



Women  
Journalists  
Without  
Chains



**The Architecture of Repression:**

**From Atrocities to Authoritarian Legality**





## A. Introduction

In **2025**, the Middle East and North Africa displayed a sharp paradox: rapid economic modernization alongside a deepening collapse of basic civil and political rights. Governments promoted ambitious development agendas and global openness—exemplified by Saudi Arabia's "Vision **2030**"—while simultaneously expanding surveillance, restricting civic space, and suppressing dissent. This dual track reflected a deliberate strategy to separate economic reform from political freedoms, turning international integration into a mechanism for consolidating authoritarian control rather than advancing genuine reform.

In parallel, the region's human rights landscape in **2025** has been profoundly shaped by transnational trends that cast a bleak shadow over the future of fundamental freedoms. Armed conflicts have produced catastrophic consequences, most notably the ongoing genocide in Palestine and the brutal wars in Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Libya. These crises have left behind mass killings, deliberate starvation, and the widespread destruction of critical infrastructure. Crucially, they have not unfolded in isolation: external interventions have played a decisive role in fueling the violence. Emirati support for the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan, alongside Saudi and Emirati backing of armed groups in Yemen operating outside state structures, exemplify how regional power plays have intensified instability and deepened human suffering.

Repression has become deeply entrenched, further eroding the rule of law and accelerating its breakdown. Governments in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, Tunisia, the UAE, and Bahrain have increasingly relied on broadly and vaguely defined laws—often framed under the guise of "counterterrorism" or "cybercrime"—to legitimize the suppression of peaceful dissent. Judicial systems have been co-opted to suppress opposition and shield security forces, fostering impunity that enables ongoing human rights violations.

Civil and digital spaces faced severe restrictions, as online platforms once seen as havens for freedom became new arenas for repression. From extensive digital surveillance in Saudi Arabia and the UAE to website blocking in Algeria and the prosecution of activists for social

media posts in Egypt, authorities tightened their grip on cyberspace to silence dissenting voices.

Amid this oppressive environment, vulnerable groups bore the heaviest burdens. In Sudan, women were subjected to systematic sexual violence as a weapon of war, while Iran entrenched gender apartheid through intensified compulsory hijab laws. Migrants and refugees faced mass deportations in Algeria and Lebanon and lethal violence at Saudi Arabia's borders. Stateless populations, such as Kuwait's Bidoon, remained trapped in systemic exclusion and denied basic rights.

The following sections dissect this disturbing convergence of tactics, revealing a unified regional playbook of repression that made 2025 one of the darkest chapters for human rights in the modern era.



## B. Executive Summary

This report transcends a nation-by-nation accounting to expose the shared architecture of repression deployed across the Middle East and North Africa. Through comparative analysis, we document a convergent playbook of authoritarian tactics designed to ensure regime survival at any human cost. The evidence is stark: from the deliberate manufacture of humanitarian crises through the weaponization of starvation in Gaza and El-Fasher, to the systematic criminalization of dissent under expansive "counter-terrorism" and



"cybercrime" laws in Cairo, Riyadh, and Algiers. These are not isolated incidents but interconnected strategies, revealing a region-wide erosion of human dignity driven by a common logic of control. The following pages detail this transnational assault on fundamental freedoms, tracing how governments are collaboratively and concurrently closing civic space, neutralizing opposition, and perpetuating impunity.

## 1. Conflict Zones: Genocide, Starvation, and Absolute Impunity

In **2025**, conflict zones across the region became theaters of grave violations of international humanitarian law. Targeting civilians and destroying life's essentials turned into deliberate policy, not incidental war. Repeated patterns in Palestine, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon revealed a clear strategy to terrorize communities and forcibly reshape demographics. The paralysis of international accountability emboldened authoritarian regimes, replacing war's chaos with the cold machinery of the security state.

Genocide and systematic killing reached their most horrifying expression in Gaza, where Israel's campaign of extermination has resulted in at least **69,176** people documented killed — a figure that almost certainly underrepresents the true scale of loss due to access restrictions, widespread destruction of infrastructure, and chronic under-reporting. The vast majority of victims are women and children, and nearly **90%** of civilian infrastructure has been obliterated. Similar patterns appeared in Darfur, Sudan, where atrocities killed an estimated **150,000** and erased more than **50** villages.

Starvation has been deployed as a deliberate method of warfare. In Gaza, Israel's blockade on aid, combined with the seizure of shipments including infant formula, resulted in the starvation deaths of **460** people, among them **154** children. In Sudan, both the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces imposed a suffocating siege on El-Fasher, pushing hundreds of thousands toward famine conditions.

The human cost was further compounded by catastrophic displacement. Sudan witnessed the world's largest internal displacement crisis, with over **12** million people forcibly uprooted, while more than two million Palestinians were displaced within Gaza under relentless bombardment. Health systems, intentionally targeted by all major conflict parties, faced



near-total collapse. Thousands of medical personnel were killed, detained, or forced to flee, and hospitals and clinics were systematically destroyed.

Across every theater—from Gaza and Sudan to Yemen and Syria—this escalation of brutality was fueled by one unifying factor: the guarantee of impunity. The repeated failure of the international community to hold perpetrators accountable—from Israeli forces and Sudan's Rapid Support Forces to Yemen's Houthis and other militias—has created a vicious cycle, encouraging ever-greater atrocities and rendering 2025 a year of profound failure for global justice.

## 2. The Security State: Institutionalized Repression and the Weaponization of Law

Across much of the region outside active conflict zones, repression was no longer episodic but fully institutionalized. Throughout 2025, governments entrenched a model of "legalized authoritarianism," deploying expansive legal and judicial frameworks to justify the suppression of dissent. Broad and ambiguously worded counterterrorism and cybercrime laws became the primary tools for criminalizing peaceful expression, applied with striking uniformity from Algiers and Tunis to Riyadh and Manama.

The judiciary was systematically refashioned into an apparatus of political control. Tunisia witnessed a "judicial massacre" with the dismissal of 57 judges; Egypt continued to try civilians before military courts; and both Algeria and Tunisia pursued sweeping conspiracy cases against opposition figures. These prosecutions relied on elastic legal provisions—such as Algeria's Article 87 on terrorism, Tunisia's Decree 54 on "false news," and Oman's penal code clauses on "undermining state prestige"—to target activists, journalists, and lawyers. In the UAE, the re-prosecution of activists who had already completed their sentences, including the case of lawyer Mohamed al-Roken, openly violated the principle of *ne bis in idem*, which prohibits trying a person twice for the same offense. Torture and ill-treatment in detention remained widespread, exemplified by the death of engineer Bashir Khaled Latif in a Baghdad police station—an abuse shielded by judicial complicity.

Equally alarming was the escalation in the use of capital punishment as a political instrument. Iran carried out more than 1,000 executions, while Saudi Arabia executed over 292 individuals, including political dissidents, members of marginalized communities, and

persons convicted of offenses committed as children—clear breaches of international juvenile justice standards. The execution of Jalal Labad in Saudi Arabia, for participation in a protest as a minor, stands as a stark illustration.

Together, these measures have resulted in the near-total dismantling of civil society. Political parties and associations were dissolved in Algeria, suspended in Tunisia, and banned entirely in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman. In Jordan, political activity was prohibited altogether. The cumulative effect has been the eradication of independent civic space, leaving no institutional mechanisms capable of scrutinizing or restraining state power.

### 3. The Digital Battlefield: Transnational Repression and Silencing Online Expression

Authoritarian regimes across the region increasingly recognized that controlling the digital sphere is essential to maintaining political power. In 2025, governments deployed a shared arsenal of restrictive legislation, advanced surveillance technologies, and cross-border repression to silence dissent and eliminate independent digital spaces.

The first wave of repression unfolded through legislative censorship: Saudi Arabia's new media regulations, Oman's expansive media law, and Jordan's cybercrime legislation imposed prior restraints and mandatory licensing on digital content. This suffocation was reinforced by growing surveillance, with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco continuing to deploy spyware such as Pegasus against activists and journalists. Most dangerous was the surge in transnational repression, exemplified by the extradition of Salman al-Khalidi from Iraq to Kuwait, the transfer of Abdul Rahman Yusuf al-Qaradawi from Lebanon to the UAE, the targeting of dissidents' families abroad, and threats against Iranian journalists—evidence of repression expanding far beyond national borders.

The criminalization of online expression reached unprecedented extremes. Peaceful digital activity—tweets, posts, pseudonymous accounts—became grounds for life sentences and even capital punishment. The execution of Saudi journalist Turki al-Jasser for operating a Twitter account, and the death sentence issued against Tunisian national Saber Chouchane for Facebook posts, stand as stark indicators of an escalating doctrine: that ordinary online expression is met with the harshest possible retaliation.



#### 4. Vulnerable Groups: The Heavy Price of Conflict and Systemic Discrimination

The collapse of the human rights order across the region has not been felt evenly; instead, women, children, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, refugees, and stateless communities have borne the heaviest toll. Deep-rooted structural discrimination—embedded in law and practice—intersects with state violence and armed conflict, producing multiple layers of repression and suffering.

Women endured systematic abuse, including sexual violence used as a weapon of war in Sudan and Libya. A Darfur survivor recalled: "They gathered the women in the schoolyard, then raped us one by one in front of our children." In Iran, compulsory hijab laws were enforced through harsh crackdowns under the "Noor Plan," entrenching what many describe as gender apartheid. Children also faced extreme violations: executions in Saudi Arabia and Iran, forced recruitment in Yemen and Sudan, and mass killings in Gaza. One emblematic tragedy in Gaza saw journalist Fatima Hassouna killed with ten relatives while preparing for her wedding, after losing eleven family members in earlier airstrikes—symbolizing the devastating toll on life and future.

Systematic persecution of minorities and stateless groups persisted, with Kurds and Baluchis in Iran and Algeria's Ahmadi community facing repression. The plight of the Bidoon worsened in Kuwait and Oman, especially after Kuwait's mass denationalization campaigns. At the same time, migrants and refugees suffered brutal abuses: killings and torture in Libya's detention centers, forced expulsions to Algeria's "zero point" desert zones, and deadly attacks along the Saudi-Yemeni border.

#### 5. The Crisis of Impunity: Absence of Justice and Accountability

Impunity has become entrenched in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Syria, where state institutions have persistently failed to deliver justice. Accountability remains the exception rather than the rule: no prosecutions have been brought for the killing of hundreds of protesters during Iraq's Tishreen uprising; Lebanon's investigation into the Beirut Port explosion remains stalled; and Libya has undertaken no credible inquiries into militia-led torture or extrajudicial killings.

In Syria, the collapse of the former regime exposed mass graves that revealed some of its worst crimes. In Iraq, the ongoing discovery of graves from past conflicts—particularly the war against ISIS—underscores the enduring failure of successive governments to confront historical atrocities.

With domestic justice mechanisms paralyzed, international courts have become the last resort for victims. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Israeli officials, while the International Court of Justice has heard cases concerning Palestine and Sudan, reflecting the growing reliance on international accountability in the face of regional impunity.

## 6. International Accountability in Crisis: A Call to Action

The report's findings reveal a collapse of the international system's capacity—or will—to protect civilians and enforce accountability in the Middle East and North Africa. Global inaction, and in some cases direct military or diplomatic backing of abusive regimes, has granted perpetrators free rein to escalate atrocities: genocidal campaigns in Gaza and Sudan, and entrenched repression in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, and Bahrain. In 2025, impunity emerged not as a byproduct of violence but as its driving force, fueling cycles of mass killing and state brutality.

In this context, expressions of concern are no longer meaningful. Without concrete measures, they amount to complicity. The international community—above all the United Nations, the Security Council, and the International Criminal Court—must urgently fulfill their legal and moral obligations by taking the following actions:

- Activate independent international investigative mechanisms into war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, and guarantee their unrestricted access to affected areas.
- Ensure criminal accountability for perpetrators at all levels, including political and military leaders, by supporting ICC investigations and expanding the use of universal jurisdiction to remove legal barriers to prosecution.
- Impose an immediate and comprehensive arms embargo on all parties responsible for severe violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.



- Secure the release of all prisoners of conscience and end the instrumentalization of counterterrorism, cybercrime, and other repressive laws to criminalize peaceful expression and civic activism.
- Provide urgent international protection to vulnerable groups and guarantee safe, unhindered humanitarian access to all populations in need.

### C. Methodology

This report is grounded in a rigorous research methodology designed to ensure accuracy, credibility, and objectivity in documenting the state of human rights across the Middle East and North Africa. Data was collected and analyzed in line with the highest international standards of human rights documentation, drawing on a diverse range of sources and tools.

- **Temporal and Geographic Scope:** The report covers the period from late 2024 to late 2025 and includes Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Yemen, Iran, Tunisia, Syria, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, and Mauritania, with a focus on cross-border patterns and systemic violations.
- **Field Data Collection:** Monitoring and research teams gathered primary data through confidential interviews with victims, eyewitnesses, lawyers, human rights defenders, and medical professionals, providing direct and detailed testimonies of abuses.
- **Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT):** Extensive use of open-source analysis was employed to verify violations. This included satellite imagery to confirm the scale of massacres—such as in El-Fasher—and to document the systematic destruction of more than 50 villages in Darfur, alongside the analysis of videos, photographs, and independent media reports.
- **Legal and Official Document Review:** Research teams examined new legislation, draft laws, judicial rulings, and official government statements to assess their impact on human rights and to track how legal frameworks were weaponized to entrench repression or, in rare cases, safeguard rights.
- **Media and Human Rights Monitoring:** Continuous monitoring of independent media, reports from local and international human rights organizations, and outputs from UN mechanisms—including statements by Special Rapporteurs and fact-finding missions—provided additional verification.

- **Verification and Triangulation:** The organization adheres to a strict policy of cross-checking information against multiple independent sources before publication. No claim is accepted unless corroborated by at least two independent sources.
- **Precision and Under-Documentation:** Some figures in this report appear highly precise because they are derived from verified records and documented monitoring. However, under-documentation remains a significant challenge: access restrictions, destruction of infrastructure, and fear of reporting almost certainly result in undercounting. Accordingly, all figures should be understood as minimum estimates rather than exhaustive totals.
- **Acknowledgment of Limitations:** Documentation faced significant challenges, including restrictions on access to conflict zones (such as Sudan, Yemen, Gaza, and Libya) and pervasive fear and intimidation that deterred victims and witnesses from reporting abuses. As a result, the figures presented in this report represent a *minimum estimate* of violations, with the actual scale of crimes likely to be far greater than what could be documented.



### **JORDAN: STIFLING THE PUBLIC SPHERE, SILENCING CRITICAL VOICES**

The human rights environment in Jordan has undergone a marked deterioration, defined by the systematic erosion of fundamental freedoms—most prominently freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, political participation, and the safeguarding of civic space. This regression unfolded against the backdrop of an unprecedented wave of public mobilization triggered by Israel's ongoing atrocities in Gaza, a conflict that resonates deeply in Jordan due to historic, demographic, and political ties with Palestine.

In response to this broad-based popular movement, authorities adopted a dual strategy of repression that combined direct coercive force with a flexible legal architecture designed to provide formal justification for restricting dissent. Mass arrests targeted peaceful demonstrators, political activists, and social-media voices, often for nothing more than expressing opinions or participating in solidarity actions critical of Israeli military operations.



The result was a sustained campaign that reshaped the state–society dynamic and severely constricted the avenues for legitimate political and civic engagement.

## Section I. Political and Legal Framework

Throughout 2025, Jordanian authorities relied heavily on the legal system and the broader political environment as instruments to curtail basic rights and suppress peaceful activism. A mix of vaguely worded laws, exceptional judicial practices, and administrative measures significantly reduced the space available for political participation and civil society work.

- **Legal Tools to Restrict Freedoms:** Central to this framework was the intensified use of the Crime Prevention Law—an expansive statute that authorizes detention based on mere "suspicion of posing a danger to the public." This provision enabled widespread pre-emptive arrests of peaceful participants in demonstrations and solidarity activities.

Parallel to this, the Cybercrimes Law became a primary mechanism for policing digital expression. Activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens faced prosecution for online posts deemed critical of official policy or supportive of Gaza. Courts, including the State Security Court, continued to issue severe penalties for acts that fall squarely within protected expression under international law, effectively criminalizing political speech and media work.

- **Suppression of Political Life:** The year also witnessed a renewed crackdown on political parties—most notably the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front. In April 2025, the authorities formally banned the activities of the Brotherhood, characterizing membership as a prohibited act under loosely defined claims of threatening national stability. The Islamic Action Front rejected these accusations, affirming its compliance with the constitution and party law. These measures were accompanied by arrests and legal actions targeting leaders and members of opposition movements, reinforcing the perception of a broader policy aimed at extinguishing organized dissent.



## Section II. Civil Rights, Arbitrary Arrests, and Torture

Repression extended far beyond politically motivated arrests and touched on grave violations committed during detention. Reports documented patterns of ill-treatment and torture in clear breach of Jordan's obligations under the Convention against Torture. These violations intensified following an April 2025 announcement by the General Intelligence Directorate concerning an alleged "terrorist cell"—<sup>1</sup> a designation widely perceived as a pretext for rounding up activists and individuals expressing solidarity with Gaza.

### Several emblematic cases illustrate this entrenched pattern:

- **Abdulaziz Haroun** – According to testimony from his mother, journalist Doaa Jabr, Haroun was arrested in a degrading manner from his workplace and subjected to blindfolding during a search of his home—an intimidation tactic intended to degrade and instill fear.
- **Hamza Bani Issa** – A peaceful demonstrator who suffered severe beatings at the hands of security forces, resulting in the loss of his eyesight. His case is among the most alarming examples of excessive force used against unarmed protesters.
- **Lawyer Firas al-Rousan** – Arrested for his peaceful activism, he was denied necessary medical care despite chronic health conditions, reflecting punitive and negligent detention practices.

### Other political and civic figures faced similar measures, including:



**Mohammed Jamal Hawamdeh**, Islamic Action Front leader, sentenced to one year in prison for "inciting discord" online.



**Ahmed al-Zarqan**, former MP and senior Muslim Brotherhood figure, arrested without charges or legal access.



**Khaled al-Jehani**, head of the party's parliamentary bloc, detained.

<sup>1</sup> Jordan News Agency (Petra), "Minister of Interior Announces Ban on Activities of the So-Called Muslim Brotherhood Group and Considers It an Illegal Association," April 24, 2024,

<https://www.petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=311224&lang=ar&name=news>.



Hamza Khader, BDS campaign head, held for weeks without trial.



Jamil Abu Bakr and Murad al-Adaileh, senior Brotherhood officials, arrested.



Dr. Issam al-Khawaja, deputy secretary-general of the Popular Unity Party, detained after leaving his workplace.



These cases collectively point to a systematic strategy to silence organized political expression and intimidate dissenting voices.

### Freedom of Expression, Media, and Access to Information

Judicial prosecution	Harsh sentencing	Administrative restrictions	Restrictions on public interest reporting	Physical violence
Investigative journalist Heba Abu Taha sentenced to prison and fined for reporting on Jordan-Israel commercial ties.	Four-year prison term for Mohammed al-Tawil for posting recorded messages from two Palestinians.	Blocking of more than 12 independent news websites; abrupt revocation of licenses for others.	Repeated gag orders imposed on sensitive public cases.	Journalist Fares al-Habashneh assaulted by unidentified assailants outside his home.

