. Despite promises of reform and reconciliation following Bahrain's Independent Commission of Inquiry report in November 2011, the country has turned into a security state where no voice besides the government's is permitted. Journalists, human rights defenders (HRDs), and political dissidents are either imprisoned or in exile.

On 11 November 2020, the longest-serving prime minister in the world, Shaikh Khalifa Al Khalifa, died after ruling the country for 49 years; around 30 years of them were ruled under emergency law.² On 11 November 2020, the king of Bahrain appointed his son Shaikh Salman Bin Hamad Alkhalifa as prime minister, and the Bahrainis were optimistic about a new chapter of reforms and change.³

Currently, there are significant restrictions on civil society in Bahrain. This includes prohibitions on assembly and demonstrations, repressive laws against insulting the government or the King, along with an absence of democratic mechanisms for proportional representation. Government authorities frequently impose bans on peaceful demonstrations and gatherings, citing vague national security pretexts as justification. These infringements upon freedom of expression and assembly constrain the population's ability to articulate their grievances as well as engage in political discourse and decision-making processes. A conspicuous absence of democratic governance and meaningful public engagement characterizes Bahrain's current political landscape.

¹ Wright, Steven, Fixing the Kingdom: Political Evolution and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain (August 18, 2010). CIRS Occasional Papers, 2010, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2825922> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2825922>

² Welle, D. (2020, November 11). Bahrain prime minister dies at 84, royal palace says. dw.com. <https://www.dw.com/en/bahrain-prime-minister-dies-at-84-royal-palace-says/a-55560449#:~:text=Bahrain%27s%20prime%20minister%2C%20Prince%20Khalifa%20bin%20Salman%20Al,the%20United%20States%2C%2220%Bahrain%27s%20state%20news%20agency%20said.>

³ Bahrain, P. M. O. K. O. (n.d.-c). About His Royal Highness - Prime Minister's Office | Kingdom of Bahrain. <https://pmo.gov.bh/en/category/about-his-royal-highness>

Bahrain's legislative framework contains restrictive laws and lacks democratic accountability and transparency. The country's elected lower house of parliament, the Council of Representatives, serves as a forum for democratic representation but is largely devoid of substantive power and oversight mechanisms. Furthermore, the upper house of parliament, the Shura Council, wields significant legislative authority and comprises individuals directly appointed by the King. It has the power to amend and enact laws, effectively sidelining the Council of Representatives and concentrating power in the hands of the monarchy. Consequently, Bahraini citizens are disenfranchised and marginalized, with no opportunity to engage in effective political participation, influence the legislative process, or hold their representatives accountable. ⁴

Regarding civil society, the Bahraini government imposes restrictions on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), stifling their ability to operate independently and advocate for citizens' rights. Numerous NGOs, political parties, and societies have been banned outright. This includes Alwefaq National Islamic Society, the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), the Islamic Action Society (Amal), and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. Additionally, the government banned the last remaining independent media (Alwasat Newspaper) in 2017. It instituted a prohibition on leaders and members of dissolved political societies from running for boards of directors of charitable societies, civil organizations, and sports clubs in 2018. In 2018, amendments to Law 36 were enacted, which effectively barred all members of dissolved parties and societies from engaging in political and civil activities, such as voting, candidacy for public office, or participation on the boards of civil society organizations.

Consequently, thousands were disenfranchised during Bahrain's 2018 and 2022 elections. This legislation, often referred to as the «political isolation law,» faced criticism from both local and international human rights organizations. This opposition stemmed from the law's discriminatory nature, which resulted in the persecution of individuals and the deprivation of their inherent rights.

The Bahraini government continues to prevent journalists from utilizing print, electronic, and visual media. Additionally, the absence of independent journalism, the arrest of journalists, revocation of nationalities, and the monopolization of pro-government media in the country have resulted in the withering of the fourth estate, which currently plays no role in increasing citizens' participation in public affairs and listening to their voices.

Bahraini security forces have systematically targeted individuals for voicing dissent and advocating for fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, assembly, and political participation. This crackdown has resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of numerous dissidents, who were detained for their involvement in protests and criticism of government policies. Within Jau Central Prison, Bahrain's

⁴ You Can't Call Bahrain A Democracy. (2022, October 13). HRW. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from: <https://www.hrw.org/report/202231/10/you-cant-call-bahrain-democracy/bahraains-political-isolation-laws>.

primary detention facility, detainees have reported instances of deliberate medical neglect and the denial of necessary healthcare, leading to dire consequences for their health and well-being. Such practices, characterized by human rights organizations as equivalent to a policy of «slow death», have resulted in the deaths of several inmates, with Hussein Khalil being the most recent casualty in March 2024.⁵ Amidst mounting pressure and scrutiny, particularly in the lead-up to Eid al-Fitr on April 8, 2024, the King of Bahrain pardoned 1,584 individuals. It is a positive step, yet major human rights concerns persist. An estimated 560 political prisoners remain incarcerated, illustrating ongoing challenges to safeguarding human rights in Bahrain.⁶

⁵ Staff, A. (2023, April 7). Bahrain authorities subjecting prisoners to “slow death” by not providing treatment and health care, Al-Khawaja states. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain: <https://www.adhrb.org/202304//bahrain-authorities-subjecting-prisoners-to-slow-death-by-not-providing-treatment-and-health-care-al-khawaja-states/bahrain-democracy/bahrains-political-isolation-laws>.

⁶ HM King issues Royal Decree pardoning 1584 inmates. (n.d.). <https://www.bna.bh/en/>. <https://www.bna.bh/en/HMKingissuesRoyalDecreepardoning1584inmates.aspx?cms=q8FmFJgiscL2fwIzON12%bDv%2bqOtGPa0d%2bIO1H8412%bzH83%d>

2. Bahrain's Legal Framework

2.1: Constitution and International Obligations

Bahrain's legal framework, rooted in civil law and guided by Islamic Sharia principles, ostensibly protects fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, assembly, and association, as well as women's rights and the right to equality. However, the legal landscape presents major contradictions. While Bahrain's constitution enshrines these rights, various procedural, penal, and regulatory laws impose restrictions and infringe upon civil and political liberties, constituting a fundamental challenge to human rights protections.⁷

2.2 Enforcement Mechanisms and Challenges

Bahrain has established several human rights bodies meant to address violations and promote domestic accountability. However, significant obstacles hinder the realization of these objectives. Foremost among these challenges is the appointment process of these members. Rather than being selected through transparent and participatory processes involving civil society actors, appointments are made by royal decree or the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Consequently, many members are drawn from law enforcement, public prosecution, or government administration backgrounds, needing more demonstrable human rights advocacy experience or a transparent track record in this field.

Since 2011, the Bahraini government has established the Special Investigation Unit (SIU),⁸ the Police Development and Reform Committee (PDRC), and the Ministry of Interior Ombudsman,⁹ and revised the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR)'s mandate.¹⁰ This initially appeared promising for enhancing Bahrain's human rights framework. However, these efforts have not yielded significant outcomes.

⁷ Al Khalifa, I. B. S. (1995). Constitution: State of Bahrain. Arab LQ, 10, 92.

⁸ SIU was established pursuant to Public Prosecution Decision No. (8) of 2012. In accordance with Article 4 of the decision, its jurisdiction is limited to investigating and dealing with allegations of torture, abuse and cruel treatment, by determining criminal responsibility against the involved public officials, including those with leadership positions under the principle of leadership responsibility. (n.d.). Special Investigation Unit. <https://siu.gov.bh/establishment-and-specialization/>

⁹ Bahrain plans to set up ombudsman. (2012, February 28). https://tradedearabia.com/news/LAW_213295.html

¹⁰ His Majesty the King established the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) on 10 November 2009, by Royal Order No. 46 of 2009, and granted it mandates and powers in line with the Paris Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights. "UN General Assembly Resolution 48134/ of 1993". (n.d.). National Institution for Human Rights. <https://www.nihr.org.bh/EN/About/Brief#:~:text=To%20complement%20these%20transitions%2C%20His%20Majesty%20the%20King,for%20the%20promotion%20and%20protection%20of%20human%20rights.>

Beyond issues with their organizational structure, formation processes, and operational methods, there is a notable absence of robustness, effective impact, boldness, or commitment to addressing violations and ensuring accountability for those responsible.¹¹

A critical concern lies in the independence of these organizations and their personnel. Appointment mechanisms lack transparency across all four bodies, with minimal or unclear involvement from civil society or parliamentary oversight. Being government-formed and ultimately reporting to the government, these bodies face challenges in effectively challenging state security apparatuses. Furthermore, none of them have established clear protocols for following up on complaints or implementing recommendations, thereby diminishing their efficacy. These organizations operate more like public relations agencies, that typically praise government-led reforms, than entities with genuine human rights mandates. Additionally, they often deny, minimize, or justify human rights violations.¹² They actively engage in international relations to seek awards and international recognition, but do not typically collaborate with local NGOs and activists. The lack of NIHR financial independence is a contradiction to the Paris Principles ('Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions'). Furthermore, NIHR disregards all independent human rights groups in Bahrain and exile and engages only with registered human rights groups, all of which are government organizations except two. Moreover, they are active only when human rights groups expose human rights violations in Bahrain's main jail (Jaw). They visit the jail and publish a statement to deny what independent human rights groups have published to take away any accountability from the government.¹³

