

GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX 2025: BAHRAIN FACTSHEET

OVERALL GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX SCORE:

VERY HIGH RISK

The Global Torture Index 2025 is the first analysis designed to assess the risk of torture and ill-treatment across 26 countries worldwide. This 2025 factsheet for Bahrain includes an analysis of the country's overall performance, a breakdown by thematic pillars and key recommendations for driving meaningful change in the fight against torture and the promotion of human rights.

COLLABORATING ORGANISATIONS IN BAHRAIN:

SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights
(SALAM DHR)

AT A GLANCE

Torture remains systematic in Bahrain in both custodial and extra-custodial settings. For 2025, the Global Torture Index classifies the country as facing a **very high risk** of torture and ill-treatment, based on data collected in 2023 and 2024. Political opposition leaders, human rights defenders, Shi'a Bahrainis and migrants experience severe abuses such as beatings, sleep deprivation, sexual violence and sectarian and racial humiliation. Furthermore, the Shia community faces infringement on their freedom of conscience and their right to conduct religious rites.

Bahrain recently hosted its 20th Formula 1 Grand Prix in Sakhir, promoted as a symbol of national pride and global sport. However, for human rights advocates, it marks 20 years of sportswashing—[using major events to distract from ongoing rights abuses](#).

Vulnerable groups in detention, including juveniles and women prisoners, suffer particularly appalling treatment, such as threats of rape, solitary confinement, and medical neglect. Torture techniques primarily target victims' ethnic and religious identities with the intention of humiliating, degrading and silencing them. These abuses remain significantly underreported due to victims' fear of reprisals.

Bahrain demonstrates limited political will to eradicate torture, as evidenced by **its failure to ratify key international instruments like OPCAT** and its refusal to allow comprehensive UN oversight visits. The country has thus far failed to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, a common practice against dissent. Domestically, **citizenship revocation is employed as a punitive measure to control dissidents, with at least 292 individuals remaining denaturalised**. Internal accountability bodies, such as the Ombudsman of the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecution Office's Special Investigation Unit, are widely criticised for their lack of independence and impartiality. Such institutions allegedly protect impunity rather than investigate or prosecute torture cases. Since 2017, Bahrain has executed six people following unfair trials based on coerced confessions.

Deaths in custody resulting from denial of medical care are common in Bahrain. In March 2024, political prisoners [Husain Khalil Ebrahim](#) and Husain Aman died in Jau Prison, reportedly following prolonged medical neglect. [Other political prisoners are at significant risk due to ongoing medical neglect and retaliatory measures by prison authorities.](#)

Although official records indicate a limited number of torture complaints—only 17 reported by the Special Investigation Unit in the first four months of 2025—both local and international NGOs have consistently claimed that these figures are significantly underreported. Acts of ill-treatment, however, such as the denial of medication and medical attention to prisoners of conscience are widespread.

Victims and their families face considerable obstacles in obtaining effective solutions due to dysfunctional institutional structures. Judicial authorities routinely fail to prosecute perpetrators, often placing the burden of proof unfairly on victims, and the Bahraini National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) holds B-status accreditation. Both the Ombudsman and Special Investigation Unit (SIU) have been criticised for lacking independence and failing to comply with international standards. Such bodies are regarded as incapable of adequately investigating cases of torture. **Bahrain lacks a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to guarantee systematic torture prevention, oversight of detention facilities and rehabilitation for victims.**

GENERAL INFORMATION



Type of government:
Constitutional Monarchy



United Nations Convention Against Torture:
Ratified



OPCAT ratification:
Not ratified



Population:
1.6 million



People deprived of liberty:
3485



Prison population (per 100,000 of national population):
234



Pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners (percentage of prison population):
25.7%



Documented Detained Human Rights Defenders:
No data



Alerts Issued by the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders in 2024:
6