### Targeting of Women Human Rights Defenders

Repression expanded to include systematic targeting of women activists and human-rights defenders, reinforcing the broader effort to silence civil society.

#### Key documented cases (2025):

- Abeer al-Jamal**  
Sentenced to six months in prison and fined for receiving humanitarian donations while in Gaza.
- Alya al-Hajjawi, Hanan Kattaneh, and Khetam Irshaid**  
Detained administratively without charge while preparing a humanitarian convoy for Gaza.
- Engineer Bushra al-Eissi**  
administratively detained in Jordan in July 2025 for activism and social media posts, she launched a hunger strike, was placed in solitary confinement, and subjected to punitive measures.





### Section III. Freedom of Expression, the Press, and Digital Space

Freedom of expression suffered an alarming decline as the authorities employed legal, administrative, and security tools to suppress independent journalism and public criticism. Violations documented during 2024–2025 included arbitrary arrests, physical assaults on journalists, shutdowns of media outlets, and sweeping bans on public reporting.

- **Judicial Prosecution and Administrative Censorship**

- Women Journalists Without Chains recorded at least 12 major violations against journalists and media institutions. Among the most prominent was the conviction of investigative journalist Heba Abu Taha, who received a prison sentence and fine for her reporting on Jordanian-Israeli commercial cooperation during the Gaza war.<sup>2</sup>
- Authorities also blocked more than a dozen independent news websites, revoked licenses for others without explanation, and repeatedly imposed "gag orders" on issues of significant public interest. Journalists were barred from covering official events, limiting transparency and public oversight.
- Physical intimidation continued with attacks such as the assault on journalist Fares al-Habashneh outside his home in Amman. Filmmaker Ahmed al-Ramahi was secretly detained and denied access to legal counsel for his anti-normalization activism.

- **Expansion of the Cybercrimes Law**

Courts increasingly relied on the Cybercrimes Law to suppress online dissent. Sentences included:

- A four-year prison term for Mohammed al-Tawil for posting a recorded Palestinian will.
- Prison terms ranging from three to six months for activists such as Mohammed al-Toubasi and Yousef al-Ghazzawi, charged with cybercrimes and "insulting official bodies."

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<sup>2</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, "Jordan: Release of Journalist after Imprisonment and Payment of a Large Fine," February 15, 2025, <https://wjwc.org/ar/newsar/2025-02-15-16-00-43>.



These prosecutions reflect a broad strategy to limit expression both online and off, entrenching a climate of fear and shrinking public space.

### Legal and Political Instruments of Repression

Jordanian authorities used broad legal and political tools to criminalize civic activity and restrict freedoms.

#### Crime Prevention Law

Used to justify sweeping arrests of peaceful participants based solely on "suspicion of posing a threat."

#### Cybercrimes Law

Functioned as a central mechanism to restrict digital expression; critics were prosecuted for social-media posts, often receiving severe sentences.

#### State Security Court

Continued to prosecute and criminalize peaceful political and media activity.

#### Political Activity Ban

In April, authorities prohibited all activities of the Muslim Brotherhood and designated membership as unlawful, accompanied by arrests of opposition leaders and party figures.

### Core Violation: Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

#### Suppression of protests

Violent dispersal of peaceful demonstrations in Irbid, Zarqa, and Amman; dozens arrested.

#### Mass detentions

Hundreds detained; more than **100** cases documented involving participants in solidarity events.

#### Targeted reprisals

Arrest of lawyer Firas al-Rousan and his family; arrest of a young woman protesting outside the Israeli embassy under vague charges.





#### Section IV. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The right to peaceful assembly—protected under the ICCPR, to which Jordan is a party—was systematically undermined throughout 2025. Authorities adopted a dual approach: direct suppression of demonstrations through physical force, and pre-emptive arrests through the Crime Prevention Law to justify extensive detentions linked to Gaza-related solidarity actions.

Hundreds of protesters were detained; Women Journalists Without Chains documented more than 100 cases involving serious violations.<sup>3</sup> Key incidents include:

- **April:** A young woman was arrested during a protest outside the Israeli embassy and charged with "illegal gathering" and "insulting an official body," demonstrating the weaponization of vague offences against peaceful participants.
- **July:** Security forces violently dispersed demonstrations in Irbid, Zarqa, and Amman, arresting dozens. Raids in Amman's Tafilah neighborhood resulted in arrests even of residents who had not participated—suggesting collective punishment.
- **August:** Lawyer Firas al-Rousan and family members were arrested at a Gaza solidarity event and charged with "sectarian incitement" and "illegal assembly."

These incidents illustrate a consistent strategy of suppressing civic mobilization and deterring public engagement.

<sup>3</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, "Press Release: Condemnation of Continued Violations against Journalists in Yemen," April 15, 2025, <https://wjwc.org/ar/press-releases-ar/2025-04-15-16-47-10>.



## Section V. Women's Rights and the Targeting of Human Rights Defenders

Women activists were also subjected to targeted repression, underscoring the broader attempt to silence independent civil society. Cases include:

- **Abeer al-Jamal** – Sentenced to six months in prison and fined for having received humanitarian donations while in Gaza, despite the non-political nature of her actions.
- **Alya al-Hajjawi, Hanan Kattaneh, and Khetam Irshaid** – Arrested in Irbid without charge while preparing a humanitarian convoy for Gaza.
- **Engineer Bushra al-Eissi**– Arrested over social-media posts, held in solitary confinement after a hunger strike, and later dismissed from her job.
- **Inshirah Sonduqa** – Summoned by intelligence services and threatened for expressing support for Gaza; she observed that "the pen of a fifty-year-old disabled woman cannot possibly threaten state security."

The targeting of women human-rights defenders represents not only an assault on individual rights but a deliberate narrowing of civic space and a clear attempt to marginalize independent voices within society.

## Conclusion

The findings of this report indicate a sustained, systemic effort to erode fundamental rights and narrow civic space in Jordan. Authorities have increasingly relied on broad, imprecise legislation—particularly the Crime Prevention Law and the Cybercrimes Law—to justify arbitrary arrests, restrict peaceful assembly, and enable mistreatment in detention, while simultaneously targeting political figures, journalists, and human-rights defenders. These practices constitute clear violations of Jordan's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including the rights to expression, assembly, and political participation, and together reveal a deliberate reconfiguration of the public sphere aimed at suppressing dissent, weakening accountability, and constraining society's ability to engage freely in public affairs.



## UAE: CROSS-BORDER REPRESSION AND INTERNATIONAL LAW'S DOUBLE STANDARDS

### Introduction

From late 2024 through late 2025, the human-rights landscape in the United Arab Emirates remained defined by entrenched patterns of repression and the adoption of increasingly intrusive tactics. Broad national-security legislation continued to serve as the principal mechanism for criminalizing peaceful civic activity, effectively eliminating space for public participation and silencing critical voices. As a result, civil society operated under conditions of near-total closure, with independent political expression constrained by legal, administrative, and security instruments wielded by state authorities.

### Section 1. Political and legal framework

Understanding the human-rights environment in the UAE requires examining the political structure, the functioning of the judiciary, and the set of laws introduced or enforced during 2024–2025. These elements collectively shape the operational boundaries of civic freedoms and determine the extent to which individuals can exercise their fundamental rights.

#### 1.1 Political and parliamentary system

- **System of governance:** The UAE is a federal hereditary monarchy where ultimate authority rests with the rulers of the seven emirates. Vast economic disparities between emirates have consolidated effective power in Abu Dhabi, which shapes national governance and security policy. The State Security apparatus continues to exert a dominant influence over public life, backed by broad provisions that enable the suppression of dissent and the criminalization of peaceful expression.
- **Legislative body:** The Federal National Council (FNC) remains a consultative chamber with highly restricted legislative and oversight powers. Of its 40 members, half are appointed directly by the rulers, while the remaining half are selected through a limited electoral college whose membership is itself chosen by the ruling



authorities. This system raises persistent questions about the Council's representativeness and its ability to function as an independent institutional check.

## 1.2 Judiciary and administration of justice

- **Judicial independence:** Judicial independence remains severely compromised, particularly in cases touching on national security or political expression. Executive and State Security interference continues to shape outcomes in politically sensitive proceedings, undermining fair-trial guarantees.
- **Case study—"UAE 84":** On 4 March 2025, the High State Security Court rejected the appeal of prominent human rights defender Mohamed al-Roken and upheld an additional 25-year prison sentence. This ruling came as al-Roken was nearing completion of a prior 10-year sentence, raising grave concerns regarding the principle of non bis in idem (prohibition on double jeopardy), a cornerstone of international criminal law.
- **Further escalations:** In July 2024, prominent activist Ahmed Mansoor and academic Nasser bin Ghaith were re-convicted and each received an additional 15-year prison term while already serving existing sentences. Reports indicate their proceedings lacked due process and involved prolonged solitary confinement, compounding fair trial and ill-treatment concerns.

## 1.3 Legal framework and implications for human rights

- **International obligations:** The UAE has not acceded to key international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, constraining external accountability mechanisms.
- **New and revised legislation:** Several pivotal laws entered into force during the review period with mixed or adverse human rights impacts.
- **Cumulative effect:** The tightening of evidentiary standards, coupled with expansive application of cybercrime and national security laws, directly enables specific



violations of civil rights. These developments set conditions for intensified restrictions that will be detailed in the subsequent section of the report.

### Key legislation enacted or effective in 2024–2025

#### Personal Status Law

**15 April 2025**

Mixed effect: positive developments include recognition of equal inheritance and adoption of joint custody; negative elements persist, such as discriminatory restrictions on Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men.

#### Anti-Money Laundering Law

**November 2025**

Heightened risk to civil liberties: lowers the evidentiary threshold for conviction from "actual knowledge" to "objective circumstances," enabling prosecutions of civil society activity on circumstantial grounds.

#### Media Regulation Law

**July 2025**

Curtails freedom of expression: imposes stringent oversight of digital content and requires prior licensing for social media influencers, further constraining the online space.





## Section 2. Fundamental Civil Rights

The right to liberty and personal security remains a central concern in the UAE's human-rights record. The 2024–2025 reporting period demonstrates continued reliance on arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, and intensifying forms of transnational repression aimed at silencing critics both inside and outside the country.

### 2.1 Arbitrary arrest and detention

- Authorities continued to employ arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention against political opponents and human rights defenders.
- The cases of Ahmed Mansoor and Mohamed al-Roken illustrate how additional judicial rulings are used to indefinitely prolong imprisonment, constituting a sustained violation of their right to liberty.

### 2.2 Transnational repression

During the reporting period, UAE authorities expanded their tactics to target critics residing abroad, extending repression beyond national boundaries.

- **Abdulrahman Yusuf al-Qaradawi:**
  - In January 2025, the poet and activist was deported from Lebanon to the UAE.
  - His detention in Lebanon in late 2024 was based on warrants issued by both Egypt and the UAE: Egypt sought his extradition on charges of "spreading false news," while the UAE requested deportation for "incitement against the state."
  - Since his transfer to UAE custody, no verified information has been available regarding his fate or legal status.
- **Jasim Rashid al-Shamsi:**
  - On 6 November 2025, reports emerged of his alleged arrest in Damascus, Syria.

- The detention is believed to have been carried out at the request of UAE authorities, exemplifying regional security cooperation to suppress political dissent.

• **Targeting of families of exiled dissidents:**

- Beginning in January 2025, authorities initiated measures against the families and businesses of exiled opponents.
- This tactic amounts to collective punishment, designed to isolate dissidents by dismantling their financial and emotional support networks.

**Legal implications:** Pursuing activists abroad constitutes a deliberate circumvention of international legal standards. Individuals are detained without fair trial guarantees or immediate access to legal counsel. Under human rights law, the use of third states to execute arbitrary arrests renders such detentions unlawful and directly undermines the rights to freedom of expression and movement.

New Legislation and Its Effects			
Contrasting declared legal reforms with their substantive impact on freedoms			
Law / Regulation	Date of Entry into Force	Positive (Surface) Effect	Negative (Substantive) Effect
Personal Status Law	15 April 2025	Equal inheritance rights, shared custody provisions.	Continued discrimination against Muslim women marrying non Muslims.
Media Regulation Law	July 2025	Framework for digital content regulation.	Mandatory prior licensing and heavy censorship of influencers.
Anti Money Laundering Law	November 2025	Strengthened tools against financial crime.	Lowered evidentiary threshold (circumstantial evidence) used to target civil society actors.



### 2.3 Torture and prison conditions

- Allegations of ill-treatment in detention facilities persisted, with no effective accountability mechanisms in place to investigate such claims.
  - Reports confirm that prolonged solitary confinement remains a common practice, affecting prominent activists such as Ahmed Mansoor and Nasser bin Ghaith.
- <sup>4</sup>Extended solitary confinement contravenes international standards and may amount to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

#### Case of Ali Abdullah Fath Ali al-Khaja:

- In mid-November 2025, the 58-year-old businessman and prisoner of conscience died in al-Razeen prison, Abu Dhabi, after 13 years of violations.
- *Women Journalists Without Chains* described his death as a form of "slow killing" resulting from deliberate medical neglect and harsh detention conditions.
- UAE authorities bear full criminal responsibility for his death. The organization has called for an immediate, independent international investigation into the circumstances.
- Al-Khaja had been held arbitrarily in "counseling centers" even after completing his original sentence, and was retried and re-sentenced prior to his death.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.4 Restrictions on freedom of expression

Limitations extended beyond physical security to encompass intellectual rights. Freedom of expression continued to face severe restrictions, reinforcing the broader pattern of repression documented during this period.

## Section 3. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Media, and the Internet

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<sup>4</sup> Times of India. "UAE Sends Social Media Users to Public Prosecution for Violating Media and Cybercrime Laws." World News. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/uae-sends-social-media-users-to-public-prosecution-for-violating-media-and-cybercrime-laws/articleshow/123538623.cms>.

<sup>5</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains. "Press Release: UAE Refers Social Media Users to Public Prosecution for Violating Media and Cybercrime Laws." November 22, 2025. <https://wjwc.org/ar/press-releases-ar/2025-11-22-10-15-08>.



The UAE employs an integrated strategy to control digital and traditional public spaces by combining vague legislation, advanced surveillance technology, and strict administrative regulation. This approach has shifted repression from targeting direct political activism to criminalizing even ordinary online commentary.

### 3.1 Targeting of human rights defenders and journalists

- Peaceful human rights and journalistic activity continued to be criminalized during the reporting period.
- In March 2025, human rights defender **Mohamed al-Roken** received an additional 25-year prison sentence, exemplifying the judiciary's role in silencing dissent.
- In November 2025, journalist **Jasim Rashid al-Shamsi** was arrested, further demonstrating the use of security and judicial mechanisms to suppress independent voices.
- The case of Jordanian activist **Ahmed al-Atoum**, serving a 10-year sentence for peaceful social media posts, underscores the punitive application of cybercrime legislation against online expression.

### 3.2 Press freedom and restrictive laws

- The media environment remained severely constrained, with the Cybercrime Law serving as the principal instrument of repression.
- In August 2025, the National Media Office referred a group of social media users to the Federal Public Prosecutor for alleged violations of content standards.<sup>6</sup>
- This measure reflects a strategic shift toward preventive censorship, tightening restrictions on any form of unlicensed public communication.

### 3.3 Digital surveillance

- Authorities continued systematic use of advanced surveillance tools.

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<sup>6</sup> National Media Office. "National Media Office Refers Social Media Users to Public Prosecution." Presidential News. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://www.nmo.gov.ae/en/presidential-news/national-media-office-refers-social-media-users-to-public-prosecution>.

- In February 2025, NGOs submitted evidence to the UN Human Rights Council<sup>7</sup> documenting the UAE's ongoing deployment of spyware such as Pegasus to infiltrate the devices of activists, journalists, and exiles.
- Such practices constitute serious violations of the rights to privacy and freedom of expression.

### 3.4 Academic freedom

- The repressive environment directly impacted academic freedom.
- Beyond concerns raised by the new Media Regulation Law, the 2024–2025 academic year witnessed punitive measures against students at New York University Abu Dhabi who criticized the war in Gaza.<sup>8</sup>
- These measures included deportation and suspension, violating rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly within the university setting.

**Broader implications:** Restrictions on freedom of expression naturally extend to the rights of peaceful assembly and association, both of which are foundational to any functioning civil society.

## Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association

Peaceful assembly and freedom of association cannot exist without an autonomous and functioning civil society. Throughout 2024–2025, the UAE's legal and political framework made the practical exercise of these rights impossible, shutting down any avenue for collective action, public expression, or civic oversight.

### 4.1 Closure of civic space

- Civic space in the UAE remained **tightly closed**, with no independent human rights organizations licensed to operate domestically during the reporting period.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations General Assembly. A/HRC/58/NGO/27. Human Rights Council, Fifty-eighth Session. November 2025. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/NGO/27>.

<sup>8</sup> Student at New York University. Interview with Women Journalists Without Chains, August 2025.

- The absence of peaceful assemblies does not indicate public satisfaction but rather reflects the effectiveness of harsh legal and security deterrence policies.

#### 4.2 Case study—Bangladeshi workers

- In July 2024, 57 Bangladeshi workers were prosecuted on security charges for participating in an unlicensed demonstration.
- Although they were later pardoned and deported, the case serves as a precedent illustrating the severe consequences of exercising the right to assembly.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.3 Targeting of families and financial networks

- Authorities extended repression by targeting the families and businesses of exiled dissidents.
- This tactic aims to eliminate potential funding sources for independent associations, including those operating abroad, thereby ensuring complete state control over the civic landscape.

#### 4.4 Strategic objective

- Restrictions on licensing independent associations, combined with punitive measures against families of dissidents, reflect a deliberate strategy to prevent the emergence of any autonomous civic or social space capable of demanding reform or challenging government policy.

**Conclusion:** The restrictions documented in this period demonstrate a systematic effort to suppress fundamental civil and political rights. Beyond the general closure of civic space, specific population groups continue to face structural challenges that compound their vulnerability, a theme explored in the following section.

### Section 5. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups

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<sup>9</sup> Freedom House. United Arab Emirates: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report. Freedom in the World 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-arab-emirates/freedom-world/2025>.



The situation of vulnerable groups—including women and migrant workers—provides a critical measure of the UAE's actual commitment to international human rights standards. Analysis of conditions during 2024–2025 reveals structural gaps in protection, where legislative reforms often stand in stark contrast to practices on the ground.

### 5.1 Women's rights

- **Legislative reforms:** The entry into force of the new Personal Status Law on 15 April 2025 marked a significant development. Positive provisions included recognition of equal inheritance rights between men and women and the introduction of joint custody arrangements for parents.
- **Persistent discrimination:** Despite these advances, the law retained discriminatory provisions, most notably restrictions on Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men.<sup>10</sup> This reflects the ongoing tension between legal modernization and entrenched social constraints.
- **Implementation challenges:** Additional reforms in 2025—such as extending maternity leave to 60 days and expanding the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation's (MOHRE) authority to resolve disputes—were introduced.<sup>11</sup> However, enforcement remains weak, particularly in sectors where women are most vulnerable.