The second challenge is the continued lack of independence, overlapping mandates, and limited effectiveness of Bahraini national human rights bodies, particularly as complaints ultimately pass through the MOI. Additionally, concerns persist regarding deficiencies in the existing complaints mechanisms, where inmates must route complaints of torture or ill-treatment through prison authorities, raising doubts about the proper transmission of complaints to relevant authorities.¹⁴

¹¹ Bahrain: NGOs call on the National Institution for Human Rights to improve its independence, effectiveness and to engage with independent civil society to better fulfill its mandate. (2024, June 11). SALAM DHR. <https://salam-dhr.org/bahrain-ngos-call-on-the-national-institution-for-human-rights-to-improve-its-independence-effectiveness-and-to-engage-with-independent-civil-society-to-better-fulfill-its-mandate/>

¹² Bahrain News Agency: "National Institution for Human Rights: Execution of the death penalty of three convicts took place following a complete trial," 2017. <https://www.alayam.com/online/local/626138/News.html>

¹³ Ibid 7

¹⁴ Defective and Deficient A review of Bahrain's National Human Rights Bodies. (n.d.). https://bahrainrights.net/wp-content/uploads/202105//A-Review-of-Bahrain-National-Human-Rights-Bodies_210421_RM.pdf

The absence of a clear separation of powers is another major problem. The King heads executive, legislative, judicial, and military powers according to the Bahraini constitution, a clear example of conflicts of interest. This centralization of power undermines the independence of the judiciary, as all judges are appointed by the King, who also presides over the Supreme Judicial Council.¹⁵

According to Bahrain's constitution, the King is the head of state, its symbolic representation, and inviolable. The King is the loyal protector of Islamic faith, the homeland, and the symbol of national unity. He has the authority to appoint the Prime Minister, members of the Constitutional Court, judges, members of the Consultative Council, and governors. He also has the authority to amend laws, sign treaties, and repeal them without the approval of parliament. The constitution establishes a parliament, the two-chambered National Assembly, each with an equal number of members and powers: the lower house, the Council of Representatives (Majlis Nuwwab), is elected, while the upper house, Consultative Council or Shura Council (Majlis Shura), is appointed by the King. The constitution provides limited authority and powers to the elected National Assembly. Thus, while members of the appointed National Assembly can propose legislation, only the executive can draft it and put it to a vote. The constitution also grants the King the final say in any legislative dispute.¹⁶ Finally, Bahrain's judiciary system is not independent of the King, as he appoints all judges. Furthermore, the King heads the country's Supreme Judicial Council.

2.3 Key Human Rights Laws and Regulations

As a signatory to the Arab Charter on Human Rights (ACHR) and other international conventions, Bahrain is bound to uphold individual rights, such as liberty, political freedom, nationality, freedom of thought, and the right to development.¹⁷ Nevertheless, understanding Bahrain's legal system reveals systemic barriers to compliance with these commitments. Bahrain has ratified numerous United Nations conventions, including the CIRD, CRC, CAT, CEDAW, ICCPR, CESC, and CRPD, as well as treaties under international labor organization conventions such as C138, C111, and C105, all of which ban forced labor.¹⁸

¹⁵ Levi, E. H. (1976). Some aspects of separation of powers. *Colum. L. Rev.*, 76, 371.

¹⁶ King, S. J. (2011). The constitutional monarchy option in Morocco and Bahrain. *Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt*.

¹⁷ Akram, S. M. (2007). The Arab Charter on Human Rights 2004. *Boston University International Law Journal*, 24(2), 147.

¹⁸ Watkins, J. L. (2008). The Right to Reparations in International Human Rights Law and the Case of Bahrain. *Brook. J. Intl L.*, 34, 559.

3. Deficits to the Application of Civil and Political Rights

3.1 Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Press

The Bahraini government systematically represses freedom of expression, prohibiting nearly all criticism and opposition and utilizing national legislation to suppress the right to freedom of expression. Since their arrest in 2011 for their roles in pro-democracy demonstrations, thirteen notable dissidents have been serving lengthy prison sentences. Among them is HRD Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, who founded the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and the Gulf Center For Human Rights. Their open criticism of the government mobilization of protests is often considered the de facto reason for their incarceration, with authorities providing specious, ad hoc charges against them. Furthermore, Shaikh Ali Salman, the head of Al-Wefaq, Bahrain's largest opposition party, is currently serving a life sentence. The Court of Appeals affirmed his sentence in January 2019 on allegations of espionage for Qatar.

State suppression of social media occurs both domestically and crosses borders to target HRDs and activists in exile. On May 19, 2019, the Director General of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security (Ministry of Interior) announced an investigation into Twitter accounts accused of “inciting sedition and disrupting civil peace” in Bahrain. The investigation revealed that many of these accounts were operated by individuals in Iran, Qatar, Iraq, France, Germany, and Australia by «fugitives convicted in absentia.» Specifically, HRD Sayed Yusuf Almuhaafdha and Hassan al-Setri were accused of managing a network of accounts that spread false information, with legal action being threatened against them. Following this, Bahrain's King and Prime Minister called for accountability for those running these Twitter accounts. On May 21, 2019, Al Arabiya published a video report labeling HRD Sayed Yusuf Almuhaafdha and Hassan al-Satri as «wanted» men without consulting them for comment.¹⁹

In 2020, the Bahraini government intensified its suppression of online and social media activity, prosecuting several public figures solely for their social media posts, including prominent lawyers Abdullah Al Shamlawi and Abdullah Hashim. In May 2019, the MOI declared that it would prosecute people who follow or share posts from «inciting accounts» on Twitter. Bahrain further tightened online content regulations by amending the Press Law, mandating that news and broadcasting sites register and obtain approval from the Ministry of Information Affairs. This amendment also bans electronic media from publishing content that conflicts with “national interests” or the Constitution. Between June 2020 and May 2021, at least 58 individuals were arrested, detained, or prosecuted for their online activities.²⁰ In July 2021, reports indicated that Bahrain, already suspected of using NSO Group's

¹⁹ Bahrain: Threats and defamation against Sayed Yousif Almuhaafdha and Hussein al-Satri. (n.d.-b). International Federation for Human Rights.
<https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/bahrain-threats-and-defamation-against-sayed-yousif-almuhadafdha-and>

²⁰ Bahrain. (n.d.). In Freedom House.
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/bahrain/freedom-world/2022>

Pegasus spyware, had entered the phone numbers of potential targets into a now leaked database. In August 2021, Citizen Lab revealed that the iPhones of nine Bahraini activists were successfully hacked with Pegasus spyware between June 2020 and February 2021.²¹

Since the Information Affairs Ministry suspended Al Wasat, the country's only independent newspaper, in 2017, independent media has yet to operate in Bahrain. Foreign journalists rarely have access to the country, while UN special rapporteurs, international NGOs, and other rights groups are routinely denied entry into the country. International wire services, when they cover Bahrain, typically do so from Dubai or elsewhere outside of the country. When journalists are present in Bahrain, their coverage is usually non-political and uncontroversial, such as covering Formula 1.

Academics are placed under similar restrictions. On January 30, 2020, Jassim Hussein Al-Abbas, a history researcher and investigator, was summoned for a criminal inquiry after posting a blog, «The Years of Al-Jareesh,» which he had written since 2008. By placing greater emphasis on Bahrain's Shi'a roots, he was accused of «spreading false information.» He was detained again on November 10, 2023, and after being called for additional investigation. He was released a week later but had a travel ban placed on him until the writing date of this research. On July 21, 2020, Dr. Nader Kadhem, a researcher and professor, was detained and imprisoned for a week pending an inquiry. He was subject to a travel ban until the writing date of this research and subsequently fired from the University of Bahrain.

On a legal level, the Bahraini government has continuously enacted laws that restrict the expression of opinions and punish individuals who do so. Article 133 of the Bahraini Penal Code states that “Any person who deliberately announces false or malicious news, statements, or rumors in wartime, or mounts adverse publicity campaigns, to cause damage to military preparations for defending the State of Bahrain or military operations of the Armed Forces, to cause people to panic, or to weaken the nation's perseverance, shall be imprisoned for not more than ten years.” Bahraini legislation can also punish anyone for “insulting a foreign country.” According to Article 215 of the Bahraini Penal Code, a punishment of imprisonment for no more than two years or a fine of no more than BD 200 (530 USD) shall be inflicted upon any person who offends in public a foreign country, or an international organization based in the State of Bahrain or its president or representative. The same penalty applies to someone who offends an organization's flag or official emblem. The legislation also penalizes individuals who criticize ministries or entities affiliated with the Bahraini state. Expressing an opinion on this matter is construed as “insulting regular bodies.” According to Article 216, “Public insults directed at the National Assembly or other official bodies, the army, courts, authorities, or public interests can lead to imprisonment or fines.» Other restrictive measures include Article 160, promoting the change of the state regime by force; Article 165, incitement to hatred of the regime; Article 173, incitement to disobedience to laws; and Article 214, insulting

²¹ Ibid.

the King, the state flag, or its national emblem. These laws contribute significantly to the restriction of freedom of expression in Bahrain.²²

3.2 Freedom of Assembly and Association

The Bahraini government has effectively banned all forms of political assembly in the capital and metropole through the enactment of Decree-Law No. 18 of 2013, which governs public assemblies, marches, and gatherings. Article 1 of this legislation explicitly prohibits the organization of demonstrations, protests, gatherings, or sit-ins in the city of Manama. In practice, any marches or gatherings that do occur are deemed illegal and are often forcibly suppressed. Applications for permission to hold gatherings, submitted to police stations, are consistently rejected. This practice constitutes a clear violation of Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts that «everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.» Consequently, most demonstrations that have taken place in Bahrain since the enactment of Decree-Law No. 18 are considered illegal and are typically met with some form of police suppression.

