



BAHRAIN 2018:

No conducive environment for free and fair elections

“[A]n election process should be carried out in an environment in which the population can fully enjoy all its political rights and freedoms. [...] a seemingly well-run election can be meaningless, if essential civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms are not guaranteed.” [European Commission](#)

Are prerequisite rights to guarantee free and fair elections respected in Bahrain?

<p> Freedom of opinion, expression and information Article 19 (1) of the ICCPR</p>	<p>Systematic crackdown on dissent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indefinite suspension of Al Wasat, the country’s only independent newspaper; • Repeated use of Anti-terrorism law and Penal Code provisions criminalising freedom of expression (including seven years in jail for offending the King) against human rights activists and media workers, e.g. sentencing of Bahrain’s leading human rights defender Nabeel Rajab to seven years’ imprisonment in total, two for media interviews and five tweets.
<p> Freedom of association Article 22 of the ICCPR</p>	<p>Dismantling of opposition groups and targeting of their leaders and members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissolution of the main opposition societies and sentencing of Wa’ad (leading secular-left opposition society) and sentencing of its Secretary-General, Ibrahim Sharif; • Dissolution of the largest opposition society Al Wefaq (and sentencing of its leaders, including Sheikh Ali Salman (sentenced two days after he had been re-elected Secretary-General of Al-Wefaq), Sheikh Isa Qassim (the highest Shia religious authority in Bahrain and the spiritual leader of Al-Wefaq), Jameel Kadhim and Majeed Milad; • Dissolution of dozens civil societies (including Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Bahrain Teacher’s Union, Bahrain Nursing Society), replacement of their board (Bahrain Human Rights Society, Bahrain Medical Society, Bahrain Lawyers Society) • Legal restrictions on freedom of association – new law notably banning members of dissolved political associations and resigned MPs from standing for election; new law prohibiting members of political society from engaging in religious preaching; minister of Justice empowered to close political associations in case of a ‘serious breach’, which the law does not define; Law of associations requiring prior registration and prohibiting civil society organizations from “engaging in politics”
<p> Freedom of peaceful assembly Article 21 of the ICCPR</p>	<p>Ban on public gatherings and excessive use of force</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indefinite ban on all public gatherings in Manama since August 2013, almost none allowed outside even with prior notification • Repeated use of Anti-terrorism law to convict participants of marches and protests, e.g. over 70 individuals arrested between August 2016 and May 2017 for taking part in peaceful assemblies, most of them charged with participating in “illegal gatherings” • Use of excessive and lethal force to disperse peaceful protestors, e.g. police operations in Duraz in May 2017 against a sit-in in support of Sheikh Isa Qassim, resulted in 5 deaths and dozens injured



Freedom of movement
[Article 12 of the ICCPR](#)

Travel bans against human rights defenders

- [Arbitrary arrests, summons and travel bans](#) imposed on human rights defenders, e.g. [dozens](#) of rights advocates prevented from traveling to Geneva ahead of Bahrain's third Universal Periodic Review in May 2017 and [UN Human Rights Council \(HRC\) sessions](#); civil society representatives coming directly from Bahrain to HRC session have [significantly decreased](#) (not a single one attended the last one, compared to 51 in September 2011)
- [Restrictions on access to the village of Duraz](#) since June 2016 as a result of protests in support of Sheikh Isa Qassim



Freedom from fear and intimidation
[Articles 6, 7 and 9 of the ICCPR](#)

Reprisals for human rights activities, including cooperation with United Nations

- Imposition of '[drastic measures](#) to curb dissenting opinions such as torture, arbitrary detention, unfounded convictions, the stripping of citizenship, the use of travel bans, intimidation, including death threats, and reprisals for cooperating with international organizations' and increased use of charges for which the death penalty may be imposed, e.g. about [270 human rights defenders lost their citizenship](#) as a consequence of their human rights activities between July 2014 and May 2017
- At least [169 peaceful critics targeted](#) between June 2016 and June 2017, including reprisals against family members of [activists residing outside Bahrain](#)



Freedom from discrimination
[Articles 2 and 26 of the ICCPR](#)

Systematic and intimidation of Shia religious leaders and harassment of Shia population

- Repeat intimidation and attacks against [Shia religious leaders](#), e.g. revocation of citizenship of Sheikh Isa Qassim (the highest Shia religious authority in Bahrain and the spiritual leader of Al-Wefaq) and [Sheikh Hussain Najati](#)
- [Systematic harassment of the Shia population](#), including the stripping of citizenship, "the dissolution of Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, the shutting of faith-based organizations, restrictions on the practice of religious rites, on Friday prayers and peaceful assemblies, restrictions on movement, restricted access to the Internet and a ban on Shia religious leaders from preaching" on groundless charges



Independent judiciary
[Article 14 of the ICCPR](#)

Lack of judicial independence and due process violations, especially in trials of government critics

- '[Systemic problems](#) in the administration of criminal justice in Bahrain' and [arbitrary nature of trials](#) involving dissenting voices (including arrests without warrants, no access to lawyer, lengthy pre-trial detention), e.g. [Ebtisam Alsaegh](#), [Sayed Alwadaei's relatives](#) or [Sheikh Ali Al-Salman](#)
- Widespread use of [forced confessions](#) as evidence in courts, widespread torture and ill-treatment of persons deprived of their liberty, climate of impunity and lack of independence of accountability mechanisms
- Implementation of [military trials for civilians](#), despite past records of unfair trials and use of coerced confessions