### 5.2 Rights of migrant workers

Migrant workers, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the labor force, continue to face systemic violations despite limited legal reforms. Key concerns include:

<sup>10</sup> Conflict of Laws. "The Personal Status Regimes in the UAE — What's New and What Are the Implications for Private International Law? A Brief Critical Appraisal." November 2025. <https://conflictoflaws.net/2025/the-personal-status-r-in-the-uae-whats-new-and-what-are-the-implications-for-private-international-law-a-brief-critical-appraisal/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Arab Emirates. "UAE Supports Efforts to Implement Humanitarian Truce and Achieve Immediate Ceasefire in Sudan." November 5, 2025. <https://www.mofa.gov.ae/en/MediaHub/News/2025/11/5/5-11-2025-uae-sudan>.



- **Wage theft:** Domestic workers remain excluded from the mandatory Wage Protection System, leaving them highly vulnerable to non-payment or delayed wages.<sup>12</sup>
- **Passport confiscation:** Although legally prohibited, the practice of employers retaining workers' passports remains widespread, restricting freedom of movement and facilitating exploitation.
- **Heat-related risks:** Construction workers face pervasive health hazards linked to extreme heat exposure. This failure to safeguard basic rights highlights the disconnect between the UAE's climate policy commitments and its human rights obligations.

**Structural contradiction:** Legal reforms appear primarily geared toward external compliance—such as improving the country's standing in anti-trafficking reports—rather than addressing systemic enforcement failures in unregulated sectors, particularly domestic work.

## Section 6. Armed Conflicts and International Humanitarian Law

The UAE's engagement with international humanitarian law (IHL) reflects a pronounced gap between its diplomatic messaging and the documented accusations of its involvement in regional conflicts, particularly in Sudan. This divergence underscores significant concerns

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: United Arab Emirates. June 2025.  
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/united-arab-emirates/>.

about the state's commitment to accountability and compliance with international legal norms.

### Legal and Political Framework

Institution	Current Status (2025)	Impact on Rights
Civil society	Completely closed (no independent organizations).	No capacity for accountability or domestic monitoring.
Judiciary	Subordinate to the executive and state security.	Absence of fair trial guarantees.
National Council	40 members (50% appointed, 50% under restricted elections).	Advisory role only, with limited legislative authority.

### Foreign Policy Rhetoric vs. Documented Practice

#### Comparing diplomatic commitments with verified violations

Issue Area	Official Discourse / Commitment	Documented Reality / Violation
Sudan conflict	Signed the "Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Workers" (September 2025).	Accusations of military support to the Rapid Support Forces, breaching the arms embargo.
Climate and environment	Net zero strategy (2025–2050).	Failure to protect construction workers from lethal "heat stress."
Corporate conduct abroad	Commitment to responsible investment.	Environmental defenders in Colombia threatened by MDC Industry, a UAE linked company.



### 6.1 Official commitments

- **22 September 2025:** The UAE signed the *Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Workers*, affirming its commitment to uphold IHL.
- **5 November 2025:** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly condemned attacks on civilians and vital infrastructure in conflict zones, describing them as "flagrant violations."

### 6.2 Documented allegations

- Throughout 2025, credible reports pointed that the UAE provided military support to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan, a group implicated in widespread atrocities. Such support would constitute a violation of the UN-imposed arms embargo.
- UAE authorities categorically denied these accusations, dismissing them as "disinformation campaigns" and asserting a neutral, mediation-oriented position.

### 6.3 Accountability concerns

The stark divergence between official declarations and evidenced charges underscores the absence of transparency and accountability. No evidence emerged during the reporting period of independent or credible internal investigations by UAE authorities into these serious claims. This failure heightens concerns about international responsibility and the state's compliance with humanitarian law obligations.

**Overall conclusion:** The rights of women, migrant workers, and vulnerable groups remain undermined by structural enforcement gaps, while the UAE's approach to international humanitarian law reflects a troubling inconsistency between public commitments and alleged practices. Together, these dynamics illustrate the persistence of systemic barriers to genuine human rights protection and accountability.



## Section 7. Environment, Climate, and Human Rights

Global understanding of the interdependence between climate action and human rights has expanded markedly in recent years. This section examines the UAE's response to that nexus, identifying the disconnects between its high-profile climate commitments, the protection of vulnerable communities, and the human-rights obligations of Emirati companies operating overseas.

### 7.1 National climate commitments vs. human rights protection

- **Ambitious targets:** The UAE has continued to set high-profile climate objectives, including the *Net Zero Strategy 2025–2050*.<sup>13</sup>
- **Implementation gap:** Despite these commitments, there remains a substantial disconnect between stated goals and the protection of human rights in practice.
- **Migrant workers and heat risks:** The failure to adequately safeguard migrant construction workers—who form the backbone of the sector—from extreme heat exposure illustrates the lack of integration between climate policy and basic human rights obligations, particularly the right to safe and healthy working conditions.

### 7.2 Corporate accountability abroad

- **UN concerns:** In March 2025, UN Special Rapporteurs issued formal communications to both the UAE government and the Emirati company *MDC Industry Holding Company LLC*.
- **Allegations:** The letters raised concerns about threats and criminalization faced by environmental defenders in Colombia who opposed mining projects linked to the company.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The United Arab Emirates' Third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0). November 2024. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2024-11/UAE-NDC3.0.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL). "UN Experts Denounce Threats and Stigmatization Against Defenders of Water and the Santurbán Páramo; Demand Protection for Their Work." November 2025. <https://www.ciel.org/news/un-denounces-threats-against-santurban-defenders/>.



- **Implications:** This case underscores the need to extend accountability mechanisms to cover the overseas operations of Emirati corporations, ensuring that foreign investments do not contribute to human rights violations.

## Conclusion

Developments between late 2024 and late 2025 present a complex picture of the human rights situation in the UAE. Civil and political repression expanded in parallel with limited legislative reforms. Authorities continued to exploit a broad legal framework to eliminate civic space—as seen in the sentencing of Mohamed al-Roken, the ongoing imprisonment of Ahmed al-Atoum, and the lowering of criminal evidentiary thresholds—while extending repression beyond national borders through deportations, targeting of exiled families, and corporate-linked operations abroad.

A stark duality persists in the UAE's international role: official rhetoric supporting international humanitarian law contrasts sharply with documented allegations of military support to armed actors in Sudan. Meanwhile, systemic violations against migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, remain entrenched.

## Recommended actions

Based on documented violations, urgent steps are required to address these challenges. The five recommendations advanced by *Women Journalists Without Chains* include:

1. **Immediate review of repressive security legislation** to ensure compliance with international standards.
2. **Public and unconditional cessation of transnational repression**, including deportations and targeting of families of dissidents.
3. **Strengthening judicial independence and transparency of proceedings** to guarantee fair trial rights.
4. **Improved enforcement of labor laws**, with particular focus on protecting domestic workers.
5. **Full accountability and transparency regarding allegations of support to armed groups** in regional conflicts, including independent investigations.



These measures are essential to bridging the gap between the UAE's stated commitments and its actual practices, and to advancing genuine protection of human rights across civil, political, labor, and environmental domains.



## BAHRAIN: THE LONG ARM OF SECURITY

### Introduction

Over 2025, Bahrain's human rights landscape witnessed a sharp and deliberate regression, driven by the unchecked power of executive and security institutions. New laws converted repression into legality, eroding digital and public freedoms. Arbitrary detention, torture, and the persecution of activists became routine under the guise of judicial process, while vulnerable groups—women, children, and migrant workers—suffered the most. Despite official claims of constitutional and legislative reform, evidence reveals an entrenched security-first doctrine. The state's legal and institutional frameworks were recalibrated not to safeguard rights, but to consolidate political control. This report exposes the structural reality behind the narrative of reform.

### Section I. The Political and Legal Framework: Legislating Repression

A state's political and legal framework forms the foundation for either the protection or the violation of human rights. In Bahrain, this framework was deliberately reshaped during the reporting period to elevate security interests above constitutional rights and international obligations. The outcome is an environment that not only enables abuses but also entrenches a culture of impunity. This report explores how such recalibration has institutionalized repression under the guise of legality.

- **Executive and Security Dominance**

Although Bahrain's constitution describes the state as a constitutional monarchy with separated powers, the lived reality demonstrates the overwhelming influence of the National Security Agency (NSA) over civil institutions. Ministries of justice, health, and labor remained subject to security oversight, undermining administrative independence.<sup>15</sup> This influence is most visible in the judiciary. Judges and

<sup>15</sup> Reform in Bahrain and the Dominance of the National Security Agency, Bahrain Mirror, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.bahrainmirror.com/news/65247.html>.

prosecutors handling politically sensitive cases faced pressure from security agencies, eroding the principle of judicial independence. The result is a system where the security apparatus determines outcomes long before a court hearing occurs. The government celebrated Bahrain's favorable ranking in the 2025 Gallup "law and order" index, but this ranking reflects coercive social control—not adherence to the rule of law<sup>16</sup> as defined by international human-rights standards.



### Timeline of Key Violations

<b>Lawyer Rashed Al-Binali</b> <b>February 2025</b> Judicial prosecution over a social media post (initiated by an MP's complaint).	<b>Child (Yousif H.) - 16 years old</b> <b>March 2025</b> Torture, sexual threats, and extraction of coerced confessions.
<b>Religious Activist Mahdi Sahwan</b> <b>March 2025</b> Arrest for reciting a poem in solidarity with Gaza.	<b>Bahraini Society Against Normalization</b> <b>May 2025</b> Repeated denial of permits for peaceful demonstrations.
<b>Photographer Sayed Baqer Al-Kamel</b> <b>June 2025</b> Forced to sign a pledge refraining from publishing content on regional affairs.	<b>Workers 30</b> <b>July 2025</b> Collective complaint for non-payment of wages for five consecutive months.

- **Legislative Control and the Codification of Repression**

Throughout the reporting period, Parliament functioned not as an independent oversight body, but as a rubber-stamp for repressive legislation. The most

<sup>16</sup> Bahrain Tops Arab States in Commitment to Law and Order According to Gallup Report 2025, Akhbar al-Khaleej, accessed November 10, 2025, <https://akhbar-alkhaleej.com/news/article/1413973>.

prominent example was the passage of amendments to the Press and Electronic Media Law in 2025, representing a severe legislative setback for freedom of expression.<sup>17</sup> These amendments contained several problematic provisions:

- **The Misleading Repeal of Prison Sentences:** Despite official claims of eliminating jail terms for journalists, such penalties remain enshrined in other laws, including the Penal Code and the Counter-Terrorism Law. This renders the repeal a largely cosmetic gesture.
- **Crippling Financial Penalties:** The law imposes exorbitant fines of up to 50,000 Bahraini Dinars (approximately USD 132,800), reinforcing the conclusion that their purpose is the financial deterrence and suppression of independent voices, rather than proportionate disciplinary action.
- **Control over the Digital Sphere:** The law mandates that all "electronic media," including websites, obtain an official government license, thereby bringing the digital public square under direct state control.
- **Vague and Overbroad Terminology:** The legislation employs deliberately ambiguous terms such as "harming the supreme interests of the state," which grant authorities wide latitude for arbitrary interpretation and the criminalization of any disfavored content.

In parallel, 2025 amendments to the Penal Code expanded the scope of Article 372 to criminalize the recording of conversations or the capturing of images in "private" places. This provision can be readily exploited as a legal pretext to suppress the documentation of human rights abuses. Authorities also continued the routine use of Penal Code articles to prosecute individuals, notably the charge of "insulting the King of the Kingdom of Bahrain," which carries a potential sentence of up to seven years' imprisonment.

- **Cybersecurity and State Surveillance**

Royal Decree No. (25) established the National Cybersecurity Centre (NCSC) in 2025, significantly expanding the government's digital surveillance powers. The Centre's placement under the Supreme Defence Council—a senior military and

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<sup>17</sup> "Bahrain: Halt Repressive Amendments to the Press Law," Access Now, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/bahrain-halt-repressive-amendments-to-press-law/>.

security authority—raises serious concerns about privacy and the absence of independent oversight. This development is consistent with Bahrain's documented history of using sophisticated spyware, such as Pegasus and FinSpy, to target activists and political opponents.

- **The Absence of Accountability: Facade Mechanisms and a Culture of Impunity**

Domestic accountability bodies, such as the Secretariat-General of Grievances (OGS), are neither independent nor effective. Although promoted internationally as a "leading Gulf model,"<sup>18</sup> human rights organizations regard it as little more than a mechanism for whitewashing violations.<sup>19</sup> The 2025 Global Torture Index underscores this failure: since 2012, only 95 police officers have faced prosecution for abuse-related charges,<sup>20</sup> leading to just 18 convictions—a rate of under 20%. Such figures reveal a profound lack of political will to hold perpetrators of serious violations accountable.



<sup>18</sup> The Ombudsman Office: Bahrain as a Leading Gulf Model in Protecting Human Rights and a Noticeable Decline in Complaints, BH Report, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://bhreport.info/tzm/>.

<sup>19</sup> The Sixth Annual Report of the Ombudsman Office as a Tool to Whitewash Human Rights Violations in Bahrain, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.adhrb.org/ar/?p=5442>.

<sup>20</sup> Global Torture Index 2025: Bahrain Factsheet, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/factsheets/Factsheet-Bahrain-EN.pdf>.

This flawed legal and political framework directly enables the systematic violations of civil and political rights detailed in the following chapter.

## Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

Civil and political rights form the bedrock of any genuine democracy. In Bahrain, however, these rights were systematically eroded throughout the reporting period. This section highlights the concrete consequences of a security-driven framework: the persistence of arbitrary detention, the practice of torture, worsening prison conditions, and the denial of fair trial guarantees.

- **Arbitrary Detention and Enforced Disappearance**

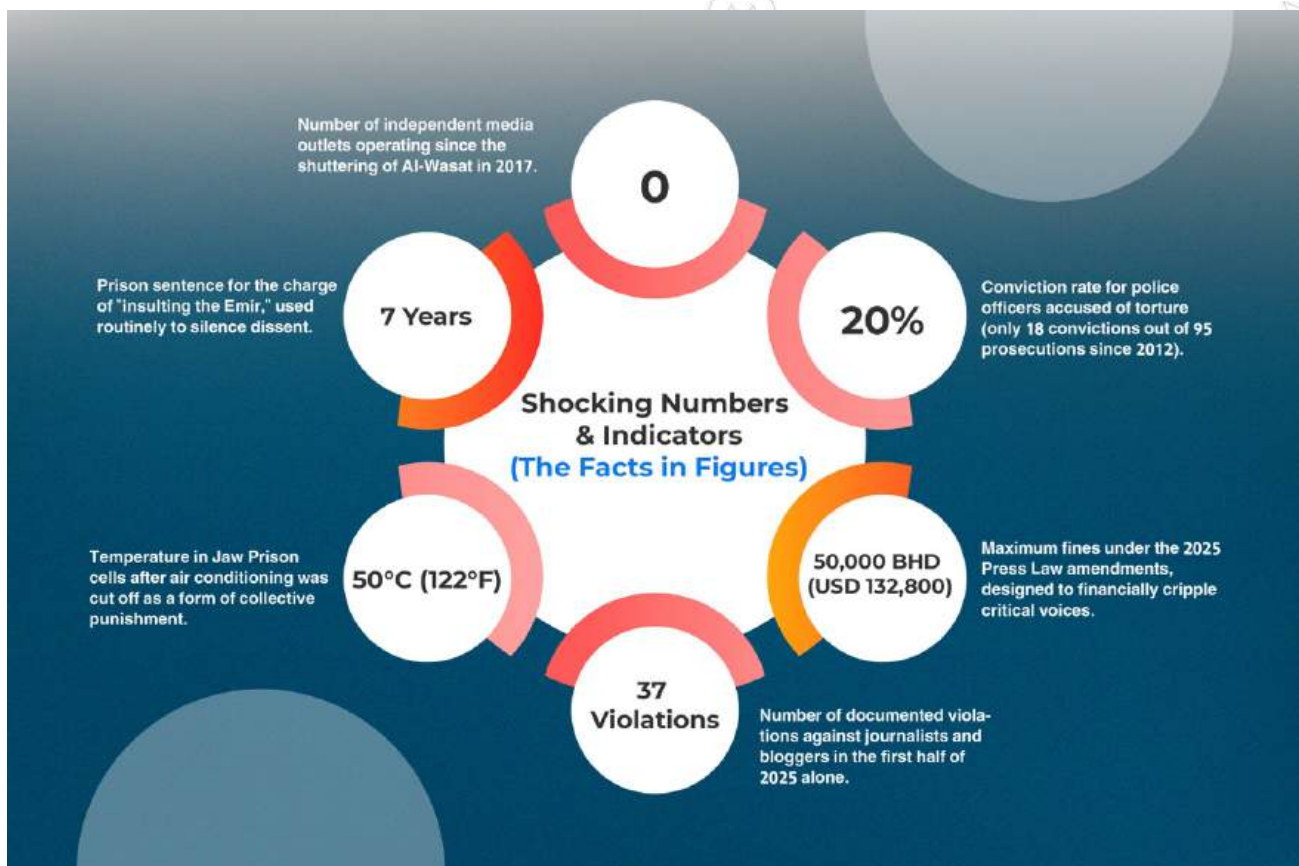
The reporting period was characterized by the systematic continuation of arbitrary arrests, aimed primarily at silencing public expressions of solidarity with Gaza and dissent against normalization. Security forces carried out raids and arrest campaigns in areas such as Al-Duraz and Sitra, detaining dozens of protesters—including minors—under charges of "unauthorized assembly." These practices starkly contradict the official narrative of rights-based reform and expose the persistence of repression beneath claims of progress.<sup>21</sup>

Procedurally, security agencies have institutionalized the practice of "short-term enforced disappearance" as a routine investigative tool. Detainees, often seized during nocturnal raids, are transferred to the Criminal Investigations Directorate and completely isolated from the outside world, including their lawyers, for periods ranging from several days to weeks. This isolation period is routinely used to extract coerced confessions before the detainee is formally presented to the public prosecution.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Between Demands and Prosecution: The State of Peaceful Assembly in Bahrain During the First Quarter of 2025 (January–March), Salam DHR, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://salam-dhr.org/between-demands-and-prosecution-the-state-of-peaceful-assembly-in-bahrain-during-the-first-quarter-of-2025-january-march/>.

<sup>22</sup> Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions of Minors in Bahrain: Political Suppression Behind the Mask of Restorative Justice, European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.ecdhr.org/arbitrary-arrests-and-detentions-of-minors-in-bahrain-political-suppression-behind-the-mask-of-restorative-justice/>.

The scope of repression widened to encompass the prosecution of digital activists critical of economic policies, alongside recurring restrictions on religious rituals during the Ashura season in July 2025, exemplified by the summoning of preachers.<sup>23</sup> Despite official promotion of the "Restorative Justice" law, violations against children persisted, with arrests and interrogations carried out absent basic safeguards. This pattern underscores the regime's "revolving door" policy<sup>24</sup>—detaining new activists even as others are released.<sup>25</sup>



<sup>23</sup> Bahrain: Authorities Continue to Restrict Religious Freedom During Ashura 2025, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.adhrb.org/2025/08/bahrain-authorities-continue-to-restrict-religious-freedom-during-ashura-2025/>.