Prison Occupancy level:
110%



Homicide rate (per 100.000 people):
0.204

THEMATIC PILLAR OVERVIEW



I. POLITICAL COMMITMENT

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Bahrain demonstrates limited political commitment to addressing torture, as reflected in its reservations to key human rights treaties and lack of cooperation with international mechanisms. Although Bahrain has ratified the UN Convention Against Torture, **it does not recognise the competence of the Committee Against Torture (CAT) to handle individual complaints, nor has it ratified the Optional Protocol (OPCAT)**. The State's engagement with CAT has been limited, and there has been **minimal progress in implementing** the Committee's recommendations. **Independent civil society organisations that report on torture and ill-treatment face severe restrictions, such as being banned or members being arrested, which often forces them to operate in exile for fear of reprisals.** Although these organisations work with the UN, the Bahraini government has expressed little to no interest in dialogue with them. In many cases, their websites are blocked in [Bahrain](#), and activists must communicate with them covertly.

The Bahraini government also uses the removal of citizenship as a means of repression. **Between 2012 and 2019, the State revoked the citizenship of 990 individuals. While an estimated 698 individuals had their citizenship restored in 2019 by royal decree and court decisions, at least 292 individuals remain denaturalised.** In 2024, the Bahraini government revoked the citizenship of MP Mohammed Al-Husseini and deported him to Pakistan after he called for the release of political prisoners, including Sheikh Ali Salman, leader of the opposition party, Al-Wefaq. Al-Husseini's children also had their Bahraini citizenship revoked as collective punishment, though it was later restored after his wife publicly pleaded with King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa for clemency.

While Bahrain has asserted improvements in its limited engagement with the UN, international observers claim that systematic torture continues largely unchecked. **Since 2012, the government has reported prosecuting 95 police officers; however, only 18 convictions have resulted, reflecting low accountability against widespread allegations.** Bahrain lacks a dedicated public policy or budget for preventing torture and disregards principles like non-refoulement. **The National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR), established in 2016, is widely seen as ineffectual, politically compromised, and dismissive of torture allegations.** It has **remained silent on many of the government's human rights violations**, and, in some cases, has justified state abuses. The NIHR must obtain permission to interview prisoners and can only report suspected violations; it has no authority to prosecute perpetrators or ensure justice for victims.



II. ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Police brutality in Bahrain remains a significant issue, characterised by systemic ill-treatment, excessive force and widespread impunity. Despite reforms promised after the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry in 2011, human rights training for security forces remains ineffective, and oversight bodies like the **Office of the Ombudsman and Special Investigation Unit** lack **independence and impartiality**. Historically, police have frequently used excessive force—such as rubber bullets and tear gas—leading to serious injuries and deaths. While direct physical violence has somewhat declined since 2020, mainly due to political repression and restrictions on peaceful assembly, systematic abuses persist. Arrests often involve arbitrary detention, incommunicado holding and violence during transportation or interrogation. These practices disproportionately affect activists, Shi'a Bahrainis and migrants. **Detainees frequently face sexual violence, sectarian and racial abuse, sleep deprivation, beatings, and electric shocks.** Torture is most prevalent during initial custody and is often conducted in improvised and unofficial detention sites that lack proper monitoring systems.

The death penalty is still in force in Bahrain. Victims report being interrogated without legal representation and being tortured and threatened into providing false confessions, and that they received grossly unfair trials. Enforced disappearances remain routine police practice, with victims held secretly for periods ranging from days to weeks, sometimes resulting in suspicious deaths attributed to causes such as heart or kidney failure. Oversight mechanisms rarely lead to accountability, and senior officers implicated in torture regularly evade prosecution, reflecting a deeply rooted culture of impunity within Bahrain's security forces. Vulnerable groups, such as migrants, have experienced more extreme forms of physical torture and mistreatment in recent years, and many are subsequently deported or leave voluntarily. Additionally, verbal abuse, particularly against the arrestee's religious sect and ethnic background, is common during arrests and police interrogations. Although torture and ill-treatment have decreased in frequency and severity in Bahrain since 2011, they remain systematic.