On January 31, 2022, the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS), one of Bahrain's oldest human rights organizations, reported that three candidates nominated to run in the society's board of directors' election - Abdul-Jalil Yousef, the organization's Secretary General, Issa Ebrahim, and Mohsin Matar - were banned from the board due to "political isolation laws." All three were former members of Bahrain's now-dissolved National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad). Additionally, in April 2024, Abdul-Jalil Yousef was banned from running for the board again, for the same reasons.²³

Political isolation laws, enacted in June 2018, explicitly prohibit members of previously dissolved political parties from running for parliament or serving on the boards of directors of civil society organizations. These laws also ban formerly convicted felons, even those pardoned or convicted on charges related to speech or assembly, as well as individuals previously deemed to have «disrupted» constitutional life in Bahrain. In 2016 and 2017, Bahrain's judiciary dissolved the country's two major opposition parties, Al-Wefaq and Wa'ad. This legislation contradicts international human rights law and Bahrain's constitution, depriving individuals of their fundamental civil and political rights.²⁴

²² The Reality of Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly in Bahrain. (2023, December 12). SALAM DHR.
<https://salam-dhr.org/the-reality-of-freedom-of-expression-and-peaceful-ssembly-in-bahrain/>

²³ قانون العزل السياسي لازال يحكم قبضته، والضحية "حرية ممارسة النشاط السياسي السلمي". (9 May, 2024). مركز البحرين لحقوق الإنسان.
<https://bahrainrights.net/?p=136934&lang=ar>

²⁴ Bahrain. (2023b, January 12). Human Rights Watch.
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/bahrain>

Ultimately, the enforcement of Decree-Law No. (25) of 2018 and the implementation of political isolation laws in Bahrain represent significant human rights violations.²⁵ The prohibition of peaceful assemblies and the disenfranchisement of political activists and former opposition members undermine the principles of freedom of assembly and association, as well as the right to political participation. These actions not only contravene international human rights standards, but also erode the democratic fabric of Bahraini society, highlighting the urgent need for reform and adherence to human rights obligations.²⁶

3.3 Electoral System and Political Participation

Bahrain's parliamentary and municipal elections in November 2022 occurred under systematic restrictions placed on political and civil rights, freedom of speech, and assembly. The country's political opposition societies, including the Islamic Action Society (dissolved in 2012), Al-Wafaq Society (disbanded in 2016), and the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad, dissolved in 2017), have been systematically suppressed. This suppression of organized political activity undermines a key pillar of democracy in Bahrain.

The Bahraini government has utilized political prosecution to strip dissidents of their political rights through amendments to Law No. 14 of 2002 (regarding political rights) and the Law on Associations, Social and Cultural Clubs, Special Committees Working in the Field of Youth and Sports, and Private Foundations (Decree-Law No. 21 of 1989). These amendments stipulate that members of a Board of Directors must enjoy their civil and political rights, effectively barring members of dissolved political societies from participating in and influencing public policies. In 2018, Law No. 25 further amended the exercise of political rights, excluding citizens from voting and running in elections. Additionally, Amendment No. 36 to the Law on Associations and Clubs introduced stringent conditions for candidates seeking to join the boards of directors of associations and clubs. These laws exclude individuals who have been sentenced to a felony, even if pardoned or rehabilitated. They also exclude individuals who have been sentenced to more than six months imprisonment for intentional offenses, even if pardoned, leaders and members of dissolved political associations, and individuals who have «disrupted constitutional or parliament» typically referring to MPs who have previously resigned in protest.

Consequently, hundreds of Bahrainis have been denied the right to vote or stand for election, violating their civil and political rights. Despite the adoption of the National Action Charter in 2002, which reintroduced a semi-democratic system with

²⁵ Text of Law No. (25) of 2018 (also regarded as political isolation law):
<https://legalaffairs.gov.bh/Legislation/English>

²⁶ State Of Civil Society Report 2023. (2023, August 1). CIVICUS Global Alliance.
<https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2023>

parliamentary and municipal elections every four years, Bahrain's elections are currently neither free nor fair. The electoral system is deeply flawed, with authorities manipulating the voting process, thus undermining its legitimacy. Since 2018, the Exercise of Political Rights Law has been used to bar members of dissolved societies and individuals with prison sentences from running for office. Before the 2014 elections, the number of electoral districts was reduced from five to four. Critics view it as an act of gerrymandering meant to diminish the chances of Shia opposition candidates being elected.

In 2018, authorities rejected at least 12 candidates linked to outlawed groups and removed thousands of names from voter lists. This practice continued in the 2022 elections, with reports indicating that over 20% of eligible voters had been removed from the lists. The High Election Commission, which monitors the vote, lacks independence and operates under the Minister of Justice. No independent, international observers are permitted into the country, much less general polling stations, for elections. Reports from the 2018 and 2022 elections highlighted violations such as vote-buying and governmental pressure on public sector workers and military personnel. Official turnout rates are disputed by opposition forces, which claim participation was far lower.

3.4 Rule of Law and Access to Justice

Bahrain's constitutional framework ostensibly upholds the separation of powers among its branches of government. However, the practical application reveals a consolidation of power in the hands of the monarchy. Article 33 of the Constitution of Bahrain confers extensive powers upon the King, thereby undermining the principles of the separation of powers and the rule of law. This provision allows the King to preside over executive, legislative, and judicial authorities and grants him the authority to appoint ministers. The King holds authority over the legislative, executive, and judicial and can appoint key officials, including the Prime Minister, judges, and members of the Consultative Council. Despite nominal parliamentary functions, the King's pervasive influence allows him to rule by decree if he desires, rendering parliament largely symbolic. Oversight mechanisms, such as the Ombudsman Office and the NIHR, lack independence. These bodies do not adequately investigate abuses, as the King also appoints their members, and this reflects an apparent conflict of interests.

An example illustrating the erosion of the rule of law is Bahrain's current divergence from the universal principle that a person under detention should be investigated within 48 hours. Under Bahrain's Terrorism Law, the executive authority is permitted to detain individuals for up to six months before bringing them before the Public Prosecution. This legislation undermines the rule of law and contradicts Bahrain's obligations to the UN human rights system. Although constitutionally mandated to be independent, the judiciary operates under royal influence. Judges, including those in the Constitutional Court, are appointed directly by the King, diminishing judicial

autonomy. Furthermore, amendments made in 2017 granted military courts jurisdiction over civilians, further undermining the rule of law. The judiciary's actions often favor the State, especially in cases involving journalists, activists, and political dissidents. Instances of impunity, particularly among royal family members and high-ranking security officers, persist despite occasional calls for judicial reform. Mechanisms to address official misconduct remain ineffective, particularly within the security forces. Oversight bodies established post-2011 have largely failed to hold security personnel accountable for abuses. Likewise, torture and mistreatment, especially of detainees, are widespread, and access to legal representation is often denied. Furthermore, discrimination against women and migrants persists both legally and in de facto circumstances, highlighting systemic human rights violations. ²⁷

3.5 The Right to Nationality

Statelessness in Bahrain is driven mainly by discrimination by gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status. Since 2012, the Bahraini government has revoked the nationality of hundreds of individuals through executive orders, royal decrees, and court decisions, rendering many of them stateless. This practice has been widely criticized as arbitrary and oppressive, used primarily to suppress dissent and consolidate power.²⁸ Between 2012 and 2019, 985 Bahraini citizens had their nationality revoked, with 970 of them being opposition politicians and activists, primarily from the Shi'a community. This practice has been criticized for its sectarian motivations and used as a tool for political suppression. A notable instance occurred on May 15, 2018, when a Bahraini court stripped 115 individuals of their nationality in a mass trial.²⁹

The systemically stateless Bidoon community, historically present in Bahrain, frequently missed the opportunity to register for citizenship and were thus denied nationality after “falling through the cracks” of government bureaucracy. Although Bahrain granted nationality to many Bidoon in 2008, thousands remain stateless. Estimates suggest between 2,000 to 5,000 Bidoon families are still without citizenship despite being eligible. Similarly, the Ajam population, primarily Shia Muslims of Persian descent, have faced significant barriers to citizenship.