<sup>24</sup> Bahrain's "Revolving Door" of Repression: New Arrests Overshadow Royal Pardons, Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://birdbh.org/2025/05/bahrains-revolving-door-of-repression/>.

<sup>25</sup> Bahrain: Authorities Violate Detained Children's Rights, Human Rights Watch (HRW), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/10/bahrain-authorities-violate-detained-childrens-rights>.

- **Torture, Ill-Treatment, and Deteriorating Prison Conditions**

Torture and ill-treatment remain entrenched practices in Bahrain's detention centers, particularly during initial interrogations designed to extract confessions later used as trial evidence.<sup>26</sup> At Jaw Prison—the country's main facility—humanitarian conditions have deteriorated dramatically. Authorities imposed harsh retaliatory measures against prisoners who staged hunger strikes to protest the appalling environment, including depriving them of meals, shutting off air conditioning in temperatures exceeding 50°C, and denying essential medical care.

In one harrowing case, a 16-year-old detainee, Youssef H., was subjected to severe physical and psychological abuse in March 2025. Reports indicate he was brutally beaten, threatened with rape, and sexually assaulted to coerce him into signing pre-prepared confessions.<sup>27</sup>

- **Erosion of Fair Trial Guarantees**

The "pressure and security influence" exerted by the National Security Agency gravely compromises the independence of Bahrain's judiciary, eroding the fair trial guarantees enshrined in Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The denial of access to legal counsel—particularly during preliminary investigations—constitutes a fundamental breach that invalidates the integrity of the entire judicial process.

This systematic suppression of both physical and legal rights extends further to the curtailment of freedom of expression, a trend that will be examined in detail in the following part.

### Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet

During the reporting period, Bahraini authorities recalibrated the legislative framework to institutionalize restrictions on freedom of expression, with a particular focus on the digital

<sup>26</sup> Global Torture Index 2025: Bahrain Factsheet, World Organization Against Torture (OMCT), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/factsheets/Factsheet-Bahrain-EN.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Bahrain Abuse of Children to Quell Dissent Violates International Law: Report, JURIST, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2025/03/bahrain-abusing-children-to-quell-dissent-violates-international-law-report/>.

sphere. These measures stand in direct violation of Bahrain's obligations under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Collectively, they have created broad legal grounds for prosecuting activists based on their online activities, thereby embedding repression within the law itself.

- **Targeting of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders**

A combination of old and new restrictive legislation was deployed to target anyone expressing criticism of the authorities. The Bahraini Journalists' Association documented 37 separate cases of violations in the first half of 2025 alone. Prominent documented cases include:<sup>28</sup>

- **Cybercrime Laws and Digital Censorship**

The expansive wording of Article 372 of the Penal Code provides broad latitude for suppressing human rights documentation under the guise of protecting privacy. In parallel, the creation of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and its subordination to the Supreme Defense Council—a senior military and security authority—poses a grave threat to privacy and digital activism, heightening the risk that surveillance tools will be deployed against activists without judicial oversight.

Within this repressive environment, no independent media outlet has operated in Bahrain since the closure of Al-Wasat newspaper in 2017, underscoring the complete absence of media pluralism.

February 2025	March 2025	June 2025
MP Abdulwahed Qaratah filed a complaint against lawyer Rashed Al-Binali over a social media post, illustrating how officials instrumentalize criminal tools to suppress criticism directed at them.	Religious activist Mahdi Sahwan was arrested after reciting a poem expressing solidarity with Gaza, as part of a broader campaign to suppress any manifestation of support for the Palestinian cause.	Photographer Sayed Baqer Al-Kamel was summoned and forced to sign a pledge refraining from publishing content related to regional affairs, an example of the politicization of free expression and its subordination to the state's official political stance.

<sup>28</sup> Semi-Annual Report of the Bahrain Press Association 2025: A Destructive Law..., Bahrain Press Association, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://bahrainpa.org/?p=2356>.

These restrictions on individual expression inevitably extend to collective expression, setting the stage for an examination of limitations on freedom of assembly in the following section.



## Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association

The authorities enforce systematic restrictions designed to suffocate independent civil society, deploying a combination of administrative, legal, and security measures to obstruct any form of collective expression.

- **Restrictions on Associations**

The pervasive influence of security agencies directly shapes decisions on licensing associations, with applications to establish independent human rights or political organizations routinely rejected. In addition, Decree-Law No. (39) of 2025 on fundraising regulation has become a tool to "freeze" or financially suffocate NGOs under vague pretexts, further constraining their ability to operate.



- **Suppression of Peaceful Assembly**

The reporting period witnessed a continued pattern of either the use of force or administrative refusal to prevent peaceful gatherings, especially those addressing sensitive issues. Notable documented incidents include:

- **May-June 2025:** Authorities repeatedly denied protest applications filed by the Bahraini Society Against Normalization, citing specious justifications such as the "event's location" or the "regional situation," demonstrating the arbitrary nature of the refusals.
- **25 June 2025:** Police forces dismantled religious mourning structures in the village of Al-Duraz, leading to clashes that resulted in citizen Hassan Al-Anfouz sustaining serious injuries.
- **27 June 2025:** Authorities arrested youths Qassim Mohammed and Hussain Hilal in the Sitra area for displaying religious banners associated with the Ashura season.

This repressive approach to collective rights disproportionately harms the most vulnerable segments of society, a reality that will be examined in detail in the following part.





## Section V. The Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups

The general violations documented in this report exacerbate the suffering of women, children, and migrant workers. Existing legal frameworks are either inherently discriminatory or ineffectively implemented, leaving these groups without adequate protection.

- **The Rights of Women and Children**

The Unified Family Law of 2017 continues to enshrine discriminatory provisions against women, including the concept of a wife's "obedience" to her husband and the potential denial of alimony if she is deemed "disobedient." In addition, Article 20 contravenes international standards by allowing the marriage of girls as young as 16 with court authorization, thereby perpetuating child marriage.

A disturbing pattern of violations against children has also been documented, encompassing politically motivated arrests, beatings, threats, and harassment during interrogations, as well as denial of access to lawyers, family contact, and education during detention.<sup>29</sup> These abuses are compounded by the absence of fair trial guarantees—outlined in Section Two—which leaves children particularly vulnerable to coerced confessions in the absence of effective legal representation.

- **The Rights of Migrant Workers**

Despite some cosmetic reforms, the sponsorship (kafala) system remains in place, continuing to tie workers' residency permits to their employers and exposing them to exploitation. The following cases illustrate the persistence of abuses:

- **July 2025:** thirty workers employed by Al-Majd Contracting filed a collective complaint after being denied wages for five consecutive months, with redress procedures marked by severe delays.
- **May 2025:** an Indian construction worker sustained a serious injury at a site operated by Golden Gulf Company due to inadequate safety equipment, while the company attempted to evade responsibility.

<sup>29</sup> Bahrain: Authorities Violate Detained Children's Rights, Human Rights Watch (HRW), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2025/03/10/bahrain-authorities-violate-detained-childrens-rights>.



## Conclusion

The period from late **2024** to **2025** marked a serious regression of human rights in Bahrain. Violations have transitioned from isolated incidents to an entrenched structural feature of the state, stemming from the overreach of the security apparatus and the undermining of the separation of powers. The government has pursued a systematic strategy to suffocate public space through restrictive legislation and expanded cyber-surveillance, while internal accountability mechanisms have been instrumentalized to whitewash abuses—covering up torture and arbitrary detention rather than delivering justice.

This approach has entrenched a culture of impunity and legally sanctioned the suffocation of the digital sphere, stripping citizens of their most basic rights guarantees. Against this backdrop, the report concludes that urgent and serious steps are required, foremost among them: amending laws that restrict freedoms, dismantling security influence over the judiciary to ensure its independence, and releasing political prisoners. Genuine structural reform remains the only path to safeguarding constitutional rights.



## ALGERIA: THE MACHINERY OF REPRESSION — HOW THE STATE INSTITUTIONALIZES CONTROL

### Introduction

The period from late **2024** through the end of **2025** marks a pivotal moment in Algeria's political and human rights landscape. Following the re-election of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on September 7, **2024**, initial hopes for political reform rapidly faded. Instead of embracing liberalization, the government entrenched a model of "legal authoritarianism," systematically consolidating power.

What started as a response to the security repercussions of the **2019** Hirak movement has evolved into a comprehensive and institutionalized system of repression. Through a series of restrictive laws, judicial practices, and administrative measures, the Algerian authorities have sought to diminish civic space and suppress fundamental freedoms.

By **2025**, prosecutions reached unprecedented levels, targeting not only established activists but also individuals previously considered outside the political sphere. This widening scope of repression reflects a broader strategy to silence dissent. At the same time, escalating geopolitical tensions with France and Morocco were leveraged to justify intensified security measures, criminalizing opposition under the guise of "national security." This environment demands urgent attention and action from the international community and human rights advocates.

### Section I. Political and Legal Framework

The violations documented in **2025** were not isolated acts of law enforcement but the direct outcome of a carefully engineered political and legal environment aimed at narrowing the margins of civil society and opposition. Understanding this framework is essential to grasp the nature of systematic repression.

The presidential elections of 7 September **2024** unfolded in an atmosphere devoid of genuine competition, with credible candidates excluded from the race. Tebboune's victory



was met with sharp criticism regarding the independence of the electoral authority.<sup>30</sup> The government interpreted the outcome as a popular mandate to continue its security-driven policies, disregarding urgent calls for national dialogue.

### The Legal Arsenal: Criminalizing Civic Action

This period was marked by the activation of laws that radically curtailed freedoms, reinforcing the model of "legal authoritarianism."

- **Article 87 bis:** Authorities continued to wield this provision as a tool to suppress opposition. Its expansive definition of terrorism—encompassing any attempt to "change the system"—enabled courts to impose severe criminal charges on activists and journalists.<sup>31</sup> UN Special Rapporteurs strongly criticized the article, warning that it legitimizes egregious abuses under the guise of counterterrorism.
- **Criminalization of Information Disclosure:** Amendments to the Penal Code in May 2024 introduced penalties of up to life imprisonment for "treason," defined as leaking information deemed sensitive to national security.<sup>32</sup> The vagueness of this provision undermined the work of researchers and journalists, several of whom faced prosecution under its terms.<sup>33</sup>
- **Cinematic Production Control Law:** Newly enacted legislation imposed strict censorship, criminalizing works considered offensive to "national values" or "symbols of the revolution." This measure compelled artists and filmmakers into self-censorship.

Available evidence from 2025 underscores the continued dominance of the executive branch over the judiciary. This was reflected in the uneven application of sentences and the

<sup>30</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Algeria Country Report, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/algeria/freedom-world/2025>.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of State, Algeria 2024 Human Rights Report, July 2025, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/62451\\_ALGERIA-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/62451_ALGERIA-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Algeria, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/algeria>.

<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International, "Algerian Authorities Must Quash Outrageous 15-Year Sentence Against Unionist Ali Mammeri," October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2025/10/algeria-authorities-must-quash-outrageous-15-year-sentence-against-unionist-ali-mammeri/>.



expedited handling of politically sensitive cases. For instance, union leader Ali Maamri received a harsh 15-year prison sentence, while the case of writer Boualem Sansal was swiftly resolved through a presidential pardon.<sup>34</sup> Such disparities highlight the political pressures exerted on judges, undermining the right to fair trial and consolidating the judiciary as an instrument within the architecture of "legal authoritarianism."

This political-legal framework constitutes the foundation upon which systematic violations of fundamental civil rights have flourished. It calls for urgent international engagement to safeguard those rights and reinforce basic freedoms in Algeria.

## Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

Violations of fundamental civil rights defined the human rights landscape in Algeria during the reporting period. These abuses ranged from arbitrary arrests and allegations of torture to restrictions on freedom of movement, all forming part of a broader strategy designed to exhaust political opponents and silence dissenting voices.

### The Case of Prisoners of Conscience: Arrest as a Tool of Political Control

Despite occasional presidential pardons, the plight of prisoners of conscience remains a deep wound in Algeria's human rights record. Hundreds remain behind bars on charges directly linked to the exercise of their constitutional rights. In the first nine months of 2025, *Women Journalists Without Chains* documented dozens of arrests, peaking in September when at least 14 activists and journalists were detained. At least 23 activists and journalists were arrested and prosecuted in the first five months of the year for supporting an online protest campaign under the hashtag #Manich\_Radi.

#### a) The Case of Ali Maamri: Criminalizing Union Solidarity

In a landmark judicial precedent, on 29 October 2025 the Criminal Court sentenced trade unionist and human rights defender Ali Maamri to 15 years in prison. Arrested in March 2025 following intensive union activity and correspondence with

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<sup>34</sup> Agence Ecofin, "Algérie: la Cour d'Appel Confirme la Condamnation du Polémiste Boualem Sansal," July 2, 2025, <https://www.agenceecofin.com/actualites/0207-129695-algerie-la-cour-d-appel-confirme-la-condamnation-du-polemiste-boualem-sansal>.



international bodies, Maamri faced charges including "glorification of terrorism" and "disclosure of secret information." These charges reflect the vague definition of "sensitive information leaks" introduced in amendments to the Penal Code. Reports indicate that Maamri was subjected to torture and ill-treatment to coerce confessions. His conviction represents an unprecedented criminalization of international union solidarity, effectively severing Algerian civil society from global support networks.<sup>35</sup>

#### b) Mohamed Tadjadit: Targeting the 'Poet of the Hirak'

Activist and poet Mohamed Tadjadit epitomizes the authorities' determination to dismantle youthful symbols of the Hirak movement. Following repeated arrests, on 11 November 2025 the Criminal Court sentenced him to five years in prison on charges of "glorification of terrorism" under Article 87 bis.<sup>36</sup> Strikingly, this harsh sentence was handed down just one day before the presidential pardon of writer Boualem Sansal, underscoring the stark double standards between local activists and internationally recognized figures.

#### c) Other Notable Cases

Judicial prosecutions extended to numerous other activists and journalists, illustrating the judiciary's role in curtailing freedoms.

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<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, "Algerian Authorities Must Quash Outrageous 15-Year Sentence Against Unionist Ali Mammeri," October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2025/10/algeria-authorities-must-quash-outrageous-15-year-sentence-against-unionist-ali-mammeri/>.

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International, Algeria: Activists & Poet Could Face Death Sentence: Mohamed Tadjadit, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde28/0491/2025/en/>.



## The Case of Prisoners of Conscience

### Mourabit Chouaib

Placed in pre trial detention under Article 87 bis, used to criminalize peaceful expression

### Saïd Boudour

Continued travel ban despite acquittal

### Rami Ben Tayeb & Saleh Houamed

Sentenced to prison terms

### Souhaib Dibaghi

Sentenced to 18 months in prison

### Belaid Charfi

Sentenced to 4 years in prison

### Abdelwahab Moulak & Mustapha Ben Jamaa

Placed under judicial control, awaiting appeal

### Abla Dirama Kimari

Sentenced to 3 years, with 1 year suspended

### Unionist Fadila Hamaas

Currently on trial

## Travel Bans (ISTN): The 'Open-Air Prison'

Travel bans have become a systematic policy to punish opponents and journalists without trial. At least 23 cases of arbitrary travel restrictions were documented. These bans are often imposed verbally at airports without legal documentation, depriving victims of the right to appeal. This extrajudicial practice creates an "open-air prison," isolating activists and journalists from international forums and support networks. Notable victims include journalist Mustapha Ben Jamaa, barred from travel since April 2024 when he attempted to leave for Tunisia, and human rights activist Kaddour Chouicha.



## Migrant Rights Violations: The 'Zero Point' Tragedy

Out of the public eye, Algeria maintained its harsh approach toward migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. Both official data and independent human-rights investigations point to the mass expulsion of tens of thousands of people—mostly nationals of Sub-Saharan states—who were forcibly transported to Niger or returned to their countries of origin. Algerian authorities claimed to have prevented more than **100,000** migrants from reaching the northern regions during **2024–2025**.

These expulsions are carried out under degrading and dangerous conditions. Migrants, including women and children, are reportedly loaded onto trucks and taken to a desolate border zone known as "Zero Point," where they are abandoned and compelled to walk for long distances across the desert. Documentation from rights groups attributes at least eight deaths to these practices. Repression thus moved beyond physical control and restrictions on movement, extending into the realm of expression and thought, in a broader effort to enforce absolute silence and suppress any form of dissent.

## Section III. Freedom of Expression and the Internet

In Algeria, freedom of expression has not only become perilous but is now criminalized through law and judicial practice. The crackdown has encompassed the dismantling of what remained of independent media, the prosecution of writers, and the imposition of advanced technological surveillance over the digital sphere—amounting to a comprehensive policy of silencing dissent.

### The Case of Boualem Sansal: Literature as a Diplomatic Pawn

The prosecution of world-renowned novelist Boualem Sansal (aged **82**) stands as the starkest indicator of the regime's intolerance toward dissenting views. Sansal was arrested on **16 November 2024** and charged with "undermining national territorial integrity" after media remarks addressing historical issues.<sup>37</sup> In March **2025**, he was sentenced to five years in prison, sparking a diplomatic crisis with France. Under mounting international

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<sup>37</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025: Algeria Country Report*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/algeria/freedom-world/2025>.



pressure, President Tebboune issued a special pardon on 12 November 2025, citing health reasons after German mediation,<sup>38</sup> allowing Sansal to depart for Germany.<sup>39</sup> This case exemplifies the instrumentalization of "national security" in the context of escalating tensions with France, transforming a literary figure into a bargaining chip in a broader diplomatic confrontation.

### Dismantling Independent Media

Authorities pursued a systematic dismantling of the last vestiges of free media through coordinated judicial rulings and targeted prosecutions. On 13 June 2025, the Court of Appeals upheld the dissolution of *Interface Media* and the confiscation of its assets. The company had published *Radio M* and *Maghreb Emergent*.<sup>40</sup> This ruling confirmed that the earlier presidential pardon of the company's director, journalist Ihsane El Kadi (1 November 2024), was personal in nature and did not extend to restoring the institution's operations—effectively delivering a fatal blow to media pluralism.<sup>41</sup>

Arbitrary arrests of journalists continued under spurious charges. Among those targeted were Omar Farhat and Soufiane Guerrous of *Algeria Scoop*, prosecuted for "inciting hatred" after releasing a video critical of the authorities.

<sup>38</sup> Agence Ecofin, "Algérie: la Cour d'Appel Confirme la Condamnation du Polémiste Boualem Sansal," July 2, 2025, <https://www.agenceecofin.com/actualites/0207-129695-algerie-la-cour-d-appel-confirme-la-condamnation-du-polemiste-boualem-sansal>.

<sup>39</sup> Al Jazeera, "Algeria's President Pardons Jailed Writer Boualem Sansal," November 12, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/12/algerias-president-pardons-jailed-writer-boualem-sansal>.

<sup>40</sup> Shooa Organization, "En Algérie, la Justice Confirme la Décision de Fermeture d'Interface Médias, l'un des Espaces Médiatiques Libres les Plus Importants du Pays," 2025, <https://shooa.org/fr/en-algerie-la-justice-confirme-la-decision-de-fermeture-dinterface-medias-lun-des-espaces-mediatiques-libres-les-plus-importants-du-pays/>.

<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International Belgium, "Un Journaliste Relâché à la Faveur d'une Grâce Présidentielle: Ihsane El Kadi," 2025, <https://www.amnesty.be/veux-agir/agir-individus/reseau-actions-urgentes/article/journaliste-relache-faveur-grace-presidentielle>.

## Digital Censorship: Cyber Sovereignty as a Tool of Isolation

The state advanced to a new stage of technological control over the internet, enhancing its ability to regulate information flows.

The Structure of Repression in Bahrain		
The authorities have shifted from traditional censorship to a doctrine of "cyber sovereignty," tightening control over information flows.		
Sector	Measure Taken	Impact / Outcome
Independent Media	Dissolution of Interface Médias	Permanent closure of Radio M and Maghreb Émergent
Internet Infrastructure	Blocking Cloudflare IP addresses	Arbitrary disruption of unrelated commercial and service websites
Internet during Exams	Targeted shutdown (June 2025)	Messaging apps blocked instead of full nationwide blackout
Digital Economy	Ban on cryptocurrencies (July 2025)	Criminalization of transactions to prevent financing outside state banking system
Film Industry	New Cinema Law	Prison sentences for works deemed "offensive to national values," fostering self censorship



- **Blocking Cloudflare:**<sup>42</sup> In an effort to restrict access to opposition websites, authorities blocked IP addresses associated with Cloudflare, a key internet infrastructure service. This indiscriminate measure disrupted numerous unrelated technical and commercial platforms.
- **Targeted Internet Shutdowns:** During the June 2025 baccalaureate exams, authorities refrained from imposing a nationwide blackout for the first time. Instead, they implemented "targeted shutdowns," selectively blocking messaging applications—a sign of evolving technical capacity for selective control.<sup>43</sup>
- **Ban on Digital Currencies:** In July 2025, Algeria imposed a blanket ban and criminalization of cryptocurrency transactions, aimed at tightening financial control and preventing potential funding channels outside the monitored banking system.<sup>44</sup>

This targeted repression of free expression was accompanied by parallel assaults on freedom of association, reflecting a deliberate strategy to dismantle any social structures capable of collective action.

#### Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association

In 2025, Algerian authorities continued the systematic "flattening" of the civic and political landscape, employing administrative courts and arbitrary decrees to suppress any form of independent collective activity. The overarching objective was to ensure that no organized popular movement could re-emerge in the future.

#### Dissolution of Parties and Associations

This year witnessed an almost complete closure of political and associative space for opposition voices, with administrative courts deployed to eliminate rivals. *Women Journalists Without Chains* documented the following:

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<sup>42</sup> Reddit r/Algeria, "Need Help to Compile a List of Blocked Websites," November 2025, [https://www.reddit.com/r/algeria/comments/1lj7b3w/need\\_help\\_to\\_compile\\_a\\_list\\_of\\_blocked\\_websites/?tl=fr](https://www.reddit.com/r/algeria/comments/1lj7b3w/need_help_to_compile_a_list_of_blocked_websites/?tl=fr).

<sup>43</sup> Tout sur l'Algérie (TSA), "BAC 2025 en Algérie: Pas de Blocage Total d'Internet, une Première," June 2025, <https://www.tsa-algerie.com/bac-2025-en-algerie-pas-de-blocage-total-dinternet-une-premiere/>.

<sup>44</sup> TECHi, "Algeria Enacts Sweeping Crypto Ban, Criminalizing All Digital Asset Activities," 2025.

- **Democratic and Social Movement (MDS):** The Council of State confirmed decisions suspending the party's activities and closing its offices in 2025, effectively terminating the legal existence of one of Algeria's oldest left-wing opposition parties.<sup>45</sup>
- **Socialist Workers' Party (PST):** The party's activities remained frozen, depriving it of any meaningful role in the political arena.
- **Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD):** The party faced suffocating administrative restrictions. Authorities blocked its public meetings, summer university, and regional conferences in several provinces (including Algiers and Batna) throughout 2025, citing pretexts such as "public order" or "lack of available venues."<sup>46</sup>
- **Youth Action Rally (RAJ):** The decision to dissolve RAJ was upheld, underscoring the political will to terminate youth associations that had played a pivotal role in the Hirak movement.<sup>47</sup>

Independent unions were also subjected to relentless pressure aimed at either co-optation or eradication. Beyond the harsh sentence against unionist Ali Maamri, which served as a deterrent message, the *Confederation of Productive Forces Unions* (COSYFOP) and its leaders faced ongoing security and judicial harassment, including interrogations on terrorism-related charges—an attempt to equate legitimate labor activism with subversive agendas.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Algeria: Halt Assault on Fundamental Freedoms," September 14, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/14/algeria-halt-assault-fundamental-freedoms>.

<sup>46</sup> La Radio des Sans Voix, "Meeting Interdit, Opposition Étouffée: Le Combat du RCD pour l'Espace Politique," 2025, <https://www.laradiodessansvoix.org/post/meeting-interdit-opposition-/C3/A9touff/C3/A9e-le-combat-du-rcd-pour-l-espace-politique>.

<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International France, "Algérie: Dissolution d'une Association de Jeunes Militants (Rassemblement Actions Jeunesse)," 2025, <https://www.amnesty.fr/liberte-d-expression/actualites/algerie-dissolution-de-l-association-rassemblement-actions-jeunesse>.

<sup>48</sup> Amnesty International, "Algerian Authorities Must Quash Outrageous 15-Year Sentence Against Unionist Ali Mammeri," October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2025/10/algeria-authorities-must-quash-outrageous-15-year-sentence-against-unionist-ali-mammeri/>.



## Religious Freedoms: Targeting Minorities

Systematic restrictions on religious minorities persisted, in blatant violation of Algeria's constitution and international conventions guaranteeing freedom of belief.

- **Protestant Church:** Reports indicate that 46 of the 47 Protestant churches in Algeria remain closed under arbitrary administrative decisions or judicial rulings.<sup>49</sup>
- **Ahmadi Community:** Judicial prosecutions against Ahmadis continued, with charges such as "practicing religious rites without authorization" and "undermining the faith of Muslims." Dozens were arrested and tried in proceedings lacking basic standards of fairness.<sup>50</sup>

**Erosion of Civil Society (Parties and Unions)**  
Political organizations and civic associations have faced dissolution, suspension, and administrative harassment.

<b>Erosion of Civil Society (Parties and Unions)</b>	<b>Socialist Workers' Party (PST)</b>	<b>Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD)</b>
<b>Activity suspended</b> Closure of headquarters and termination of legal existence	<b>Frozen</b> Continued ban on political activity	<b>Administrative blockade</b> Prohibition of meetings and conferences under pretext of "public order"
<b>RAJ Association (Rassemblement Actions Jeunesse)</b> <b>Dissolved</b> Final ruling ending youth activism	<b>Protestant Church</b> <b>Closure</b> 46 out of 47 churches shut down by administrative order	

<sup>49</sup> Amnesty International, "Algérie: La Situation des Droits Humains," 2025,

<https://www.amnesty.org/fr/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/report-algeria/>.

<sup>50</sup> European Parliament, "Compte Rendu in Extenso des Débats – Le Cas de Boualem Sansal en Algérie," January 22, 2025, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-01-22-ITM-016-03\\_FR.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-01-22-ITM-016-03_FR.html).



Amid this sweeping repression, certain groups endured compounded violations. Foremost among them were women, who faced escalating societal violence in the absence of effective legal protections.

### Section V. Women's Rights

Despite official rhetoric extolling the role of Algerian women, the reality reveals a grim situation marked by escalating gender-based violence and a legal framework that fails to provide adequate protection. Women remain trapped between societal and institutional violence.

### The Phenomenon of Femicide

In the absence of official statistics, the initiative *Féminicides Algérie* has played a vital role in documenting crimes against women, exposing alarming figures. At least 48 femicides were recorded in 2024, with this disturbing trend continuing into 2025.<sup>51</sup> These crimes are often characterized by extreme brutality, frequently perpetrated by close family members. One harrowing case occurred on 4 January 2025, when Khadija Bejaoui (aged 57) was killed by her son.<sup>52</sup> Analysis indicates that nearly 60 percent of victims are mothers, compounding

<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International, "Human Rights in Algeria," 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/report-algeria/>.

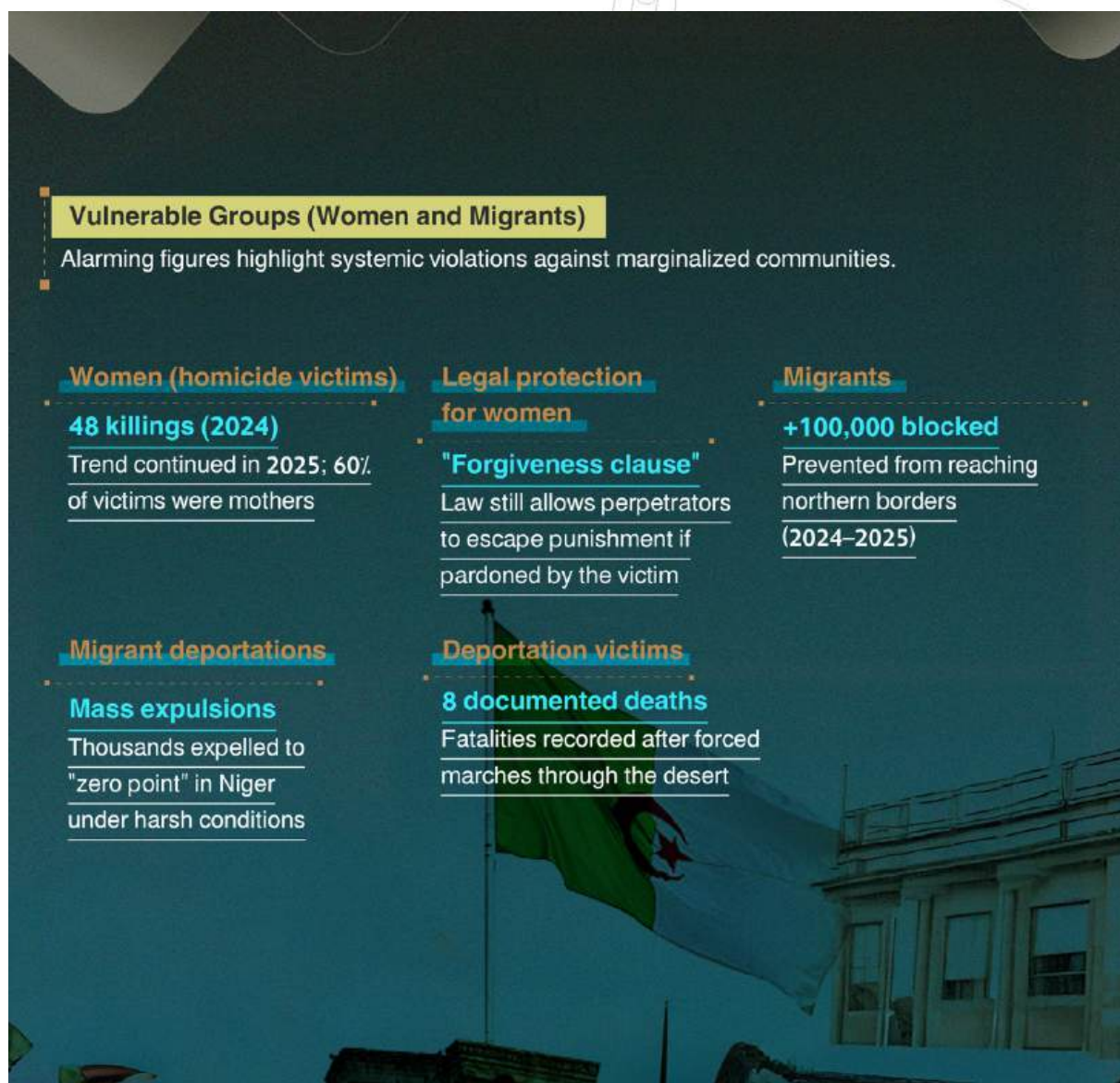
<sup>52</sup> Féminicides-dz, "Féminicides-dz (Homepage)," 2025, <https://feminicides-dz.com/>.



the social tragedy and leaving behind large numbers of orphans in devastating psychological conditions.<sup>53</sup>

### Legal Framework: The "Clause du pardon" Loophole

Legal protection for women remains gravely inadequate due to the continued application of



the *Clause du pardon* in the Penal Code.<sup>54</sup> This provision allows perpetrators to escape

<sup>53</sup> Féminicides-dz, "Bilan des Féminicides en 2024," 2024, <https://feminicides-dz.com/articles/bilan-des-feminicides-en-2024/>.

<sup>54</sup> EuroMed Droits, "Féminicide en Algérie: Où est le Cadre Juridique?," 2025, <https://euromedrights.org/fr/publication/feminicide-en-algerie-ou-est-le-cadre-juridique/>.

prosecution if the victim forgives them. Given the immense familial and social pressures placed on women to relinquish their rights, the clause effectively entrenches impunity and encourages repeated violence. In 2025, neither parliament nor the government undertook serious legislative action to amend this provision or to reform the controversial Family Code.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, *Women Journalists Without Chains* documented a rise in cases of online harassment and unlawful surveillance targeting female journalists and activists. This underscores the precarious environment in which women in media operate, marked by weak protections and absent accountability mechanisms. The condition of women reflects a deeper crisis within Algeria's justice and protection systems—an inevitable outcome of the regime's broader policies of closure and repression.

## Conclusion

The human rights landscape in Algeria over the past year paints a bleak picture of a regime that has re-engineered authoritarianism through the "institutionalization of repression." What began as temporary security measures has evolved into a state policy cloaked in "legal authoritarianism," relying on vague legislation and amendments to penal and media laws. This strategy has been reinforced by a judiciary lacking independence and subordinated to executive authority, as evidenced in the major trials of 2025.

The result has been the effective dismantling of civil society structures—parties, unions, and associations—leaving citizens defenseless against the machinery of state repression. The consequences extend beyond domestic closure, imposing heavy diplomatic costs that have isolated Algeria internationally and placed it in a defensive posture before UN bodies and European partners.

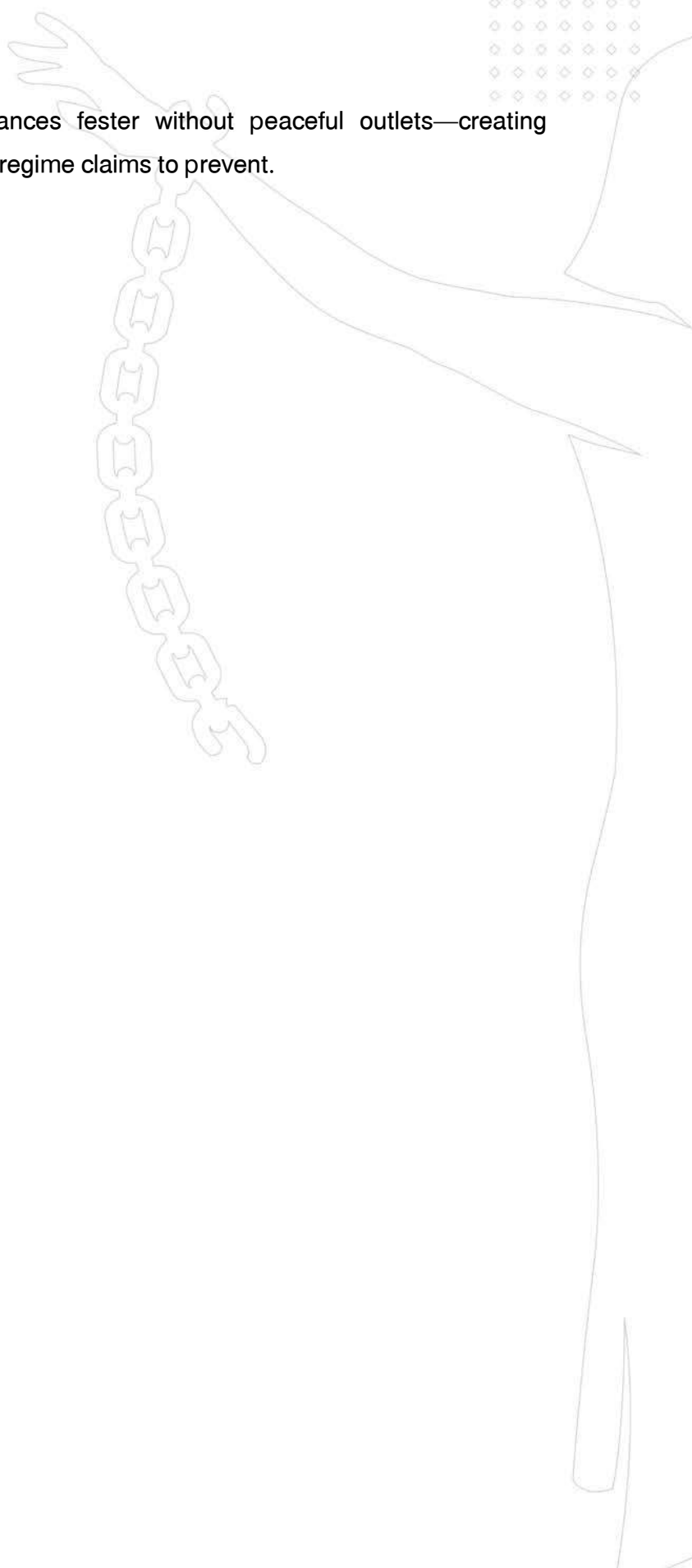
By dismantling all avenues of organized opposition and criminalizing fundamental freedoms, Algerian authorities are not securing stability. Instead, they are engineering a more volatile

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<sup>55</sup> Cambridge University Press, "Family Law Reform in Algeria (Chapter 13)," in *Women and Social Change in North Africa*, 2025, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/women-and-social-change-in-north-africa/family-law-reform-in-algeria/ACA2DFEFB90EB79831FE19C989AE13B5>.



future, where unresolved social grievances fester without peaceful outlets—creating precisely the conditions of instability the regime claims to prevent.





## SAUDI ARABIA: THE GILDED CAGE

### Introduction

Between late **2024** and late **2025**, Saudi Arabia experienced a stark paradox: relentless pursuit of rapid economic modernization under *Vision 2030* was accompanied by systematic and escalating repression of fundamental human rights. Authorities pursued a deliberate dual strategy—projecting an image of reform for international consumption while intensifying domestic repression to secure absolute political control. This approach was designed to separate economic liberalization from political reform, leveraging global integration to entrench authoritarian rule at home.

While the Kingdom sought to enhance its international reputation, the period was marked by troubling developments: increased use of the death penalty, systematic restrictions on digital spaces, and violent suppression of peaceful dissent. These trends underscore that announced reforms did not extend to the protection of basic freedoms or the establishment of accountability mechanisms.

### Section 1. Political and Legal Framework

The human rights environment in Saudi Arabia cannot be understood without reference to its institutional framework. The configuration of executive power, judicial dependency, and legislative limits creates the structural basis for rights violations. These mechanisms reinforce impunity, concentrate control, and enable systematic restrictions on fundamental freedoms.

#### 1.1 Governance system

- Saudi Arabia remains an **absolute monarchy**, where political rights and civil liberties are almost entirely restricted.
- In September **2024**, the appointment of **19** new women members to the Shura Council was presented as progress.<sup>56</sup> However, the Council remains a consultative

<sup>56</sup> Freedom House. Saudi Arabia: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report. Freedom in the World 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2025>.



body without genuine legislative or oversight authority, rendering such representation largely symbolic.

### 1.2 Transnational repression

- Authorities continued to employ **cross-border repression** as a tool to silence critics abroad.
- Documented incidents in December 2024 revealed that relatives of exiled dissidents were targeted and used as leverage to pressure activists into silence.<sup>57</sup> This tactic reflects a deliberate strategy of extending repression beyond national borders.

### 1.3 Judiciary and legislation

- The judiciary remains subject to executive influence, undermining independence and enabling politicized trials, particularly in cases involving freedom of expression.
- Authorities systematically applied broad counterterrorism and cybercrime laws to criminalize peaceful dissent.
- Between December 2024 and February 2025, several prominent activists—including Mohammed al-Qahtani, Salma al-Shehab, and Asaad al-Ghamdi<sup>58</sup>—were released. However, these releases were tactical gestures rather than structural reforms. They were freed from sentences imposed by the same politicized judiciary under the same repressive laws, which remain fully in force to silence others.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia. April 2025. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/saudi-arabia>.

<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Saudi Arabia: Dozens Freed But Arrests Continue." April 7, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/07/saudi-arabia-dozens-freed-arrests-continue>.

<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2025: Saudi Arabia. January 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>.



#### 1.4 Legal reforms and selective modernization

- Legal reforms during this period revealed a clear duality: they focused primarily on strengthening the economic environment to support *Vision 2030*,<sup>60</sup> while avoiding any genuine commitment to accountability for human rights violations.<sup>61</sup>
- This approach exemplifies a strategy of "legal reputation laundering" (IHL-Washing).
  - On 1 November 2025, Riyadh hosted a high-level international workshop on international humanitarian law (SWIRMO), projecting an image of compliance.
  - In contrast, throughout 2025, authorities systematically ignored urgent UN expert appeals to halt executions of minors, highlighting the gap between rhetoric and practice.

The political and legal framework in Saudi Arabia—characterized by absolute authority, lack of judicial independence, and repressive legislation—provides the structural basis for systematic violations of civil rights. These violations, detailed in the following section, demonstrate how governance and law are deliberately configured to suppress dissent and prevent accountability.

### Section 2. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

This section documents the gravest violations of the rights to life, liberty, and physical integrity committed during the reporting period. It highlights the state's use of punitive and coercive power to suppress dissent and subjugate society, in clear breach of its international obligations.

#### 2.1 Extrajudicial killings and the death penalty

- **Escalation in executions:** 2025 witnessed a sharp and alarming rise in the use of capital punishment, positioning the year to become one of the deadliest in modern Saudi history.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2025 Investment Climate Statements: Saudi Arabia. July 2025.

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-investment-climate-statements/saudi-arabia>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

- In the first four months of 2025, 100 executions were carried out—an average of one person every 1.5 days.<sup>62</sup>
- By mid-year, the figure had reached at least 292 executions, placing 2025 on track to surpass the record of 345 executions.<sup>63</sup>
- **Nature of offenses:** Data indicates that 70% of executions were for non-lethal crimes, with the majority linked to drug-related and political cases (59%). Notably, 20 individuals were executed solely for cannabis possession.<sup>64</sup>
- **Broken promises:** These figures demonstrate that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's 2021 pledge to limit the use of the death penalty has not been fulfilled.

## 2.2 Political executions and juvenile offenders

- Despite official assurances that no one would be executed for crimes committed as minors, 2025 saw a flagrant violation of this commitment:
  - **Jalal Labad** was executed in August 2025 for participating in a peaceful protest while under 18.<sup>65</sup>
  - In October 2025, two further executions were carried out against individuals<sup>66</sup> convicted of crimes committed as children, including Abdullah al-Darazi.
- These executions followed trials lacking basic fairness guarantees. At least five other juvenile offenders remain at imminent risk of execution.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR). "A New Year of Bloodshed: Saudi Arabia Executes 100 People in Four Months." May 2025. <https://www.ecdhr.org/a-new-year-of-bloodshed-saudi-arabia-executes-100-people-in-four-months/>.

<sup>63</sup> Amnesty International. "Saudi Arabia: NGOs Condemn Escalating Use of the Death Penalty." May 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/0382/2025/en/>.

<sup>64</sup> European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR). "A New Year of Bloodshed: Saudi Arabia Executes 100 People in Four Months." May 2025. <https://www.ecdhr.org/a-new-year-of-bloodshed-saudi-arabia-executes-100-people-in-four-months/>.

<sup>65</sup> European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR). "A New Year of Bloodshed: Saudi Arabia Executes 100 People in Four Months." May 2025. <https://www.ecdhr.org/a-new-year-of-bloodshed-saudi-arabia-executes-100-people-in-four-months/>.

<sup>66</sup> Amnesty International. "Saudi Arabia: Deplorable Execution Exposes Broken Promise to Halt Death Penalty for Juveniles." August 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/08/saudi-arabia-deplorable-execution-exposes-broken-promise-to-halt-death-penalty-for-juveniles/>.

<sup>67</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Saudi Arabia: Spate of Executions of Child Offenders." October 20, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/20/saudi-arabia-spate-of-executions-of-child-offenders>.

- The resumption of executions for minor drug offenses and the execution of child offenders indicate that the death penalty is being used as an escalating tool to deter dissent and enforce social discipline, in direct violation of international standards.

### 2.3 Targeting journalists: the case of Turki al-Jasser

- On 18 June 2025, the Ministry of Interior announced the execution of journalist **Turki al-Jasser**, convicted of "high treason" for alleged communication and conspiracy with individuals abroad.
- Al-Jasser had been detained for seven years and is believed to have been targeted for operating an anonymous Twitter account critical of the royal family.
- His execution—the first high-profile killing of a journalist since the murder of **Jamal Khashoggi in 2018**—sends a chilling message to all peaceful critics: independent expression, even online, may result in the death penalty.

### 2.4 Arbitrary detention and travel bans

- Between December 2024 and September 2025, dozens of detainees were released, including Mohammed al-Qahtani, Salma al-Shehab, Asaad al-Ghamdi, Khalid al-Ouda, and Ibrahim al-Harhi.<sup>68</sup>
- However, many others remain imprisoned, such as lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair.
- Releases were conditioned by arbitrary restrictions, including travel bans and surveillance:
  - Mohammed al-Qahtani faces a 10-year travel ban.<sup>69</sup>
  - Activists Loujain al-Hathloul and Maryam al-Otaibi remain barred from travel despite the expiry of judicial bans, underscoring the arbitrary nature of these measures.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2025: Saudi Arabia. January 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>.

<sup>69</sup> Amnesty International. "Saudi Arabia: Further Information: Lift Mohammed Al-Qahtani's Travel Ban." September 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/9006/2025/en/>.

<sup>70</sup> The Guardian. "Saudi Arabia Accused of Banning Women's Rights Activists from Leaving the Country." July 24, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jul/24/saudi-arabia-accused-of-banning-womens-rights-activists-from-leaving-the-country>.



- Prominent figures such as Dr. Salman al-Ouda, Awad al-Qarni, Hassan Farhan al-Maliki, and Essam al-Zamil remain detained. Reports indicate that Dr. al-Ouda has suffered severe deterioration in vision and hearing due to neglect and prolonged solitary confinement.

## 2.5 Torture and deaths in custody

- Credible allegations of torture persisted.
  - The case of Shadli al-Huwaiti<sup>71</sup> involved electric shocks, beatings (falqa), and sleep deprivation to coerce confessions.
- Unexplained deaths of migrant construction workers also emerged as a serious concern. These fatalities were routinely classified as "natural" without investigation, reflecting systemic neglect.

## 2.6 Fair trial rights and exceptional laws

- Authorities continued to rely on broad counterterrorism and cybercrime laws to criminalize peaceful opposition.
- In the case of ten Egyptian Nubian citizens, sentences were reduced on 6 September 2025, yet they remain in detention.
- The health of Dr. Farag-Allah Ahmed Youssef deteriorated significantly; his leg was amputated after restraints applied during detention caused irreversible damage.<sup>72</sup>

The brutal suppression of civil rights—including widespread executions, arbitrary detention, torture, and denial of fair trial guarantees—was mirrored by systematic assaults on freedom of opinion and expression. These freedoms have become the new frontline of government repression, as detailed in the following section.

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<sup>71</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia. March 2024. <https://2021-2025.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/saudi-arabia/>.

<sup>72</sup> Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR). "Sentences Reduced of Egyptian Nubian Detainees After 5 Years Unjustly Imprisoned." October 2025. <https://www.gc4hr.org/sentences-reduced-of-egyptian-nubian-detainees-after-5-years-unjustly-imprisoned/>.



### Section 3. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet

During the reporting period, digital spaces became the primary arena for repression and surveillance. Authorities pursued a dual strategy: instilling fear through the harshest penalties while constructing a legal framework to exert full control over the online sphere.

#### 3.1 Institutionalized censorship: new media regulations and the closure of digital space

- The execution of journalist Turki al-Jasser for tweets critical of government policies served as an absolute deterrent, creating a chilling effect across the community of journalists and bloggers.<sup>73</sup>
- In May 2025, the General Authority for Media Regulation (GAMR)<sup>74</sup> issued new *Media Regulations*,<sup>75</sup> formalizing censorship and granting sweeping powers to ban vaguely defined content such as "boasting of luxury."
- These regulations triggered widespread self-censorship. For example, blogger Saleh al-Zahrani ("oPiLz") drastically altered his content to avoid satire or political commentary that could fall afoul of the new rules.<sup>76</sup>

#### Key restrictive features identified by Journalists Without Chains include:

- **Vague moral and social concepts:** Broad terms such as "public taste" give authorities wide discretion to criminalize critical content.
- **Expansion of security and public order terminology:** Investigative reporting on corruption can be reframed as a threat to "public interests" or "national symbols."
- **Restrictions on constitutional debate and foreign policy:** Any discussion of constitutional reform is criminalized under the pretext of protecting "national

<sup>73</sup> The Guardian. "Saudi Journalist Tweeted Against the Government – and Was Executed for 'High Treason.'" June 18, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/18/saudi-arabia-turki-al-jasser-executed>.

<sup>74</sup> Mimeta. Saudi Arabia's 2025 Media Rules: Impact on Digital Expression. October 21, 2025. <https://www.mimeta.org/mimeta-news-on-censorship-in-art/2025/10/21/saudi-arabias-2025-media-rules-tighten-online-expression>.

<sup>75</sup> Mimeta. القانون. PDF document. Accessed November 2025. <https://www.mimeta.org/s/.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> Mimeta. Saudi Arabia's 2025 Media Rules Tighten Online Expression. October 21, 2025. <https://www.mimeta.org/mimeta-news-on-censorship-in-art/2025/10/21/saudi-arabias-2025-media-rules-tighten-online-expression>.



constants," while criticism of allied states is banned as content that "may harm relations with friendly countries."

- **Criminalization of peaceful reform discourse:** Ambiguous charges such as "incitement to overthrow the system of government" or "glorification of destructive groups" are used to suppress calls for reform.
- **Prior restraint and absolute control:** License holders must submit content to GAMR for approval before publication, amounting to prior censorship and a grave violation of press freedom.
- **Mandatory registration and punitive enforcement:** Articles 3 and 18 impose compulsory professional registration, while Chapter V establishes severe penalties to ensure compliance.



## Harvest of Repression vs. Promises of Modernization (Late 2024 – Late 2025)

Indicator	Figures / Status	Implication
Total executions (mid 2025)	At least 292	A record pace, threatening to surpass the historic peak of 345 in 2024.
Execution rate (first 4 months)	One execution every 1.5 days	An unprecedented acceleration in the machinery of death.
Non violent offenses	70% of executions	Contradicts official pledges to reserve capital punishment for the "most serious crimes."
Women's labor force participation	34.5% (Q2 2025)	Economic gains offset by persistent legal and social restrictions.
Domestic violence prevalence	Approx. 45%.	Enduring abuse despite cosmetic reforms.
Press freedom	Execution of journalist Turki al Jasser	First case since Khashoggi; a chilling message to the media.

### 3.2 Digital surveillance and spyware

- Authorities continued to deploy advanced surveillance technologies.
- In February 2025, journalists from the **Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)** were targeted in an attack believed to be linked to the **Pegasus spyware**.

- In May 2025, a case was filed in the UK High Court by a Saudi dissident alleging that the government had used the same spyware against him.<sup>77</sup>

These comprehensive restrictions on freedom of expression extend beyond the digital sphere to undermine other fundamental rights, including the right to peaceful assembly. The digital environment has thus become both a tool of repression and a frontline in the broader suppression of civil society.

#### Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association

Restrictions on individual freedoms in Saudi Arabia extend deeply into the civic sphere, where independent organization and peaceful assembly are effectively prohibited. No independent human rights organizations are licensed to operate, and in September 2025 the official Saudi Human Rights Commission was accused of serving primarily as a tool to "whitewash" the Kingdom's record rather than provide genuine oversight.

##### 4.1 Forced development and suppression of protests

Specific incidents during the reporting period illustrate the state's policy of zero tolerance toward protest:

- **Makkah protests (November 2025):**<sup>78</sup> Migrant workers who organized a peaceful demonstration demanding unpaid wages were arrested. Rather than investigating their grievances, authorities responded with repression.
- **NEOM violations (June 2025):** The forced eviction of the last residents of al-Khuraybah village marked the continuation of abuses linked to the NEOM mega-project. Courts handed down severe sentences against members of the Howeitat tribe for their peaceful opposition to displacement, including prison terms of up to 50 years and death sentences against five men:
  - Shadli Ahmed Mahmoud al-Huwaiti

<sup>77</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia. March 2025. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/saudi-arabia>.

<sup>78</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Saudi Arabia: Migrant Workers in Mecca Arrested for Demanding Unpaid Wages." November 6, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/06/saudi-arabia-migrant-workers-in-mecca-arrested-for-demanding-unpaid-wages>.

- Attaallah Musa Mohammed al-Huwaiti
- Ibrahim Saleh Ahmed Abu Khalil al-Huwaiti
- Suleiman Mohammed Musa al-Huwaiti
- Eid Hamoud al-Mashhuri al-Huwaiti



These draconian rulings serve a clear strategic purpose: branding any local opposition to mega-projects under *Vision 2030* as terrorism, thereby deterring future community resistance.

## Section 5. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups

The situation of women and vulnerable populations in Saudi Arabia remains contradictory. Economic empowerment initiatives tied to *Vision 2030* coexist with entrenched social and legal restrictions that undermine autonomy and protection.

Reality vs. Vision 2030 (NEOM and Labor Rights)		
Area	Vision 2030 Pledge / Slogan	Documented Reality (2024–2025)
NEOM project	Sustainable development, global standards	Forced displacement (al Khuraiba village cleared June 2025) + 50 year prison sentences.
Labor rights	Safe workplaces, abolition of kafala	Unexplained deaths recorded as "natural causes" + wage theft (850 workers at Sandan).
Women's rights	Empowerment of women	"Obedience" clause in personal status law + continued guardianship system in practice.
Environment & climate	"Sufficiency before efficiency" (COP30)	Commercial interests and fossil fuels prioritized over rights and sustainability.

### 5.1 Women's rights and gender-based violence

- **Economic participation:** Women's labor force participation reached 34.5% in Q2 2025, a development praised by the CEDAW Committee in October 2024.
- **Guardianship system:** Progress is constrained by the persistence of male guardianship rules, including requirements for a guardian's consent to leave prison, imposition of travel bans, and permission requirements in some universities.



- **Prevalence of violence:** The official Human Rights Commission reported that domestic violence rates reach approximately 45%, encompassing psychological and economic abuse.<sup>79</sup>
- **Legal framework:** The Personal Status Law (2022) and its implementing regulations (2025) failed to dismantle guardianship. Instead, they entrenched discrimination, requiring married women to "obey their husbands reasonably." Refusal to relocate without a "legitimate excuse" results in loss of alimony rights, exposing women systematically to domestic violence.

## 5.2 Children's rights

- The execution of Abdullah al-Darazi for a crime committed as a minor starkly contradicted Saudi Arabia's international obligations. This occurred despite urgent UN expert appeals on 5 September 2025 to halt such practices.

## 5.3 Migrant workers' rights

- **Kafala system:** Despite the official abolition of the sponsorship (kafala) system in June 2025, structural abuses persisted.
- **Unexplained deaths:** A *FairSquare* report (14 May 2025) documented a troubling pattern of unexplained migrant worker deaths, routinely attributed to "natural causes" or "heart attacks" without adequate investigation.<sup>80</sup>
- **Wage theft:** Between June and August 2025, 850 workers at Sandan International were victims of mass wage theft.<sup>81</sup> When workers in Makkah protested in November 2025, they were arrested, confirming the state's suppression of labor rights claims.
- **Workplace risks:** Conditions in major construction projects remain hazardous and opaque. The lack of transparency in reporting deaths prevents independent investigation and accountability, raising the likelihood of thousands of

<sup>79</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2025: Saudi Arabia. January 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>.

<sup>80</sup> FairSquare. Underlying Issues Report: Unexplained Migrant Worker Deaths in Saudi Arabia. May 2025. [https://fairsq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fairsquare\\_Underlying-Issues-Report-May-2025.pdf](https://fairsq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fairsquare_Underlying-Issues-Report-May-2025.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. "Saudi Arabia: Migrant Workers Unpaid for Months." November 2025. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/saudi-arabia-migrant-workers-unpaid-for-months/>.



unacknowledged fatalities in mega-projects such as NEOM and preparations for the **2034 FIFA World Cup**.<sup>82</sup>

#### 5.4 Refugees and asylum seekers

- On the southern border, Saudi border guards continued systematic and widespread attacks on Ethiopian migrants, while restricting access for UN agencies and NGOs to the area.

#### 5.5 Forced displacement in the name of development

- Development projects such as NEOM have resulted in forced displacement of indigenous populations. On **23 June 2025**, the last residents of al-Khuraybah village were evicted, as documented by Al-Qst. This reflects a broader pattern of grave violations committed under the banner of development.

The repression of civic space is accompanied by targeted violations against specific populations, including women, children, migrant workers, refugees, and indigenous communities. These practices reveal a systematic disregard for international law and extend beyond domestic policy into Saudi Arabia's conduct in external conflicts, which will be examined in the following section.

### Section 6. Armed Conflicts and International Humanitarian Law

The reporting period revealed a stark contradiction between Saudi Arabia's diplomatic rhetoric affirming commitment to international humanitarian law (IHL) and the reality of practices in Yemen, characterized by a complete absence of accountability for grave violations.

- **Documented violations:** Human rights reports covering **2024–2025** continued to record patterns of impunity for potential war crimes, including indiscriminate airstrikes and the use of starvation as a weapon.

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<sup>82</sup> FairSquare. "New Report Predicts Surge in Unexplained Migrant Worker Deaths in Saudi Arabia." May 2025.  
<https://fairsq.org/saudi-arabia-migrant-deaths/>.



- **Lack of accountability:** Authorities took no serious steps to investigate those responsible or compensate victims, reinforcing a persistent failure to meet legal and ethical obligations.
- **Diplomatic image management:** In November 2025, Riyadh hosted the annual *Senior Workshop on International Rules Governing Military Operations (SWIRMO)* in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross. This initiative is widely interpreted as a form of IHL-washing<sup>83</sup>—a reputational exercise designed to project compliance while deflecting attention from ongoing violations.
- **Refusal to cooperate:** Despite leveraging such platforms to present itself as a responsible partner, Saudi Arabia continued to reject cooperation with independent international mechanisms to investigate alleged crimes, turning diplomacy into a tactical shield against justice.

## Section 7. Environment, Climate, and Human Rights

Saudi climate policies expose a fundamental contradiction between international commitments and domestic economic priorities rooted in fossil fuels.

- **Global commitments vs. local practices:** At *COP30* in November 2025, the Kingdom promoted sustainability principles such as "sufficiency before efficiency."<sup>84</sup> Yet on the ground, commercial interests consistently outweighed rights protections.
- **NEOM project:** Marketed globally as a model of sustainable development, NEOM has relied domestically on serious violations, including the forced displacement of the Howeitat tribe. This undermines the ethical substance of environmental policies and raises serious questions about the human cost of such projects.

### 7.1 Business and human rights

- Reports highlighted a vast gap between official pledges and the lived reality of workers.

<sup>83</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). "ICRC President: For Forces to Reflexively Act Within the Law Requires Sustained Investment in IHL Compliance." November 2025. <https://www.icrc.org/en/statement/icrc-president-act-within-law-requires-sustained-investment-ihl>.

<sup>84</sup> Arab News. "Saudi Forum to Highlight Sufficiency-Based Climate Policies at UN Conference in Brazil." November 2025. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2621317/saudi-arabia>.



- Investments by the Public Investment Fund in sports-washing strategies coincided with systematic abuses, including wage theft and unexplained deaths at construction sites.<sup>85</sup>
- The government's categorical refusal to allow independent unions and its security crackdown on labor protests demonstrate a failure to apply compliance standards across supply chains. This entrenches a model of "repressive development" that sacrifices basic rights for external image-building.<sup>86</sup>

NEOM's pledges vs. documented violations	
Official commitments (NEOM website)	Documented violations on the ground
Compliance with local and international human rights law	Forced displacement of indigenous Howeitat communities
Provision of safe, healthy, and respectful work environments	Unexplained deaths of migrant construction workers
Prevention of trafficking and forced labor in supply chains	Poor working conditions and exploitation of migrant labor
Special attention to vulnerable groups, including migrant workers	Violent suppression of peaceful opposition to development projects

<sup>85</sup> Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. "Saudi Arabia: Migrant Workers Unpaid for Months." November 2025. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/saudi-arabia-migrant-workers-unpaid-for-months/>.

<sup>86</sup> The Washington Post. "U.S. Skips COP30 Climate Conference, Lobbies to Sink New Global Deals." November 7, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/11/07/cop30-climate-summit-brazil-us-trump/>.



## Conclusion

The evidence documented in this report demonstrates that Saudi Arabia is experiencing a profound dissonance between the polished façade of modernization promoted through *Vision 2030* and the grim reality of human rights at home.

- Economic and social reforms have not opened political space; instead, they have served as a cover for more systematic repression.
- Legislation has been repurposed to legalize authoritarianism, while technology has become a tool for pervasive surveillance rather than empowerment.
- The unprecedented surge in executions, targeting of minors, digital gagging of dissent, and forced displacement of communities reveal a governance model that treats people as obstacles to development rather than partners in it.

## Implications for the international community:

The continuation of "strategic silence"—prioritizing economic interests over human rights principles—has effectively given Saudi authorities a green light to proceed with violations without fear of accountability. Betting on the Kingdom's stability and economic prosperity is a losing wager unless accompanied by deep human rights reforms that guarantee human dignity, halt repression, and allow for an independent civil society.

True sustainable development cannot be built on the deaths of migrant workers, the ruins of forcibly displaced homes, or the imprisonment of peaceful critics. It requires an environment that respects the rule of law and fundamental freedoms for all, without exception.



## SUDAN: OUTSOURCING ATROCITY — WAR CRIMES BY PROXY

### Introduction

Sudan enters 2025 as one of the gravest humanitarian and human rights catastrophes of the modern era. The war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has shredded the country's legal order, erased civilian protections, and produced levels of displacement, hunger, and mass violence unprecedented in Sudan's history. More than 30 million people now require humanitarian assistance, and over 12 million have been uprooted from their homes, forming the largest displacement crisis in the world.

This report reconstructs the political environment that enabled the collapse of the state, documents patterns of atrocities committed by both parties, and records the gendered, ethnic, and structural violations shaping daily life. The fall of El Fasher in October 2025 marks a defining point, unleashing a cascade of systematic abuses, including mass killings, ethnic cleansing, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, and deliberate starvation. As the report demonstrates, the war is no longer a battle for territorial control but an assault on the core integrity of Sudan's social fabric.





## Section I. The Political and Legal Framework

The war has not only ravaged Sudan's cities and communities but also torn apart its constitutional foundations and legal order. With the collapse of civilian authority, both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) advanced competing political agendas and established parallel constitutional frameworks to legitimize their de facto control, deepening impunity and creating a de facto division of power and sovereignty on the ground. Rather than steering the country toward democratic transition, Sudan has entered a phase defined by rival constitutional projects, each asserting exclusive claims to legitimacy.

### 1. SAF's Constitutional Maneuvers

In early 2025, the Sudanese Armed Forces introduced a package of constitutional amendments that dramatically expanded military dominance over the transition. The amendments extended the transitional period by **39 additional months**, granting the military full authority to shape political institutions. SAF's leadership used legalistic language to present the measures as a path to stability; in practice, they entrenched unchallenged military supremacy.

One of the most consequential decisions was the dissolution of the Investigative Committee on the 2019 Sit-in Massacre, a body already under-resourced but symbolically vital for accountability. Its dismantling effectively wiped away the last formal mechanism capable of investigating one of the defining atrocities of Sudan's post-revolutionary era. Families of victims described the measure as a "legislated burial" of truth.

### 2. The RSF's Parallel Constitutional Order

In March 2025, the RSF and its political allies issued what they termed a "transitional constitution" during meetings in Nairobi. This document laid the foundation for a parallel governing project in areas under RSF control. Soon after, in July 2025, the RSF announced the formation of a "Transitional Government", complete with ministries, security structures, and a civil administration.

Both military actors thus claimed exclusive custodianship over Sudan's political future, entrenching a dual-sovereignty reality that fractured the national landscape and made civilian governance impossible.

### 3. International Justice and Legal Responsibility

The international legal environment shifted dramatically during the year. The International Criminal Court (ICC) confirmed it had "reasonable grounds" to believe RSF forces committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, including systematic killing, mass displacement, and targeted ethnic violence.

Simultaneously, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) recommended that the mandate of the ICC be expanded to cover the entire territory of Sudan, citing widespread atrocities by both SAF and RSF.



### 4. Foreign Involvement and Its Escalating Impact on Sudan's War

Sudan's war has become a regional proxy conflict, prolonged by external military and logistical support that fuels violence and blocks political resolution. The United Arab Emirates, a Gulf Cooperation Council member, faces mounting international criticism for



supplying the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) with drones, ammunition, and materiel. In March 2025, Sudan filed a case before the International Court of Justice accusing the UAE of complicity in genocide. Satellite and field evidence revealed a transnational supply chain enabling RSF offensives across Darfur, deepening atrocities and transforming Sudan's crisis into a broader regional confrontation.



## Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

Sudan witnessed a severe breakdown in civil rights and the fundamental right to life. Civilians carried the greatest burden of the conflict, as deliberate and systematic targeting became a defining feature of the war. Both parties committed grave violations, including indiscriminate bombardment and extrajudicial executions—acts that constitute clear breaches of the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law and rise to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

### 1. The Scale of Civilian Deaths

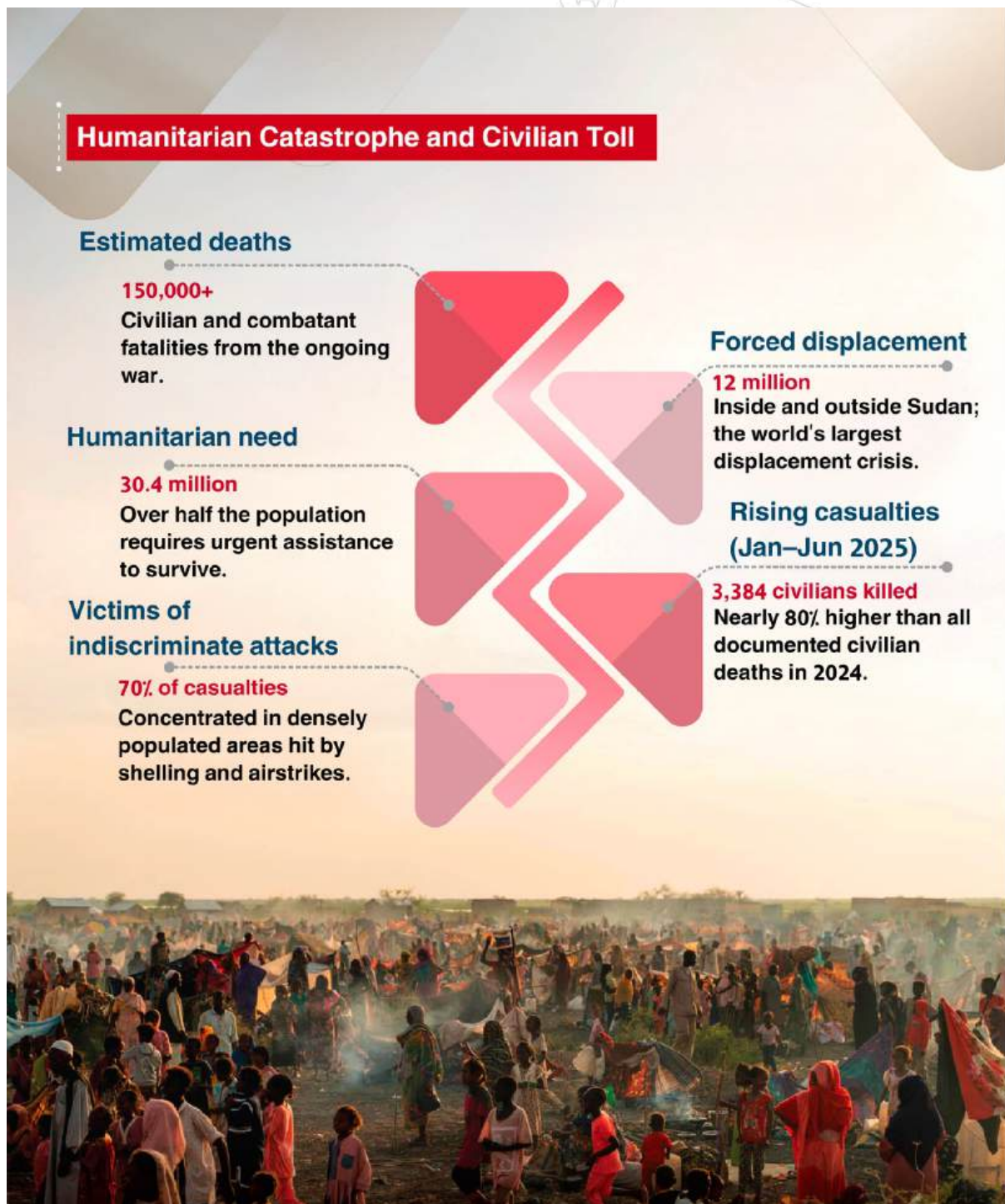
Between January and June 2025, rights organizations documented 3,384 civilian deaths, representing an 80% increase from the previous year.<sup>87</sup> Cumulative civilian deaths since the

<sup>87</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Sudan Crisis Deepens Amid Rising Civilian Casualties and Growing Ethnic Violence, press release, September 2025, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/sudan-crisis-deepens-amid-rising-civilian-casualties-growing-ethnic-violence>.



start of the war surpassed 25,000, with estimates suggesting the true number may approach 150,000 when accounting for inaccessible areas.

The majority—over 70%—occurred in densely populated areas subjected to drone strikes, heavy shelling, and close-quarters assaults.





## 2. Patterns of Killing and Systematic Violence

### a. RSF Operations

The RSF carried out widespread and coordinated attacks involving:

- **Tactics:** House-to-house raids, execution-style killings, burning of homes/markets/health facilities, indiscriminate shelling, and sexual violence.
- **Targeting:** Nuba, Masalit, Zaghawa, and other non-Arab communities.
- Key incidents:
  - **Habilla and Fayou (South Kordofan):** Families forced from homes; men and boys separated and killed; satellite evidence of soil disturbances consistent with mass graves and charred civilian structures.
  - **El Fasher (Oct–Nov 2025):** Executions of fleeing civilians; a massacre inside Sudi Maternity Hospital.
  - **Western Darfur:** Acts amounting to genocide against Masalit and Zaghawa; villages including Misterei, Geneina, and Gereida destroyed.<sup>88</sup>
  - **Religious site attack:** On 19 September 2025, a drone strike during dawn prayers killed at least 75 worshippers at a mosque in El Fasher.<sup>89</sup>
  - **Village destruction at scale:** Satellite imagery (WJWC) identified more than 50 villages across Greater Darfur fully or partially destroyed, displacing hundreds of thousands.
  - **External support:** UN reporting linked RSF financing and arms networks to regional actors, including the United Arab Emirates, prolonging the conflict and deepening abuses.

### b. SAF Violations

The Sudanese Armed Forces also committed grave abuses:

<sup>88</sup> Al Jazeera Liberties, Human Rights Watch Accuses RSF of Committing Atrocities in Sudan, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://liberties.aljazeera.com/رايتس-ووتش-تتهم-الدعم-السريع-باقتراف-ت/>.

<sup>89</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), Press Release on Sudan, 20 September 2025, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.wjwc.org/ar/press-releases-ar/2025-09-20-19-35-39>.



- **Tactics:** Indiscriminate aerial bombardment and heavy artillery in civilian zones; preventing civilians from fleeing; obstructing humanitarian corridors.
- **Key incidents:**
  - Omdurman: Entire residential blocks leveled by artillery, killing civilians sheltering inside.
  - Tura Market (March 2025): Drone attacks on a crowded market killed at least 350 civilians in a single moment.<sup>90</sup>
  - Khartoum (first half of 2025): At least 990 civilians were unlawfully executed outside active hostilities after areas were retaken; victims included individuals accused of RSF collaboration, among them children as young as 14.<sup>91</sup>

### c. Detention and extrajudicial practices

Both RSF and SAF engaged in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, systematic torture in unofficial detention sites, and retaliatory field executions. This pattern—especially state executions in recaptured areas—signals a shift from conventional warfare to political cleansing and retribution, undermining the state's monopoly on legitimate force and reflecting a profound collapse of the rule of law.

<sup>90</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, Global Conflict Tracker: Power Struggle in Sudan, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan>.

<sup>91</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Sudan Crisis Deepens Amid Rising Civilian Casualties and Growing Ethnic Violence, press release, September 2025, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/sudan-crisis-deepens-amid-rising-civilian-casualties-growing-ethnic-violence>.



## Major Atrocities Documented in Sudan (2024–2025)

Date	Location	Key Violations	Estimated Civilian Deaths	Perpetrating Force
Late October 2025	El Fasher, North Darfur (after RSF takeover)	Mass executions, house to house clearance killings, sexual violence, evidence of mass graves	1,500+ (Sudanese Doctors Network estimate since siege began)	Rapid Support Forces (RSF)
19–22 September 2025	El Fasher (Abu Shouk Mosque & surrounding IDP camp)	Drone strike on mosque during prayers; attack on displaced civilians — classified as war crime	70–75 civilians	Rapid Support Forces (RSF)
April 2025	North Darfur (large scale offensive)	Broad military assault leading to sharp rise in civilian casualties	500+ civilians in April alone	Rapid Support Forces (RSF)
24 March 2025	Tura Market, North Darfur	Aerial bombardment of crowded market; 13 members of one family killed	Hundreds overall / at least 54 documented fatalities	Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)
4 November 2024	Ardamata, West Darfur	Mass killings with significant numbers of documented victims	800 civilians	Attributed within RSF violence
Oct–Dec 2024	Eastern Gezira State (30+ villages)	Retaliatory mass killings, systematic sexual violence, looting and arson	1,237–8,000 civilians (various estimates)	Rapid Support Forces (RSF)



### 3. The Assault on El Fasher

The fall of El Fasher in October 2025 stands as one of the report's central events. In the aftermath of the Rapid Support Forces' (RSF) seizure of the city, atrocities escalated on a massive scale. According to the Sudanese Doctors Network, more than 1,500 civilians were killed in deliberate assaults and extrajudicial executions. Testimonies describe summary killings, targeted attacks on displaced people, and pervasive sexual violence against women and girls.<sup>92</sup>

#### After breaching the eastern district, RSF forces:

- Stormed **Al-Naseem Hospital**, killing medical staff and patients.
- Besieged the **Children's Hospital**, executing those attempting to flee.
- Destroyed the **Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital**, displacing hundreds of pregnant women.
- Shelled IDP camps around the city.
- Conducted systematic looting across markets and food stores.

<sup>92</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, Global Conflict Tracker: Power Struggle in Sudan, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan>.



On 27 October 2025, the Yale Humanitarian Research Laboratory (HRL) released satellite analyses showing RSF units engaged in systematic house-to-house clearance operations in the Daraga district.<sup>93</sup> The imagery contradicts any notion of spontaneous violence, instead

## Documented War Crimes and Violations

### Extrajudicial executions

At least 990 civilians

Some sources accuse SAF;  
SAF denies responsibility,  
attributing killings to RSF  
militias.

### Systematic sexual violence

400+ women and girls raped

Majority attributed to RSF  
forces.

### Surge in sexual violence

+288%.

Documented increase during  
2024.

### Villages destroyed in Darfur

50+ villages

Complete or partial destruction  
in one year, displacing hundreds  
of thousands; largely attributed  
to RSF.



<sup>93</sup> Yale School of Medicine, Humanitarian Research Lab Report on Sudan, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/876b4afc-e1da-495b-ac32-b5098699a371>.

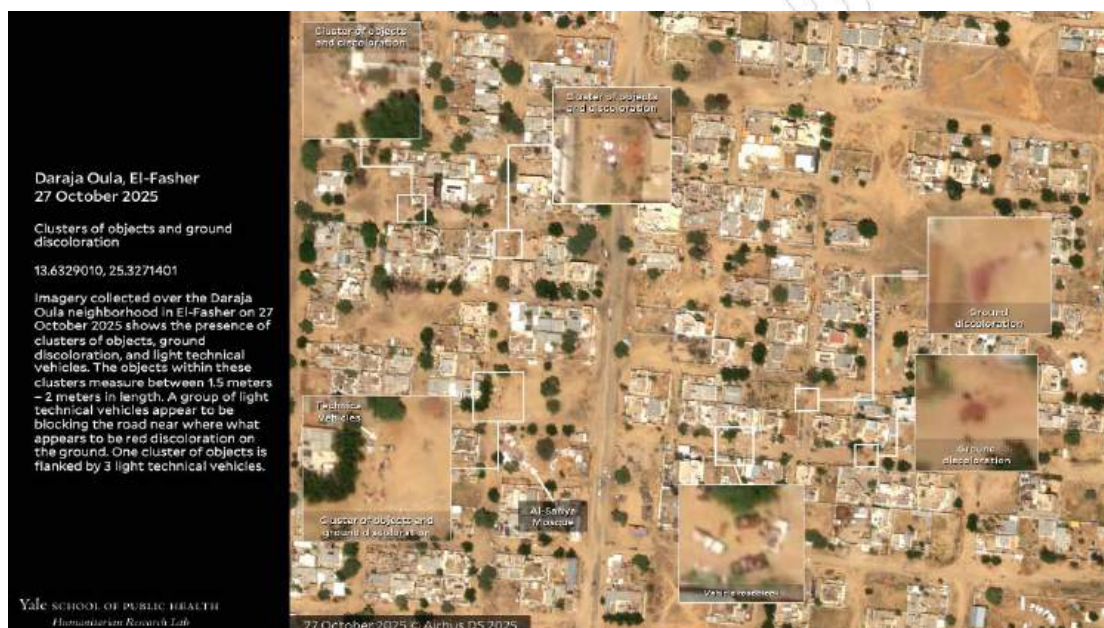


pointing to an organized campaign of repression and collective punishment. HRL analysts identified objects resembling human bodies positioned near RSF vehicles and along perimeter berms encircling the city, consistent with testimonies of executions of civilians attempting to escape. Disturbances in the soil indicated clandestine mass burial sites.<sup>94</sup>

Taken together, satellite documentation of cleansing operations and executions, corroborated by field reports citing ethnic targeting, reinforce the conclusion that RSF's actions were not isolated excesses but part of a deliberate, criminal pattern. This intent meets key legal criteria for crimes against humanity.

#### 4. Attacks on Places of Worship

On **19 September 2025**, a dawn drone strike hit a mosque in El Fasher as worshippers gathered for morning prayers. At least **75 civilians** were killed instantly, including families sheltering at the mosque after fleeing earlier fighting.



<sup>94</sup> Katharine Houreld, "Sudan's El-Fashir: Children Among Those Killed in RSF Assault," Washington Post, November 15, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/11/15/sudan-el-fashir-children-killings/>.



### Section III. Freedom of Expression and Internet Shutdowns

#### 1. Internet as a Weapon of War

Restrictions on communications became a deliberate tool of warfare. Both SAF and RSF used blackouts to conceal atrocities and obstruct humanitarian monitoring. The RSF imposed a year-long internet shutdown in Wad Madani, isolating nearly four million people and creating information "black holes" that facilitated systematic abuses in El Fasher and beyond. SAF also cut communications in several regions before launching offensives, deliberately paralyzing civilian networks.

#### 2. Killings and Persecution of Journalists

Field data from multiple organizations reveal:

- **UN OHCHR:** 7 journalists killed
- **Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC):** 17 killed
- **Sudanese Journalists Syndicate:** more than 23 killed

The killing of journalist Hanan Adam while covering displaced communities illustrates the grave risks. Journalists documenting violations were detained, assaulted, or executed;





dozens had equipment seized; and more than **40** female journalists reported sexual violence, including rape, assault, and forced disappearance.





International watchdogs confirmed the collapse of press freedom: the Committee to Protect Journalists warned that reporting in Sudan has "become a life-threatening endeavor," while Reporters Without Borders ranked Sudan 156th globally in its 2025 World Press Freedom Index.

## Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Protection of Civil Society

### 1. Collapse of Civic Space

The war obliterated organized civic life. Civil society groups, volunteer networks, and humanitarian committees were harassed or dismantled. SAF's General Intelligence Service (GIS) continued practices of arbitrary detention, especially targeting political activists and critics of military governance.



### 2. Attacks on Aid Workers

Humanitarian workers were systematically targeted:

- At least 9 killed during aid missions.
- Warehouses looted by both SAF and RSF.
- Registration centers for displaced persons attacked or closed.



### 3. The Dual Siege Strategy

El Fasher endured a dual siege, with SAF blocking humanitarian access through administrative paralysis, while RSF physically encircled the city. Food and medical supplies dwindled to catastrophic levels.

WJWC states unequivocally that RSF used starvation as an intentional weapon of war, destroying grain stores, looting convoys, and sealing escape routes. WJWC further asserts that this denial of aid was not incidental but a calculated military strategy. Under Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute, the deliberate use of starvation as a method of warfare constitutes a war crime.



## Section V. Women's Rights and Gender-Based Violence

Sudanese women and girls face a compounded crisis that goes far beyond the ordinary harms of war. Sexual violence has become a systematic weapon of war, essential health services have collapsed, and food insecurity has reached unprecedented levels—threatening an entire generation of women and girls.

### 1. Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

There is mounting and conclusive evidence that rape is being deliberately and systematically deployed as a weapon of war in Sudan, intended to spread terror and dismantle the social fabric of targeted communities. The majority of these atrocities are attributed to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).



## Women's Rights and Essential Services

### Medical facilities disrupted

**80%+ non functional**

Near total collapse of the health system.

### Women at risk (Darfur)

**28% of pregnant women**

Facing high risk pregnancies without medical care.

### Food insecurity among women/girls

**11 million**

Severe hunger and malnutrition.

### Dietary diversity

**73.7% of women**

Below minimum dietary diversity; many sacrifice meals.

### Cost of basic hygiene

**\$27 per pack of sanitary pads**

Poverty weaponized, undermining dignity and resilience.





### WJWC and other organizations documented more than:

- **400 cases of rape** against women and minors.
- **330 cases** confirmed in **2025** alone.
- A **288% increase** in reported cases since **2024**.

The majority occurred in Darfur and Khartoum State. Survivors described RSF fighters selecting women based on ethnicity, especially **Masalit** and **Nuba** women.

### Cases include:

- Rape committed during home invasions.
- Sexual slavery in RSF-controlled schools and government buildings.
- Assaults at checkpoints against displaced women.

In a harrowing testimony collected by Women Journalists Without Chains a displacement camp in Chad, one survivor recounted: "They gathered the women in the schoolyard, then raped us one by one in front of our children. They told us: 'It's your fault because you support the army.'" Such accounts reveal that sexual violence is not random, but a deliberate tactic of ethnic cleansing.





## 2. Collapse of Maternal Health Care

With **80% of health facilities non-functional**, pregnant women face unprecedented risks:

- The destruction of El Fasher's main maternity hospital forced women to give birth in the streets.
- Midwives operate without equipment or sterile conditions.
- A spike in obstetric fistula cases was reported.

Over **28%** of pregnant women in Darfur were classified as high-risk due to malnutrition, displacement and lack of care.

## 3. Starvation and Malnutrition

Women bear the brunt of food scarcity:

- More than **11 million** women and girls face acute food insecurity.
- **73.7%** of women do not meet minimum dietary diversity.
- Mothers frequently skip meals so children can eat.
- Severe acute malnutrition is rising among newborns due to maternal starvation.

Beyond food shortages, poverty itself has been weaponized against women. In North Darfur, a single pack of sanitary pads costs around **US\$27**—an unaffordable sum that consumes much of families' meager cash aid. By turning basic hygiene into a luxury, the conflict strips women and girls of dignity and heightens their vulnerability. Their daily journeys in search of food and water further expose them to risks of abduction and sexual violence, underscoring the multifaceted war being waged against their bodies and lives.

## Conclusion

The deepening catastrophe in Sudan throughout **2025** reveals not only the collapse of national governance but also the systemic failure of the international community to uphold the most basic duties of civilian protection. Despite mounting evidence of mass atrocities—including large-scale killings, targeted ethnic violence, enforced displacement, and deliberate starvation—the global response has remained limited to expressions of concern and fragmented diplomacy. Such inaction has provided cover for escalating crimes and reinforced the perception that perpetrators can continue with complete impunity.



International organizations and field monitors have warned that Darfur is witnessing a renewed campaign of ethnic cleansing in real time, yet no meaningful enforcement measures have followed. The paralysis of global institutions, combined with competing regional agendas, has effectively transformed Sudan into a proxy battleground, eroding mechanisms of accountability and widening the space for systematic abuses. Without decisive intervention, Sudan risks sliding into a prolonged phase of mass atrocity violence reminiscent of the darkest chapters of its history.

In this context, Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) stresses that any future political settlement must be anchored in accountability, civilian protection, and the restoration of the rule of law. Peace built on impunity will only entrench instability and enable future cycles of violence.

### Recommended Actions

#### 1. To the International Community

- Impose a comprehensive arms embargo on all warring parties.
- Expand the ICC mandate to include atrocities across Sudan.
- Establish an independent international investigative mechanism with unhindered access.
- Ensure accountability and prosecution of all perpetrators, including regional actors who finance or arm the conflict.

#### 2. To the United Nations

- Activate mechanisms under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine.
- Guarantee humanitarian corridors and safe passage for civilians.
- Urgently increase funding for famine prevention and emergency medical services.

#### 3. To Regional Governments

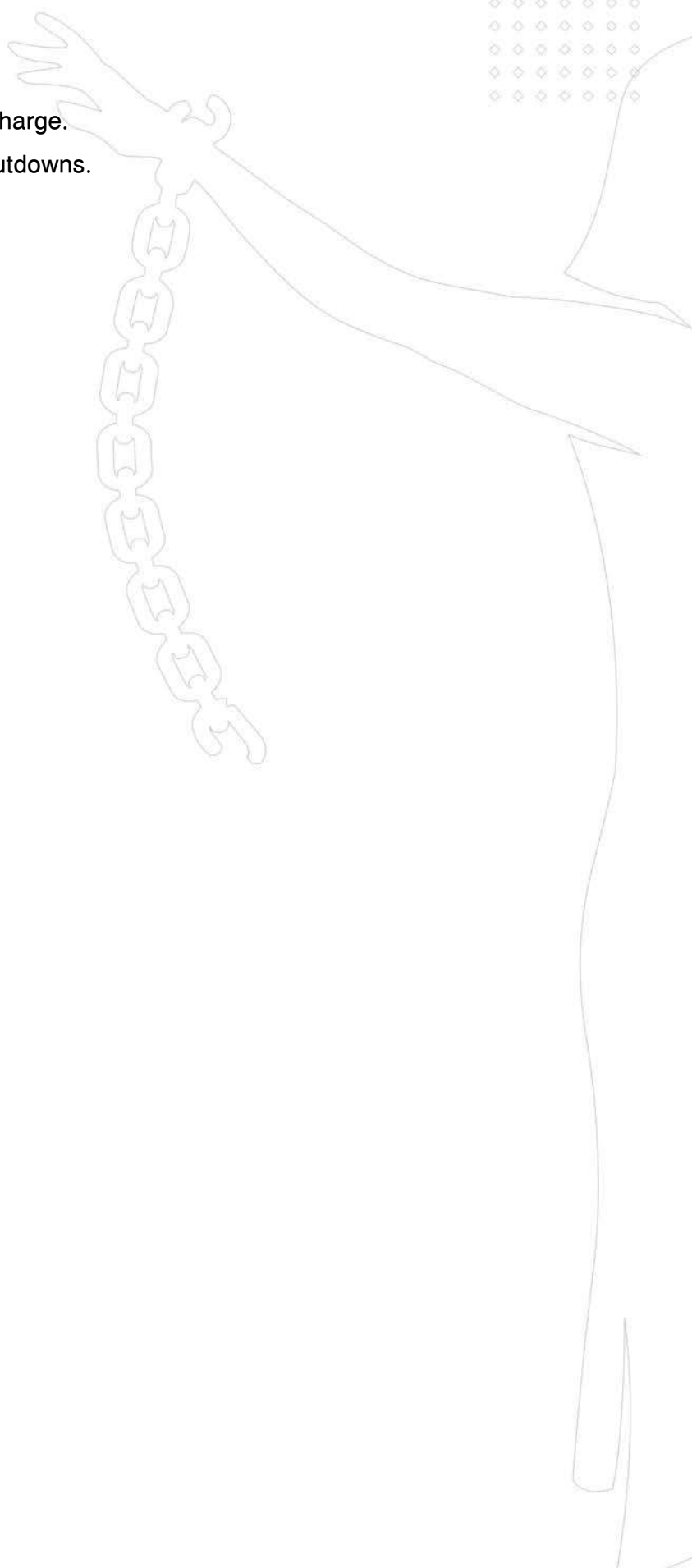
- Cease logistical and military assistance to parties committing violations.
- Facilitate cross-border humanitarian access from Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt.

#### 4. To Sudan's Warring Parties

- Immediately halt attacks on civilians.
- Allow unrestricted humanitarian access.



- Release detainees held without charge.
- End siege tactics and internet shutdowns.

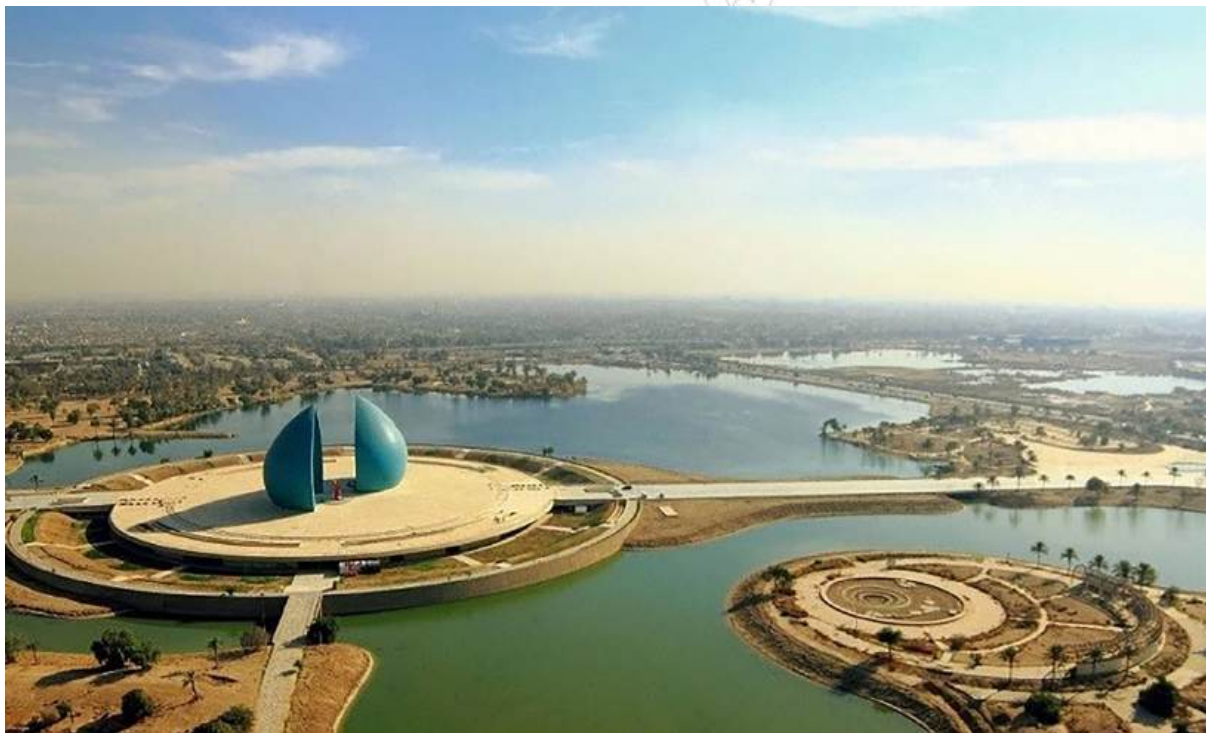




## IRAQ: CALM AS A TOOL OF OPPRESSION

### Introduction

Between late 2024 and late 2025, Iraq entered a period of what might be called "contradictory calm." Direct violence fell to its lowest levels since 2003, yet this surface stability failed to deliver genuine gains in rights or freedoms. Instead, the reduction in overt conflict allowed ruling elites to entrench their power through non-violent mechanisms of repression, steadily eroding fundamental liberties. The year was defined by the tightening grip of a political order built on clientelism, sectarian power sharing, and the pervasive influence of armed militias. State institutions—including the judiciary—were increasingly bent to partisan interests, abandoning their mandate to safeguard citizens' rights.



### Section 1. Political and Legal Framework

Understanding Iraq's human rights trajectory demands close scrutiny of its political and legal architecture. These structures not only fail to safeguard fundamental rights but are deliberately engineered to enable violations and ensure impunity for perpetrators—whether state authorities or allied militias. Weakened by endemic corruption, structural fragility, and relentless political infighting, it provides fertile ground for the abuses documented in this



report. Ongoing power struggles between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, particularly over oil revenues and budget allocations, further obstruct development and cripple the state's capacity to deliver services or protect its citizens' rights.<sup>95</sup>

### 1.1 Structural weaknesses and elite dominance

Iraq's political system remains defined by sectarian and ethnic quota-sharing (muhasasa), a structure that entrenches elite control, fuels corruption, and systematically weakens formal governance.

- This system parcels out ministries and state institutions as spoils among parties, creating vacuums of power readily exploited by non-state actors.
- Armed militias—most prominently the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—embody this dynamic. Although formally recognized as a state institution, the PMF functions as a semi-autonomous entity.<sup>96</sup>
  - Certain factions—most notably Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq—operate under direct IRGC command and carry out military operations without authorization from Iraq's Commander-in-Chief.
  - Beyond their military role, PMF factions have profoundly penetrated Iraq's political economy: controlling key border crossings and their customs revenues, levying illegal taxes on commerce, and monopolizing state contracts in sectors like construction and security. These practices consolidate their grip on state structures and fundamentally erode institutional sovereignty.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Iraq, accessed November 25, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/iraq>.

<sup>96</sup> UK Home Office, Country Policy and Information Note: Actors of Protection, Iraq, September 2025 (accessible), accessed November 25, 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/iraq-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-actors-of-protection-iraq-september-2025-accessible>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



## 1.2 Parliamentary Elections and Associated Violations

On 11 November 2025, Iraq held parliamentary elections with a turnout of roughly **56%**—a comparatively high figure reflecting extensive party mobilization.<sup>98</sup>

- **Results:** Preliminary tallies showed gains for the Reconstruction and Development Coalition led by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani, followed by the Taqaddum (Progress) Party under Mohammed al-Halbousi<sup>99</sup> and the State of Law Coalition headed by Nouri al-Maliki. The outcome confirmed the continued dominance of Iraq's traditional political blocs.
- **Violations:**
  - Political money and vote-buying were widespread,<sup>100</sup> ranging from prepaid recharge cards and fuel coupons<sup>101</sup> to direct cash payments of up to **300,000 IQD (≈200 USD)** per vote in some districts.<sup>102</sup>
  - Candidate exclusions targeted dozens of reformist figures, particularly those associated with the Tishreen protest movement,<sup>103</sup> amid widespread allegations of politically motivated disqualification.
  - The adoption of the 'Sainte-Laguë 1.7' formula was widely criticized as a mechanism to marginalize independents and entrench major parties.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Sky News Arabia, "العراق.. الإعلان عن النتائج النهائية للانتخابات التشريعية" [Iraq: Announcement of Final Parliamentary Election Results], Sky News Arabia, November 2025, <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1834543>.

<sup>99</sup> Asharq News, "العراق يعلن النتائج النهائية للانتخابات البرلمانية: 'الإعمار والتنمية' يتصدر" [Iraq Announces Final Parliamentary Election Results: 'Reconstruction and Development' