

Bahrain - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Bahrain, officially the Kingdom of Bahrain, is a small island country situated near the western shores of the Persian Gulf. It is an archipelago with Bahrain Island, the largest land mass, at 55 km long by 18 km wide.²

Official language: Arabic

Ethnic groups: 46% Bahraini; 45.5% Asian; 4.7% other Arabs; 1.6% African; 1% European; 1.2% Other

Government: Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy

- King: Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa
- Crown Prince: Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa
- Prime Minister: Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa

Death penalty: Retentionist

Population: 1.3 million

Life expectancy: 75.1 years

Under-5 mortality: 12.1 per 1000

Adult literacy: 91.4 percent



Section 1: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Largely disrespected ³

There has been reporting that government security forces arbitrarily killed protestors. These instances have not been sufficiently addressed by the government.

Freedom from disappearance



Respected ⁴

There are no reports of disappearances in Bahrain.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Largely disrespected ⁵

Various reports have been issued by local and international human rights organizations condemning the Bahraini government for its use of torture. This has been insufficiently addressed by the government.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Partially respected ⁶

Since the reporting on arbitrary detentions surrounding the 2011 protests, new laws have been enacted to protect individuals from such practices by security forces.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Largely disrespected ⁷

The King controls the judicial branch of government. Numerous irregularities have been noted in the cases of political dissidents.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Largely disrespected ⁸

Widespread surveillance practices which run contrary to Bahraini law have been pointed out by civil society organizations within the country.

Section 2: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)⁹



Score: 58.26, Rank: 165 / 179 – Highly controlled, limited or intimidated¹⁰

The targeting of civilians and professional journalists by the state has been consistent in Bahraini public life in recent years. Ongoing imprisonment and the stifling of freedom of speech continue to be noted by freedom of speech organizations, such as Reporters without Borders.

Freedom from academic censorship



Partially respected¹¹

Following the protests against the regime in 2011, the state forcibly suspended academics sympathetic to the protests. More recently, the government has moved to suspend the Islamic Scholars Council.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Largely disrespected¹²

Various reports have been issued by local and international human rights organizations condemning the Bahraini government for its use of torture. This has been insufficiently addressed by the government.

Freedom of religion



Largely disrespected¹³

A long standing pattern of discriminatory policy towards Bahrain's Shia'a majority continues to receive attention from local and international human rights organization.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Largely disrespected¹⁴

Only individuals who have a Bahraini father are granted citizenship. As a result, many individuals face issues of statelessness. This has been widely condemned by both international and local organizations. Furthermore, Bahrain does not provide adequate routes to citizenship for refugees.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{15 16}



6 / 7 – Not free¹⁷

The media and the legal system are controlled by the government, or individuals close to the government. The government and its supporters regularly persecute human rights activists. Permits must be obtained for demonstrations, and NGOs require a permit to operate.

Section 3: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc..

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)¹⁸



6 / 7 – Not free¹⁹

In Bahrain the king has control over the three branches of government, appointing members of the legislative and judiciary branches. The mobility of oppositional politics is greatly hindered by the state.

Section 4: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²⁰



Score: 49%, Rank: 55 / 175 – Some corruption²¹

In Bahrain, anti-corruption measures, though guaranteed by the constitution, have been weakly enforced in Bahrain according to Transparency International.

Section 5: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Largely disrespected²²

In 2013 Bahrain enacted new laws banning “unapproved” contact between Bahraini political society and international observers and organizations.

Section 6: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Rights of women (World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index)²³



Score: 62.6%, Rank: 124 / 142 – Very unequal rights²⁴

Women in Bahrain face discrimination under Bahraini law. There are a number of areas, such as personal status law, which are in need of reform.

Rights of Children (KidsRights Index Overall Score)²⁵



Score: 67.5%, Rank: 88 / 165 – Somewhat protected²⁶

Because citizenship in Bahrain is derived from the father, children in Bahrain can be born stateless.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Partially respected²⁷

Although there are some areas in which the Bahraini government’s enforcement of laws surrounding the protection of persons with disabilities are applied, there is much room for improvement.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Largely disrespected²⁸

The discrimination of migrant, foreign born workers in Bahrain, is institutional and widely reported on by both local international observers.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{29 30}

Although same sex sexual activity is not officially criminalized in Bahrain, recent court decisions prove that there is discrimination.

Section 7: Workers’ Rights

Workers’ rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Partially respected³¹

Although the law allows for a range of independent union organization, the rights of unions are greatly restricted in Bahrain.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Largely disrespected³²

Bahrain has failed to enforce its laws surrounding forced labour. Foreign born migrant workers are subjected to debt bondage and other forms of coercive and forced labour practices.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Partially respected³³

Minimum age of employment and protection of children from child labour is generally respected in, however, these laws appear to be lacking with respect to the children of migrant and foreign born workers.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Largely disrespected³⁴

There is no minimum wage for workers in the private sector in Bahrain, nor is there a minimum wage standard for migrant labourers in the public sector. Occupational, health and safety standards, although guaranteed by law, have been inadequately monitored.

Right to employment



7.5% - Reasonable unemployment³⁵

While the unemployment rate in Bahrain has dropped somewhat over the last three years, it is still much higher than it should be, and is project to climb.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, and Amnesty International. For death penalty see: "Death sentences and executions in 2013." Amnesty International. March 24, 2014. Accessed May 15, 2015.

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/001/2014/en/>.

³ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Bahrain." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹⁰ "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>.

¹¹ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Bahrain." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹² "Bahrain." World Report 2014: Bahrain. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/bahrain>.

¹³ "Bahrain." International Religious Freedom Report for 2013. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 25, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

¹⁴ "Bahrain." World Report 2014: Bahrain. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/bahrain>.

¹⁵ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

¹⁶ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed Dec. 9, 2014

<https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

¹⁷ "Bahrain." Freedom in the World 2014: Bahrain. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/bahrain-0#.VIHLzGG9e8>.

¹⁸ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed Dec. 9, 2014 <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

¹⁹ "Bahrain." Freedom in the World 2014: Bahrain. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/bahrain-0#:VIIHLzGG9e8>.

²⁰ Transparency International (TI) publishes a "Corruption Perceptions Index" annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²¹ "Bahrain." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.transparency.org/country#BHR>.

²² "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Bahrain." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²³ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁴ "Bahrain." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/economies/#economy=BHR>.

²⁵ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable

²⁶ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

²⁷ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Bahrain." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

²⁹ "ILGA World Map." International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁰ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³¹ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Bahrain." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³² Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State. See also a well-done Wikipedia comparison of wage, income and work week metrics across countries at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minimum_wages_by_country

³⁵ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed December 7, 2014. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang--en/index.htm.