It is worth noting that Bahrain has not ratified international conventions on statelessness and currently lacks mechanisms to address it. Stateless individuals and those stripped of their nationality face severe restrictions, including loss of access to education, healthcare, employment, and social services. For instance, children born to stateless fathers cannot acquire Bahraini citizenship, even if their mothers are citizens,

²⁷ BTI 2024 Bahrain Country Report. (n.d.). BTI 2024.
<https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BHR#pos5>

²⁸ Arbitrary Revocation of Nationality in Bahrain: a Tool of Oppression. (2021, May 31). SALAM DHR.
<https://salam-dhr.org/arbitrary-revocation-of-nationality-in-bahrain-a-tool-of-oppression/>

²⁹ Bahrain: New Deportations of Nationals. (2020, October 28). Human Rights Watch.
<https://www.hrw.org/news/201804/02/bahrain-new-deportations-nationals>

perpetuating the cycle of statelessness. Lastly, stateless children also face significant hurdles in accessing fundamental rights, requiring annual residency permit renewals and needing employer sponsorship as adults.³⁰

International condemnation during Bahrain's 2017 Universal Periodic Review led to some reforms. In April 2019, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa restored Bahraini citizenship to 551 individuals, and the power to revoke nationality was restricted to the Cabinet. However, these changes do not fully address the issues of deprivation of citizenship and statelessness. Those who regained their nationality continue to face discrimination and lack full access to housing, social welfare, healthcare, and political rights. Additionally, no reparations were provided for seized properties or for hardships endured. The mechanisms allowing the arbitrary removal of nationality remain, and accountability for these actions is lacking. Currently, 434 people remain stateless due to nationality revocation. Some of them live in Bahrain, but the majority live in exile in different regions.³¹

³⁰ Alsabeehg, Z. (2018). Bahrain's citizenship policy of inclusion and exclusion. In *The Middle East in Transition* (pp. 133-156). Edward Elgar Publishing.

³¹ Bahrain | Stateless Hub. (n.d.). <https://www.statelesshub.org/country/bahrain#:~:text=Statelessness%20in%20Bahrain%20is%20most%20often%20caused%20and,via%20executive%20order%2C%20royal%20decrees%20or%20court%20decisions.>

4. Women's Rights

4.1 Legal Status and Rights of Women in Bahrain

Article 4 of the Bahraini Constitution ensures equality and equal opportunity for all citizens, a principle the State upholds. Article 5(b) further states that the State guarantees women's ability to balance family responsibilities with societal work, ensuring their equality with men in political, social, cultural, and economic spheres while adhering to Islamic Sharia principles.

Women in Bahrain are among the most educated in the Gulf region. They are not legally excluded from the workplace and are active in tertiary education. However, they are underrepresented professionally and face unequal treatment under personal status laws. Bahrain's legal framework is complex, incorporating royal decrees, civil and criminal codes, and sect-specific Sharia courts. International conventions like the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights add to this complexity. It's worth mentioning that reservations were made about CEDAW articles number 2, 9, 15, and 16 by the government of Bahrain, arguing that they conflict with Bahrain's constitution and Sharia law. Key personal status laws, particularly those concerning family matters such as marriage, divorce, and child custody, are not unified and are subject to Sharia court rulings. This lack of uniformity has sparked debate among civil society, with women's groups and human rights organizations advocating for unified laws while some Islamist groups oppose them.

Codified gender discrimination continues in Bahrain. For instance, a woman cannot be a legal guardian over her children in the event of her husband's death, as guardianship passes to the grandfather or uncle, the male. In July 2017, Bahrain enacted the Unified Family Law, which provides women and families with de jure equal access to justice. However, Bahraini law still discriminates against women's rights concerning marriage, divorce, and inheritance, failing to provide equal treatment compared to men. Women are mandated to obey their husbands, who are regarded as the head of the household. Currently, Bahraini law does not allow mothers to transfer their nationality to their children in the same manner as fathers. Additionally, Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims. Regarding inheritance, Bahraini law, like many Muslim countries, is based on Islamic jurisprudence, where men inherit twice the amount entitled to women. Husbands inherit a higher share than wives despite the latter's contributions to family wealth. This gender-based discrimination can lead to adverse effects such as poverty and deprivation among women.³²

³² Semi Structured Online Interview with Women Rights Defender 10-May 2024.

The Bahraini Citizenship Act of 1963 exemplifies discrimination against Bahraini women, particularly regarding their rights to confer citizenship to their children if married to a foreigner. This legislation highlights the systemic gender inequities entrenched in Bahrain’s current nationality laws.³³

4.2 Gender-Based Violence and Measures for Protection

Gender-based violence is a significant issue in Bahrain. Although sexual harassment is illegal, the legislation focuses on protecting honor over women’s rights. Domestic and sexual violence are underreported, and there is a lack of support for organizations for victims. Despite the police and judiciary receiving some training on how to challenge sexual harassment, rates of reporting sexual harassment remain low.³⁴ Additionally, there is no direct reference to violence against women (VAW) in the law, and there are very few organizations in Bahrain that support victims of domestic and sexual violence.

In 2004, amendments to the Passport Law in Bahrain permitted married women to apply for a passport without their husband’s permission. Legally, women do not need consent from a male guardian to travel, and it is unlawful for a man to confiscate his spouse’s travel documents. However, regarding employment, Article 55(a) of the personal status law acknowledges a woman’s right to work. Nonetheless, in practice, women sometimes need their husband’s permission to work outside the home. Bahraini marriage contracts must stipulate a woman’s right to work, or the husband must be aware of his wife’s desire to work at the time of marriage. A husband can also provide post-marriage consent for his wife to gain employment. Article 55(b) stipulates that a wife will lose her alimony if she works against her husband’s wishes and the family’s interests.³⁵

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) has documented an increasing number of women activists targeted by Bahraini authorities. Women HRDs are frequently subjected to gender-based violence and threatened with rape and sexual assault during interrogation and detention. Since 2011, BCHR has recorded the arrest of more than 300 women. This indicates that women are subjected to the same arbitrary arrest system as male HRDs.³⁶

In April 2016, Taiba Darwish, a Bahraini citizen, was convicted and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment on charges of “harboring wanted suspects.” The

³³ Abbas. (2017, March 8). The Legal Status of Women in Bahrain. BCHR. <https://bahrainrights.net/?p=8619#:~:text=Bahrain%20has%20no%20legislation%20protecting%20the%20freedoms%20of,prosecute%20individuals%20who%20discriminate%20on%20grounds%20of%20gender.>

³⁴ Tzabiras, M. (2020, March 11). The legal barriers holding back women’s rights in Bahrain - IFEX. IFEX. <https://ifex.org/the-legal-barriers-holding-back-womens-rights-in-bahrain/>

³⁵ Abbas. (2017b, March 8). The Legal Status of Women in Bahrain. BCHR. <https://bahrainrights.net/?p=8619#:~:text=Bahrain%20has%20no%20legislation%20protecting%20the%20freedoms%20of,prosecute%20individuals%20who%20discriminate%20on%20grounds%20of%20gender.>

³⁶ Ahmed, Dunya Ahmed Abdullah, “Bahrain” in Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress

European-Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR) reported that Darwish was subjected to ill-treatment while detained and was forbidden from having contact with her family for extended periods.³⁷ On May 26, 2017, the National Security Apparatus (NSA) summoned Women Rights Defender Ebtisam Al-Saegh to the Muharraq police station in the country's north. The interrogators sexually attacked her. She was also verbally abused, and interrogators threatened to rape her if she didn't stop her human rights work. Ebtisam Al-Saegh was discharged about 11 p.m. and immediately transported to the hospital.³⁸

In August 2016, Bahrain's Ministry of Justice, Endowments, and Islamic Affairs issued new regulations for citizens intending to go on Hajj. These regulations require that female pilgrims under the age of 45 be accompanied by a male guardian, such as a husband, father, brother, or son, if traveling to Mecca. These regulations violate the CEDAW, to which Bahrain is a party, committing to implement measures to end discrimination against women. Additionally, these regulations violate Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantee the right to freedom of religion.