Arbitrary arrests and arrests without warrants remain common, especially when performed by state security forces. These forces are also more likely to physically harm detainees during arrests. Generally, assaults and ill-treatment during arrest, transport, detention, or interrogation are not recorded by authorities. Torture in Bahrain is often intended to degrade, humiliate, and potentially blackmail victims. Abuse is often religious, sectarian, and ethnic in nature, with victims having their religious background and ethnic identity insulted by officers and interrogators. In 2024, despite a large number of amnesties being granted, the Bahraini government did not commute the death sentences of the 26 individuals who remain on death row with all appeals exhausted. Since 2017, Bahrain has executed six people. Reports show that Bahraini courts have convicted and sentenced defendants to death following manifestly unfair trials, based solely or primarily on confessions allegedly coerced through torture and ill-treatment.

Male Shi'a Baharna youths from poor villages are among the most heavily securitised demographics. Boys as young as 14 are frequently singled out by security forces and subjected to violent arbitrary arrests.



III. FREEDOM FROM TORTURE WHILE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

The situation in places of detention in Bahrain remains deeply troubling. Prison conditions are dire, marked by overcrowding, inadequate sanitary facilities, poor ventilation, lack of clean drinking water, and insufficient healthcare. Although medical facilities exist, access is systematically withheld as punishment, as evidenced by the March 2024 death of political prisoner Husain Khalil Ebrahim, allegedly resulting from prolonged medical neglect. Frequent prisoner protests, including sit-ins, hunger strikes and official complaints to prison authorities are routinely suppressed violently, leading to widespread use of solitary confinement, verbal abuse or medical neglect. In August 2023, around 800 prisoners went on hunger strike to protest overcrowding and unhygienic conditions.

In March 2024, in response to protests by prisoners for better conditions at Jau Central Prison, the authorities denied medical care, cut air conditioning, exposing prisoners to extreme heat, and interrupted communication with family members.

Juveniles suffer severe rights violations, including unfair trials, arbitrary detention, denial of legal assistance, and even torture. Women face similar abuses. Although there are allegations of physical and sexual assault towards female detainees, such violations are rarely reported due to cultural stigma. **The predominantly Shi'a Baharna ethnoreligious group endures heightened discrimination, restricted access to religious texts and harsher treatment in prisons.**

Independent monitoring of prisons is practically non-existent; occasional official visits, such as the guided 2021 tour by then-UK Home Secretary Priti Patel, lack transparency and genuine oversight. Despite a legal limit of six months, pre-trial detention can extend to over a year, often without formal charges or legal counsel, severely undermining detainees' rights to fair trial and defence.

Numerous human rights groups have consistently raised concerns about the deteriorating conditions and mistreatment in detention centres. Authorities often abuse detainees during interrogations and deny medical care. Migrant workers fleeing abusive employers are frequently detained and charged as "runaways". The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in 2006 recommended that there should be systematic screening of trafficked persons in detention centres. The overall lack of access to justice for detained immigrants is particularly concerning because Bahrain remains notorious for imprisoning large numbers of foreign workers, who have at times reportedly made up over 30% of the country's prison population.



IV. ENDING IMPUNITY

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Impunity for torture remains deeply entrenched in Bahrain, despite the existence of internal accountability bodies such as the Ombudsman and the Special Investigation Unit (SIU). **These mechanisms are severely criticised for their lack of independence and inability to conduct effective investigations.** Torture charges are rarely prosecuted, and available court records lack transparency. Between 2016 and 2020, complaints of torture rose while referrals for prosecution decreased.

As of April 2025, the SIU reported receiving only 17 complaints, and referred seven complainants to the forensic and psychological medicine division. However, Bahraini human rights NGOs have reason to believe these metrics significantly under-report the number of incidents that have taken place. Access to justice is severely inadequate, as complainants often have to report allegations of torture at the same facilities where abuses occurred, and less than 25% of them receive state-sponsored legal aid. Victims rarely receive psychological support or protection and often face harassment or surveillance intended to intimidate them into silence. **Activists released from detention commonly face restrictions on political activities, effectively barring them from speaking out about abuses.** Additionally, prosecutorial authorities routinely fail to investigate or prosecute torture cases, placing an undue burden on victims. Judges rarely adhere to international standards or acknowledge higher-ranking officials' complicity, reflecting systemic political bias. **Medico-legal institutions lack independence, transparency, and mandatory compliance with international protocols such as the Istanbul Protocol.**