4.3 Women's Participation in Political and Public Life

Bahraini women have access to education and are increasingly participating in political and public life. Women were granted suffrage in 2002 and can vote at the age of 18. There has been a notable increase in female participation in the workforce and in higher education. Women occupy positions in the judiciary and government, although they remain underrepresented. In 2018, Bahrain was ranked 130th by the Inter-Parliamentary Union for female representation, with women holding seats in both houses of parliament and municipal councils. However, members of women's unions are not allowed to participate or run for office due to the political isolation laws, which prevents current and former members of banned organizations from exercising their political rights. Finally, barriers to upward mobility persist, partly due to Bahrain's patronage systems and gender-based discrimination in the workplace.³⁹

³⁷ European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, "The Situation of Women in the Gulf States" (2014), p.18, source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/509985/IPOL_STU\(2014\)509985_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/509985/IPOL_STU(2014)509985_EN.pdf)

³⁸ Bahrain: Ebtisam Al-Saegh tortured and sexually assaulted in National Security Agency building. (2017, November 14). Front Line Defenders. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/ebtisam-al-saegh-tortured-and-sexually-assaulted>

³⁹ Staff, A. (2021, June 2). Whitewashing Women's Rights Violations: The Participation of Bahrain's Supreme Council for Women in the Gender Equality Forum. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain. <https://www.adhrb.org/2021/06/whitewashing-womens-rights/>

4.4 Efforts to Promote Gender Equality and Challenges Faced

Efforts to promote gender equality in Bahrain include the ratification of international conventions and the establishment of training programs for law enforcement and judicial personnel. The Supreme Council for Women has been instrumental in these efforts, emphasizing education and combating illiteracy. According to the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, Bahrain improved its ranking to 126 out of 144 countries, standing second in the Gulf and third among Arab States.⁴⁰ The report highlights Bahrain's significant achievements in closing the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity (54%), educational attainment (99%), and health and survival (96%). Bahrain has completely closed the gender gap in primary, secondary, and tertiary education enrollment and leads the Gulf region in economic participation and opportunity metrics, such as wage equality, estimated earned income, and representation in senior roles.⁴¹ Rape has been criminalized, and Article 353 of the Penal Code, which controversially allowed rapists to avoid punishment if they married their victims, was scrapped in 2023. This was a major development and one of the greatest achievements of the women's movement in Bahrain.⁴²

Legal reforms have also been made, such as allowing women to apply for passports without a husband's permission. However, significant challenges remain. Women still face legal and societal restrictions, particularly in personal status laws, inheritance rights, and the ability to pass citizenship on to their children. Discrimination in financial services and the need for male guardianship in some circumstances further hinders gender equality. Overall, while there have been strides towards gender equality in Bahrain, substantial legal and societal challenges persist, requiring continued advocacy and reform efforts.⁴³

⁴⁰ World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2017, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Naar, I. (2023, May 23). Bahrain abolishes controversial rape law. The National. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/bahrain/2023/05/23/bahrain-abolishes-controversial-rape-law/>

⁴³ UN women's rights committee publishes findings on Bahrain, Costa Rica, Georgia, Hungary, Mauritania, Norway, Slovenia and Tunisia. (2023). In <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/un-womens-rights-committee-publishes-findings-bahrain-costa-rica-georgia>.

5. Rights of Minorities and Vulnerable Groups

5.1 Rights of Migrant Workers

Bahrain continues to enforce the kafala (sponsorship) system, which links migrant workers' permits to their employers. Under kafala, if migrant workers leave their employer without permission, they will lose their residence status and may risk fines, arrest, and deportation for «absconding.» In 2009, Bahrain altered policy to allow migrant workers to terminate their contracts with their original employer after one year if they gave at least 30 days' notice. However, in January 2022, legislators extended the duration to two years. Workers must also pay for their two-year work permits, which has contributed to a low uptake. Although Bahrain's Labour Law covers domestic workers, it excludes them from important safeguards such as weekly rest days, minimum pay, and limitations on working hours.

There are still significant abuses and exploitation faced by migrant workers in Bahrain, stemming both from employer practices and systemic legal and societal issues. Despite some efforts at reform, migrant workers continue to endure severe hardships, including high recruitment fees, unpaid wages, substandard living conditions, physical and sexual abuse, and restricted mobility due to the confiscation of passports. The effectiveness of legal protections and reforms is currently undermined by insufficient enforcement and the continued prevalence of exploitative practices.⁴⁴

Migrant workers often pay exorbitant recruitment fees, the equivalent to 1020-months' wages, despite Bahraini law prohibiting such the practice. The resulting debt forces workers to remain in abusive and exploitative jobs to repay their loans. Nonpayment of wages is a prevalent issue, with some workers going months or even years without their salaries. From 2008-2009, the Ministry of Labour received nearly 1,800 complaints of withheld and late wages.

Workers are often housed in overcrowded and unsanitary labor camps with inadequate amenities. Domestic workers face even worse conditions, with minimal pay, long working hours, and no days off. Migrant workers, especially domestic workers, frequently report physical, psychological, and sexual abuse by employers and recruitment agents. Human Rights Watch documented numerous cases of abuse, including beatings, harassment, and rape. Employers routinely confiscate workers' passports, limiting their freedom of movement and ability to leave abusive situations. Authorities fail to enforce prohibitions against this practice effectively.⁴⁵ Additionally, abuses against migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, authorities covered the salaries of 100,000 citizens working in the private sector from April to June but did not extend

⁴⁴ Interview with K.B, Participant is referred to pseudonymously, the interview was conducted on 19 May 2024.

⁴⁵ For a Better Life. (2012). In Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/09/30/better-life/migrant-worker-abuse-bahrain-and-government-reform-agenda>

similar benefits to migrant workers, who make up the majority of Bahrain's workforce. Consequently, many migrant workers faced dismissals, reduced or unpaid wages, and evictions from their accommodations.⁴⁶ In 2017, Bahrain introduced a unified standard contract for domestic workers, requiring details on the nature of the job, rest hours, and days off. However, this contract does not limit working hours, set a minimum wage, or specify the rest days workers are entitled to. Moreover, the Bahraini government did not include irregular migrants in its Covid-19 vaccination program.⁴⁷

Bahrain has implemented some labor reforms for migrants, such as allowing workers to change jobs without their employer's consent after a certain period as well as providing a women's shelter. New labor laws introduced extended leave, compensation for unfair dismissal, and increased fines for violations, but domestic workers remain largely unprotected.⁴⁸ The Ministry of Labour currently lacks sufficient inspectors to monitor compliance with labor laws effectively. Workers face challenges in accessing justice due to lengthy court processes, lack of awareness of their rights, and fear of retaliation from employers. Moreover, migrant workers face societal discrimination and violence, including attacks during periods of political unrest. Despite some positive initiatives from the government to address these issues, the implementation and enforcement of protective measures remain weak, leaving many migrant workers vulnerable to continued exploitation and abuse.⁴⁹

5.2 Rights of Sexual Minorities

The Bahraini penal code criminalizes adultery and sexual interactions outside of marriage, infringing on women's and migrant women's private rights. Women who become pregnant outside of marriage, may face charges for consenting extramarital sex. Although no legislation specifically criminalizes same-sex relationships, authorities have exploited ambiguous penal code sections against «indecent» and «immorality» to persecute sexual and gender minorities.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Rights, M. (2020, September 15). Migrants in Bahrain face an eviction crisis amid Covid-19 pandemic. Migrant Rights. <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2020/09/migrants-in-bahrain-face-an-eviction-crisis-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁴⁷ Bahrain to pay private sector salaries as Gulf scrambles to shield migrant workers from COVID-19. (2020). <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-bahrain-economy-idUSL8N2BW3YD/>.

⁴⁸ Bahrain takes a leap forward in enhancing end-of-service rights for migrant workers. (2024, April 15). International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/bahrain-takes-leap-forward-enhancing-end-service-rights-migrant-workers>

⁴⁹ Rights, M. (2024, March 6). Bahrain's government will now collect contributions for migrant workers' indemnity and disburse them directly. Migrant Rights. <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2024/03/bahrain-s-government-will-now-collect-contributions-for-migrant-workers-indemnity-and-disburse-them-directly/>

⁵⁰ Bahrain. (2022, January 13). Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/bahrain>

Bahrain modified its labor laws in December 2018 to prohibit employment discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, language, and religion. However, the law does not cover discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or age. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in Bahrain face unique legal challenges and discrimination not encountered by non-LGBT residents. Although homosexual activity was decriminalized in Bahrain in 1976, there are no specific laws protecting them against discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation.⁵¹ LGBT people can still be targeted under Bahrain's broad indecency laws, which can in turn be used to discriminate against sexual minorities. Additionally, Bahrain's adherence to Islamic law means that same-sex activity, adultery, and sodomy can be viewed as punishable offenses for Muslims. While the penal code does not explicitly mention these acts, local interpretations can result in hostile perceptions and actions towards LGBT individuals.⁵²

5.3 Discrimination Based on Religion and Ethnicity

The U.S. Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report of 2006 and the International Crisis Group's statistics indicate that Shia Muslims constitute approximately 70% of Bahrain's population.⁵³ Historical records show that Bahrain's Shia community played a significant role in the country's 1971 independence referendum overseen by the UN. Despite constitutional provisions in 1973 and 2002 asserting equality for all Bahrainis in terms of rights and obligations. This principle has not been realized. Instead, Bahrain's Shia majority is underrepresented in key areas: only 15% in the executive branch, 12% in the judiciary, 10% in government bodies and companies, and a mere 1% in the King's guard and security apparatus. The Shia are excluded and prevented from working in security and the military.

The Bahraini government has sought to diminish the Shia's religious and cultural presence in Bahrain, including national museums and official tourism guidance associated with the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities. This includes derogatory comments by senior officials, biased media coverage, and the destruction of Shia historical and cultural sites, such as the graves of Shia religious scholars. Since the establishment of formal education in 1919, the curriculum has been based on Sunni teachings, with the State selecting Shia administrative authorities. Shia communities are restricted from building mosques in majority-Shia cities and from constructing hussainiyas near public roads, Hamad Town, diplomatic areas, or business districts.⁵⁴

⁵¹ 200 PEOPLE DETAINED AFTER PARTY IN BAHRAIN. (n.d.). Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/mde110022011en.pdf>.

⁵² Bahrain. (n.d.-b). In Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/bahrain/freedom-world/2021>

⁵³ 2006 Report on International Religious Freedom, US Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2006/>

⁵⁴ Oppressed Majority: Ideal Persecution of Shia in Bahrain. (2014, November 26). SALAM DHR. <https://salam-dhr.org/oppressed-majority-ideal-persecution-of-shia-in-bahrain/>

In Bahraini media, Shia representation is largely absent, their activities, culture, and identity receiving no substantive coverage. Since 2011, official news agencies have referred to Shia Bahrainis derogatorily, often linking them to Iran. In 2011, 38 Shia mosques and 8 hussainiyas were punitively demolished by security forces, and Shia graveyards and mourning marches have been regularly vandalized and attacked. Numerous Shia scholars have been detained and tortured for their views, with their right to take part in religious activities restricted. The Shia Islamic Council, for example, was forcibly closed, and prominent Shia religious scholars Ayatollah Al-Najati and Ayatollah Shaikh Isa Qassim had their citizenships revoked and were deported from Bahrain.

The systematic harassment of the Shia population by Bahrain's authorities, including the revocation of citizenship for many, is deeply concerning, according to a group of United Nations human rights independent experts. The experts stated that "the intensified wave of arrests, detentions, summonses, interrogations, and criminal charges against numerous Shia religious clerics and poets, HRDs, and peaceful dissidents is having a chilling effect on fundamental human rights."⁵⁵ Equivalently, they emphasized that Shias are clearly being targeted based on their religion. This is exemplified by recent actions such as the dissolution of the Al-Wefaq, the shuttering of faith-based organizations, restrictions on religious rites, Friday prayers, and peaceful assemblies, as well as limitations on movement, internet access, and a ban on Shia religious leaders preaching.

Shias face a wide range of charges including "illegal gathering," "inciting hatred against the regime," "money laundering," and "acts of terrorism" related to their peaceful gatherings, religious congregations, and expressions of their beliefs and dissenting opinions. Conjointly, experts described these as "groundless accusations used to hide a deliberate targeting of Shias in the country."⁵⁶ They also highlighted that authorities are using the Bahrain Citizenship Act and the Protection of Society Against Acts of Terror Law to revoke citizenship, leaving people stateless and facing deportation from Bahrain. They expressed concern over allegations that the government, via an administrative order, revoked the citizenship of Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim on June 20, 2016, without allowing him the opportunity to defend himself.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ UN rights experts urge Bahrain to end the persecution of Shias. (2016). In The UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

6. Recent Developments and Challenges

6.1 Overview of Recent Human Rights Violations in Bahrain

On April 9, 2024, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa granted amnesty to 1584 convicts, including political activists, HRDs, and those imprisoned for political acts. Numerous Bahraini groups praised this development, but many saw it as incomplete because there are still around 560 political prisoners incarcerated. There are still numerous hurdles to overcome. There are currently 26 people sentenced to death in Bahrain and at risk of being executed at any time, awaiting the King's final consent. Human rights groups are pressing Bahrain to abolish the death penalty and ratify the ICCPR's optional protocol, to which Bahrain is a signatory.⁵⁹

Harsh sentences for engaging in peaceful political assembly continue, with five individuals sentenced to a year in prison on June 10, 2024, for participating in a pro-Palestine protest deemed an «illegal gathering.» This verdict raises concerns about restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly.⁶⁰ HRDs and journalists are subject to harassment, travel bans, and surveillance through technologies such as the Pegasus spyware for monitoring and taking part in such activities, among others.

Political prisoners frequently report being denied medical treatment and their basic rights, such as visitations and regular communication. Despite the positive developments of the release of political prisoners through royal pardons, and the establishment of the Alternative Penal Code (open prison programs), the Bahraini government has not provided justice for the victims, psychological rehabilitation, reparations, or accountability for those responsible for torture. This negligence risks leading to repeated violations and instability if there is no genuine initiative for reconciliation and transitional justice in accordance with international principles.⁶¹

6.2 Crackdown on Civil Society, HRDs, and Journalists

Bahrain is currently classified as a “closed country” in the CIVICUS Monitor, which monitors restrictions on civic space worldwide in real-time. Bahraini security forces

⁵⁸ HM King issues Royal Decree pardoning 1584 inmates. (n.d.-b). <https://www.bna.bh/en/HMKingissuesRoyalDecreepardoning1584inmates.aspx?cms=q8FmFJgiscL2fwlZON1%2bDv%2bqOtG-Pa0d%2bIO1H841%2bzH8%3d>

⁵⁹ Bahrain: Joint letter on human rights situation to Member States and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council - Amnesty International. (2024, June 2). Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/8086/2024/en/>

⁶⁰ Interview with A H, Participant is referred to pseudonymously, The File with the author, the interview was conducted on 13 June 2024

⁶¹ Jamal, U. (2023, August 31). 'Slow murder': Hundreds of prisoners stage Bahrain's largest hunger strike. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/28/slow-murder-hundreds-of-prisoners-stage-bahraains-largest-hunger-strike>

employ various methods to muzzle civil society, including arbitrary arrests, citizenship revocation, enforced disappearances, prosecutions, and torture, making it one of the most restrictive countries for civil society globally.⁶²

Additionally, the Bahraini government has intensified crackdowns on activists and HRDs, utilizing both traditional methods like policing and imprisonment, as well as advanced technologies such as those provided by the spyware companies like NSO Group Technologies. In June 2018, political isolation laws were passed, explicitly banning members of previously dissolved political parties from running for parliament or serving on civil society organization boards. These laws also target individuals previously convicted of certain offenses, even if pardoned, and those deemed to have “disrupted” constitutional life in Bahrain.⁶³

In December 2021 and January 2022, security forces arbitrarily detained six boys, aged 14 and 15, from an orphanage in Seef. The boys and their families were not provided with any written justification for their detention until a public statement, made in February, accused them of throwing a Molotov cocktail. Authorities denied their parents’ requests to be present during the boys’ interrogations. Despite Bahrain’s 2021 Restorative Justice Law for Children setting the minimum age of criminal responsibility at 15, authorities have detained children participating in illegal protests and failed to ensure their access to legal representation.⁶⁴

The Bahraini government censors criticism on social media, imprisons activists critical of government policies, and prohibits their participation in events criticizing political or economic policies. On November 10, 2021, Bahrain’s Ministry of Justice arbitrarily banned a virtual seminar organized by the Nationalist Democratic Assembly Society, where Ibrahim Sharif, former leader of the dissolved National Democratic Action Society (Wa’ad), was supposed to participate. The government utilized the Ministry of Justice to cancel Sharif’s participation, indicating political motivations behind the ban.⁶⁵

Journalists in Bahrain face severe restrictions from the government. Those who previously worked with the now banned Al Wasat newspaper are currently prohibited from practicing journalism in the country and many are subjected to travel bans, preventing them from working in Bahrain and restricting their movement to countries in the MENA region, including Gulf countries, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. International journalists are not typically permitted to operate in Bahrain, with many reporters covering Bahrain being based in Dubai.

⁶² Civicus Monitor. (n.d.). Civicus Monitor.
<https://monitor.civicus.org/country/bahrain/>

⁶³ Marczak, B. (2021, August 27). From Pearl to Pegasus: Bahraini Government Hacks Activists with NSO Group Zero-Click iPhone Exploits - The. The Citizen Lab.
<https://citizenlab.ca/2021/08/bahrain-hacks-activists-with-nso-group-zero-click-iphone-exploits/>

⁶⁴ Bahrain: Boys Arbitrarily Detained in Orphanage. (2022, February 8). Human Rights Watch.
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/08/bahrain-boys-arbitrarily-detained-orphanage>

⁶⁵ Bahrain: Banning the Nationalist Democratic Assembly Symposium Contradicts Government Messages of Reform. (2021, November 17). SALAM DHR.
<https://salam-dhr.org/bahrain-banning-the-nationalist-democratic-assembly-symposium-contradicts-government-messages-of-reform/>

Bahrain's low ranking on the 2022 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) highlights the dire state of press freedom in the country. Since 2017, when the government banned Al Wasat, Bahrain's only independent newspaper, the media landscape has been entirely controlled by the government. Strict censorship ensures that all media outlets present a singular, government-approved viewpoint. Bahraini photographers and journalists who capture images or express opinions contrary to the government's stance are often arrested and imprisoned. Progressive restrictions on press and expression freedoms in Bahrain over the last decade began with the Cyber Crime Law, introduced in 2014. It permits the prosecution of individuals for exercising free expression, bolstered by the Media Regulation Law. Article 70 of the Media Law, for example, penalizes content deemed to be fake news. These vague prohibitions on information dissemination contradict international human rights standards.

In 2020, the Bahraini government intensified its crackdown on freedom of expression under the pretext of managing the pandemic, reflecting a long-standing pattern of repression. HRDs and NGOs in Bahrain operate in a security state where they are not allowed to work legally nor register their groups. Consequently, many HRDs have relocated to work from exile in Europe, Canada, Australia and other countries. Despite being in exile, they are not safe; the Bahraini government has convicted many in absentia, harassed their family members, and imprisoned some through issuance of Red Notices via Interpol.

6.3 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests and Summons, Torture, and the Death Penalty

Cases of arbitrary detention and torture continue to be documented by human rights groups in Bahrain and international organizations including UN bodies. Data from the Bahrain Human Rights Forum reveals a concerning trend of rising arrests, with a total of 1267 documented cases between 2019 and May 2024. The breakdown shows a significant increase in 2023 (216 arrests) compared to previous years (185 in 2020, 166 in 2021, and 102 in 2022). The Bahrain Human Rights Forum reported a concerning rise in the use of arbitrary summonses, with a record 480 documented cases in the period between 2019 and 2024. This tactic appears intended to intimidate protesters and human rights activists. These individuals are forced to sign a document

66 RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index (2022, March 5). RSF.
<https://rsf.org/en/country/bahrain>

67 Authorities impose several travel bans as crackdown on HRDs continues - Civicus Monitor. (n.d.). Civicus Monitor.
<https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/crackdown-against-human-rights-defenders-and-activists-continue-bahrain/>

68 البحرين: وتيرة انتهاكات حقوق الإنسان لا تُنبئ بإصلاحات حقوقية قريبة. (n.d). موقع منتدى البحرين لحقوق الإنسان.
<https://bfhr.org/article.php?id=1203&cid=1>

promising to appear before the police upon request, facing potential legal repercussions for exercising their right to peaceful protest.

On August 30, 2023, during its 97th session, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) issued an opinion regarding six Bahrainis, one of whom was a minor at the time of arrest. These individuals were subjected to arbitrary detention and severe human rights violations, including torture. The WGAD categorized their detention as arbitrary and highlighted the lack of a legal basis for their detention, severe violations of their right to a fair trial, and discrimination based on sectarian grounds. The WGAD urged Bahrain to immediately release all six prisoners and called for a thorough investigation to hold perpetrators accountable, particularly those responsible for torture. The WGAD also referred the case to the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers and expressed willingness to conduct a country visit to further assess the situation.

In Opinion No. 472023/, the WGAD found that all six detainees were arbitrarily held under Categories I and III. Additionally, Abduljabbar Isa Mohamed was detained under Category V due to sectarian insults during interrogation. The detainees faced severe torture, including physical assault, sexual violence, and threats, which led to coerced confessions used in their trials. One detainee, Hasan Rashed, who was a minor, was subjected to torture and denied legal counsel, violating the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention against Torture (CAT). The WGAD emphasized that such practices could amount to crimes against humanity under international law. The WGAD concluded that Bahrain's government failed to provide a legal basis for the arrests and violated international human rights laws by not bringing the detainees before a judge promptly. The detainees' right to a fair trial was further compromised by the denial of legal representation and the use of torture to extract confessions.

Highlighting the ongoing harassment of critical voices, the recent arrest of political activist and HRD Ebrahim Sharif on March 25, 2024, exemplifies the arbitrary nature of detentions in Bahrain. Sharif, who was released a week later, was detained solely for posting social media comments critical of the government's ownership of the McLaren Group. On June 2, 2024, Shaikh Fadhel Alzaki was summoned by the Ministry of Interior for comments he posted on Instagram criticizing travel restrictions imposed on Shia nationals traveling to Iraq for religious pilgrimage. Alzaki was released after signing a statement agreeing to appear when summoned. Such arbitrary summonses and harassment exemplify the current constraints on free

69 البحرين: الاستدعاء للتحقيق أداة لقمع الحريات. (.n.d). موقع منتدى البحرين لحقوق الإنسان. <https://bfhr.org/article.php?id=1202&cid=1>

70 ADHRB. (2024, January 17). UN WGAD finds the detention of six Bahrainis arbitrary and subjected to torture, coerced confessions, unfair trial, and medical neglect. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain. <https://www.adhrb.org/2024/01/un-wgad-finds-the-detention-of-six-bahrainis-arbitrary-and-subjected-to-torture-coerced-confessions-unfair-trial-and-medical-neglect/>

71 Bahrain: Activist Ebrahim Sharif arrested over social media posts. (2024, March 28). BCHR. <https://bahrainrights.net/?p=136908>

expression and religious discrimination in the country. ⁷² Another case of torture documented by local, and international, including the human rights committee in the European Union, is that of four Bahraini individuals who were sentenced to death in Bahrain and were subjected to torture. ⁷³

The Bahraini government has claimed that its courts rarely issue death sentences. However, since 2011, 51 people have been sentenced to death, with six executions occurring since its moratorium ended in 2017. As of June 2022, 26 men remain on death row, having exhausted their appeals. Under Bahraini law, the King can ratify, commute, or pardon these sentences. While international human rights law does not prohibit the death penalty, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) restricts it to the “most serious crimes.” Bahrain asserts that it applies the death penalty only for severe crimes like premeditated murder. Today, about 170 states have abolished or introduced moratoriums on the death penalty, reflecting growing opposition to its use. ⁷⁴

Article 14 of the ICCPR outlines fair trial rights, including the presumption of innocence. Bahrain, having acceded to the ICCPR in September 2006, incorporates this presumption into its constitution. The UN Human Rights Committee emphasizes rigorous fair trial guarantees in death penalty cases. Article 7 of the ICCPR prohibits torture, and Article 14(3)(g) prevents self-incrimination under coercion. Bahrain is also a party to the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Bahraini law and its Code of Criminal Procedure prohibit torture and the use of coerced confessions, ensuring rights like legal representation and cross-examination. Bahraini courts have consistently violated fair trial rights in death penalty cases. Courts have issued death sentences for non-violent crimes, contravening international and national laws. Defendants have frequently reported convictions based on confessions obtained under torture. Bahraini courts often ignored or inadequately investigated these allegations, violating the requirement for impartial scrutiny and international fair trial standards before admitting such confessions as evidence.

Maher Abbas al-Khabbaz was arrested in 2013 for killing a police officer. He reported being severely while in police custody torture, corroborated by a forensic doctor's report. The court disregarded these findings and sentenced him to death based on a coerced confession. Despite higher court interventions, the courts ultimately failed to properly address the torture allegations, leaving al-Khabbaz on death row.

Zuhair Ebrahim Jasim Abdullah was arrested in 2017 for killing a police officer. He also described being subjected to extreme torture. His request to stay proceedings

⁷² Interview with A H, Participant is referred to pseudonymously, The File with the author, the interview was conducted on 6 June 2024

⁷³ Gheorghe, F. R. N. T. I. B. B. M. I. D. C. J. N. H. V. R. S. N. B. S. H. O. C. K. M. K. C. D. P. D. T. V. (n.d.). MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on the case of human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja in Bahrain | B92022/0565- | European Parliament. © European Union, 2022 - Source: European Parliament.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2022-0565_EN.html

⁷⁴ Texts adopted - The human rights situation in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in particular the cases of death row inmates and human rights defenders - Thursday, 11 March 2021. (n.d.). © European Union, 2021 - Source: European Parliament.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0086_EN.html

until investigations were complete was denied. The court dismissed his torture claims, and he was sentenced to death, a decision upheld on appeal despite ongoing investigations.

Mohamed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa were arrested in 2014. Both men are reported to have made torture-induced confessions. Medical reports supported Moosa's claims. Their death sentences, initially upheld, were reconsidered but ultimately reaffirmed despite serious procedural flaws, including allegations of torture being ignored. In all these cases, the courts relied heavily on coerced confessions, neglecting substantial evidence of torture and other fair trial violations.⁷⁵

66 "The Court is Satisfied with the Confession." (2023). In Human Rights Watch.
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/10/10/court-satisfied-confession/bahrain-death-sentences-follow-torture-sham-trials>

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations to the Bahraini Government

Death Penalty and Criminal Justice Reform

- Repeal Article 30 of Law No. 15 of 2007: Abolish the provision that allows for the imposition of the death penalty on individuals convicted of drug offenses;
- Impartial Investigations into Torture: Conduct independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture or ill-treatment committed, ordered, or abetted by government officials;
- Prosecute Officials Responsible for Torture: Investigate and prosecute all officials, including prosecutors and security personnel, responsible for acts of torture and ill-treatment, regardless of their rank or position;
- End Impunity for Prison Officers: Address the impunity of prison officers following documented and repeated allegations of torture and mistreatment.

Political Prisoners and Free Expression

- Complete the implementation of the Independent Commission of Inquiry (ICI)'s recommendations from 2011 as well as the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR);
- Release Political Prisoners: Release all political prisoners, approximately 560 individuals, detained for exercising their rights to free expression and peaceful assembly;
- Moratorium on the Death Penalty for EU Visa Waivers: Reinststate a moratorium on the death penalty and make tangible progress on the release of political prisoners to qualify for EU visa waiver status;
- End Arbitrary Arrests and Summons: Cease arbitrary arrests and summons, and release all individuals detained for exercising their rights;
- Lift Legal Restrictions on Civil Society: Remove travel bans and other restrictions on human rights defenders, journalists, and other civil society actors.

Women's Rights

- **Implement CEDAW:** Take necessary legislative steps to fully implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) before the next reporting period;
- **Prohibit Discrimination Against Women:** Directly prohibit and sanction discrimination against women in accordance with Articles 1 and 2 of CEDAW;
- **Strengthen Education on Women's Rights:** Enhance education and training programs for law enforcement officials and legal professionals on CEDAW and the scope of discrimination;
- **Support for Civil Society:** Encourage the Supreme Council for Women to strengthen its cooperation with all stakeholders by supporting civil society groups and NGOs;
- **Prevent Violence Against Women:** Implement measures and policies at the constitutional, governmental, and administrative levels to prevent violence against women;
- **End Targeting of Women Activists:** Stop all forms of targeting, attacks, and arrests of Bahraini women, especially activists;

Political Rights and Freedom of Association

- **Repeal Political Isolation Laws:** Repeal Law 252018/ (political isolation law) and Law 362018/ (civil isolation law) to restore full political and civil rights to all opposition members;
- **Reform Anti-Terrorism Laws:** Amend Law 582006/ (Protecting Society from Terrorism Acts) to ensure it excludes peaceful protest and other legitimate activities;
- **Restore Political Societies:** Reinstate previously dissolved political societies such as al-Wafaq, the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), and Amal;
- **Lift Restrictions on Political Candidacy:** Remove all restrictions imposed on the political opposition regarding candidacy in parliamentary and municipal elections;
- **Withdraw Security Checks Requirement:** Revoke the Ministry of Labour and Social Development's directive requiring security checks for candidates for boards of directors of civil society organizations;

- Amend Penal Code Articles: Revoke or amend penal code articles used to prosecute individuals for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, or peaceful assembly to ensure compliance with international law;
- Accept Special Rapporteurs' Visits: Accept the requested visits of the UN special rapporteurs on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

Migrant Workers' Rights

- Ensure Decent Accommodation: enact legislation to ensure employers provide decent accommodation for migrant workers;
- Investigate and Prosecute Abusive Employers: ensure expeditious and thorough investigation and prosecution of employers and recruiters who violate labor laws, including withholding wages and confiscating passports, with meaningful penalties imposed on violators;
- Effective Dispute Resolution: ensure that the Ministry of Labor's mediation and judicial procedures address labor disputes involving migrant workers effectively and promptly;
- Impose Significant Penalties on Law Violators: ensure that employers who violate labor laws and regulations face substantial administrative and civil penalties;
- Ratify ILO Convention No. 189: ratify the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 189, which advocates decent work conditions for domestic workers;
- Eliminate Freedom of Movement Restrictions: Address limitations on migrant workers' freedom of movement by removing the requirement for a sponsor to cancel a work permit before a worker can freely leave Bahrain. In cases of abuse and exploitation, eliminate the requirement that workers must wait one year before changing jobs without their employer's permission;
- Expand Education and Training Programs: increase public information campaigns and training programs to educate migrant workers, including domestic workers, and employers about Bahraini labor policies, with a focus on workers' rights and available remedies.

Transitional Justice and Reconciliation

- Promote inclusive, representative, independent, free, frank, and unconditional conversation among Bahraini communities working towards national reconciliation;
- Implement Transitional Justice Programs: establish programs for reconciliation and transitional justice to redress victims, including psychological rehabilitation, reparations, and public apologies;
- Memorialize Victims: build memorials for victims of extrajudicial killings to acknowledge their suffering and promote healing; and
- Accountability for Torture: ensure justice for victims of torture by holding perpetrators accountable and providing compensation to victims and their families.

Citizenship and the Right to Equality and Elimination of Discrimination against the Majority Shia in Bahrain

- Protect Religious Freedoms: uphold and defend religious freedoms in Bahrain, as stipulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- Safeguard Religious Minorities: ensure the protection of religious minorities in Bahrain and defend their rights to worship, observe, and practice their religion freely;
- Eliminate Sectarian Discrimination: call on the Bahraini government to actively pursue policies aimed at eradicating sectarian discrimination in all its forms and promoting equal citizenship for all Bahrainis, regardless of their religion or faith;
- Invite UN Special Rapporteurs: request a visit from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to Bahrain, granting them full access to the country's educational curricula and unrestricted freedom to conduct a fact-finding mission;
- Reform Educational Curriculum: review and reform the educational curriculum to eliminate hate speech and religious exclusion or discrimination. Ensure that the curriculum reflects the diversity of Bahrain's religious communities, including the Shia community;

7.2 Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations

- Conduct awareness campaigns to educate the public about human rights and their importance;
- Lobby for the repeal of laws that infringe on human rights, such as those restricting freedom of expression, assembly, and association;
- Offer legal assistance and support services to victims of human rights abuses; Provide capacity-building training online for local human rights defenders and activists to enhance their skills and knowledge;
- Collaborate with international legal experts to bring cases to regional and international human rights courts;
- Leverage traditional and social media to raise awareness and mobilize public opinion on human rights issues;
- Campaign for the release of political prisoners and individuals detained for exercising their rights to free speech, peaceful assembly, or association;
- Highlight individual cases in international forums to increase pressure on the Bahraini government;
- Advocate for the establishment of independent commissions to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for human rights abuses;
- Push for comprehensive transitional justice programs, including reparations and public apologies for victims of torture and other abuses;
- Engage in constructive dialogue with government institutions to promote the implementation of human rights policies and practices;
- Participate in government consultations and government human rights bodies on human rights issues;
- Prioritize the protection and empowerment of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, migrants, and religious minorities

7.3 Recommendations for International Stakeholders and Donors

- Use diplomatic engagements, including bilateral and multilateral forums, to consistently raise human rights concerns in Bahrain;
- Tie trade agreements to concrete improvements in human rights conditions; Suspend or restrict military and security assistance until the Bahraini government demonstrates a commitment to ending human rights abuses;
- Allocate more funds to support human rights initiatives in Bahrain and other Gulf countries facing issues of civil and political rights;
- Ensure that these funds are directed towards both local independent civil society organizations and international NGOs working on human rights in Bahrain;
- Provide financial, technical, and capacity-building support to Bahraini civil society organizations and exiled activists working on human rights issues; Facilitate networking and partnerships between Bahraini civil society organizations and donors to enhance their advocacy efforts;
- Provide emergency assistance, including legal and financial support, to Bahraini human rights defenders at risk;
- Facilitate safe passage and asylum for activists facing severe threats and persecution;
- Advocate for the protection of journalists and media workers and the removal of censorship laws;
- Impose targeted sanctions, such as travel bans and asset freezes, on Bahraini officials responsible for human rights abuses;
- Provide technical assistance and expertise to promote legal reforms that enhance human rights protections;
- Advocate for the independence of the judiciary and the fair administration of justice in Bahrain;
- Advocate for transitional justice mechanisms to address past human rights abuses and foster long-term stability;
- Fund independent research and reporting on the human rights situation in Bahrain to maintain international awareness and pressure; and
- Utilize international platforms to disseminate information and keep human rights issues in Bahrain on the global agenda.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bahrain's legal framework presents major gaps in its protection of fundamental human rights. While the constitution enshrines rights such as freedom of expression and women's rights, various laws impose restrictions and infringe upon civil and political liberties, posing a fundamental challenge to human rights protection. Bahrain has established human rights bodies to address violations, but significant obstacles hinder their effectiveness. The appointment processes for members lack transparency and often draw individuals without demonstrable experience in human rights advocacy. Additionally, these bodies face challenges in effectively challenging government security apparatuses and lack clear protocols for following up on complaints or implementing recommendations.

Bahrain's national human rights bodies lack independence, have overlapping mandates, and operate more like public relations agencies than entities with genuine human rights mandates. Concerns persist regarding deficiencies in the existing complaints mechanisms, raising doubts about the proper transmission of complaints to relevant authorities. The absence of a clear separation of powers undermines the independence of the judiciary in Bahrain. The King's control over executive, legislative, judicial, and military powers present a conflict of interests and hinders the judiciary's independence. Overall, Bahrain faces significant challenges in upholding human rights due to limitations within its legal framework and enforcement mechanisms. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring the protection of fundamental human rights. Based on the report's findings, it was clear that the repression approach used in Bahrain from 1971 until the new prime minister took office was almost the same, but the methods of oppression evolved and changed, becoming suppression under the law and systematic but with soft suppression techniques, as opposed to before, when they were brutal and outside the scope of the law.

The Importance of Addressing Human Rights Issues in Bahrain

Upholding human rights is essential for building a just and equitable society for all Bahrainis. Moreover, addressing human rights violations can contribute to long-term stability and economic prosperity.

Call to Action for Advancing Human Rights in Bahrain

Legal Reforms: Bahrain needs legal reforms that align laws with the constitution and international human rights standards.

Independent Human Rights Bodies: Establish truly independent human rights bodies with transparent appointment processes and the authority to investigate violations.

Strengthening Complaint Mechanisms: Enhance complaint mechanisms to ensure proper transmission and investigation of human rights abuses.

Judicial Independence: Reforms are required to ensure the judiciary's independence from the King and the government influence.

By addressing these issues, Bahrain can create a stronger legal framework for human rights protection and build a more just and stable society for all its citizens.