V. VICTIM'S RIGHTS

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

In Bahrain, victims of torture lack fundamental legal protections and access to adequate rehabilitation and redress. The country has no national legislation that clearly defines victims of torture or ensures their right to effective judicial remedies. Existing compensation mechanisms are insufficient, ineffective, and fail to provide timely, fair or adequate reparations. Official forms of redress, such as public apologies, publication of decisions or government acceptance of responsibility, are rarely, if ever, implemented.

Moreover, the state has not established any national fund dedicated to victims' redress or implemented meaningful non-recurrence measures in the last five years. Rehabilitation is equally neglected, with no official state-run rehabilitation programs in existence. Additionally, because domestic organisations would have to acknowledge that torture is pervasive in Bahrain, they are generally not permitted to publicly engage in rehabilitation. Independent clinicians sometimes provide discreet services to victims, but their work is heavily restricted due to the sensitivity and political risks surrounding the issue of torture. Despite receiving formal training in human rights procedures and safeguards through partner programmes in the UK, Bahraini security forces have cultivated a culture of impunity, further exacerbating victims' suffering. However, security forces have long been accused of fostering a culture of impunity, where members do not appear to be expected to follow these procedures.



VI. PROTECTION FOR ALL

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

In Bahrain, significant protection gaps remain for vulnerable groups, especially women, children, LGBTQI individuals and political dissidents. Approximately **70% of women have reportedly experienced physical or emotional abuse from their husbands**, with limited governmental intervention or accurate statistical tracking due to restrictions placed on civil society organisations. Women disproportionately face charges of adultery and accusations of sorcery, highlighting gender biases within judicial practices.

Although Bahrain is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), **the minimum legal age for marriage for girls is 16 years old. Furthermore, Sharia courts have the power to authorise marriage at an even younger age** if they deem it suitable. Bahraini Family Law gives men priority when it comes to marriage and family relations, such as inheritance, consent to marriage and divorce and child custody, hindering women's access to justice. LGBTQI individuals face systemic discrimination without legal protection against hate crimes or recognition of same-sex relationships, and conversion therapy continues to be practiced without legal prohibition. Corporal punishment, grooming, incest, and non-physical sexual assault are not sufficiently regulated to ensure legal safeguards for children.

Bahrain's Labour Law includes foreign domestic workers, most of whom are women, but excludes them from key protections, such as weekly rest days, overtime, paid sick leave, and limits on working hours. Moreover, a disproportionate number of Bangladeshi nationals are also on death row.

Bahraini law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a system to provide protection to refugees. There are reports of torture and ill-treatment, particularly of detainees arrested on suspicion of terrorism, a crime that is vaguely defined and widely used in Bahrain. Moreover, a disproportionate number of prisoners on death row in Bahrain have been charged with terrorism and frequently denied legal representation. Additionally, indigenous Baharna face institutional neglect and discrimination, and lack culturally appropriate protection.



VII. RIGHT TO DEFEND AND CIVIC SPACE

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Human rights defenders (HRDs) in Bahrain operate in a hostile environment and under severe restrictions, despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression. Ambiguous **laws criminalising criticism of the government or monarchy, coupled with vaguely defined charges such as "inciting religious hatred," often targeting Shi'a activists, create significant barriers to activism**. Pro-government NGOs dominate civil society, while independent groups face severe limitations, including arbitrary de-registration and bans on foreign funding. Freedom of assembly is severely curtailed, and unauthorised demonstrations frequently lead to arbitrary arrests. Protest leaders are targeted shortly afterwards to avoid public scrutiny.

Minors participating in demonstrations have also faced arbitrary mass arrests. Despite an official pardon announced by Bahrain's ruling family, many remain imprisoned. In January 2025, Bahraini authorities arrested and sentenced three minors to 18 months in prison on unlawful assembly charges.

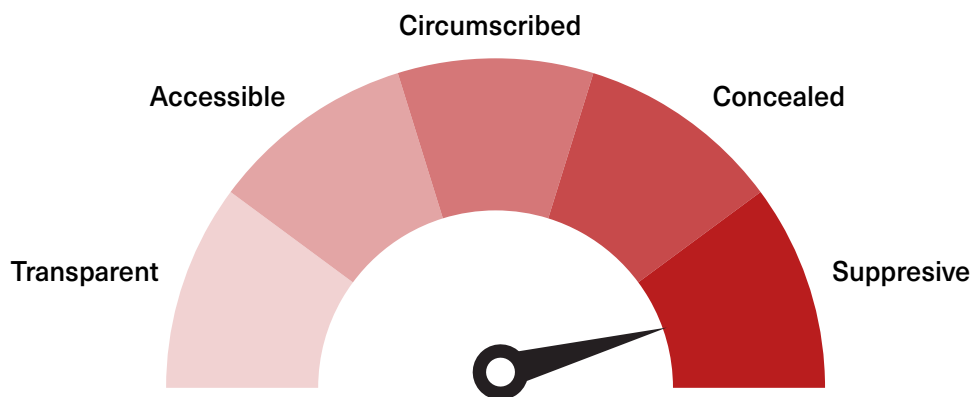
HRDs routinely face judicial harassment, torture, intimidation and invasive surveillance. NGOs report cases of internet users being summoned by the public prosecutor and interrogated over the political online content they had shared. **Recently, human rights defender and former political prisoner Ali Al-Hajee was detained by Bahraini authorities and remains under investigation on charges of "misusing social media"** for his human rights work, especially his social media posts on X (formerly Twitter). According to reports dating to 2022, at least 41 activists and journalists were arrested, detained, interrogated or persecuted for speech-related matters.

Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa **granted amnesties** to over 2,500 prisoners in 2024, including more than 800 prisoners held unjustly for political participation and peaceful free expression. Yet, human rights defenders and political leaders, including **Abdulahdi al-Khawaja, Hassan Mushaima, Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace, and Sheikh Ali Salman**, have all remained arbitrarily detained. International HRDs like SALAM DHR researcher Andrew McIntosh also face entry denials, reinforcing a chilling effect among academics and journalists. Further, citizenship revocation, travel bans, and forced exile exemplify state reprisals against activists.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Global Torture Index rates the access to information and transparency available in each country when measuring and assessing the risks of torture and ill-treatment. It considers the availability of information, as well as the obstacles faced by civil society organisations in collecting data and their ability to access it. Data access must be guaranteed in every society, both in law and in practice, to ensure state transparency and accountability. It enables organisations, journalists and individuals to request information on public bodies, protocols and statistics on human rights violations. This indicator reflects the challenges in accessing information within a country, with each country and territory assigned a rating as Suppressive, Concealed, Circumscribed, Accessible or Transparent.

Bahrain's score is **suppressive** based on our evaluation of its current level of transparency and access to information.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN BAHRAIN: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Index includes 5 recommendations for Bahrain, taken from the [Index webpage](#), which will serve as references in upcoming editions to monitor achievements within the anti-torture movement.

1. Ratify the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted in 1984.
2. Extend a standing invitation to the United Nations human rights mechanisms and allow them to access Bahrain to carry out their work.
3. Adopt strict disciplinary and other measures to prevent torture or ill-treatment of suspects in custody, holding accountable officials and agents credibly accused of committing, ordering, failing to prevent, prosecuting or allowing such acts.
4. Bahraini security forces and other institutions must adhere to international due process standards; law enforcement officials must receive human rights training; human rights defenders must be protected; detention facilities must be monitored, and legal reforms must be implemented.
5. Provide comprehensive rehabilitation services—including medical, psychological, legal and social support—to enable victims' integration into society, address the negative effects of torture, and offer long-term support.



FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at tortureindex@omct.org.

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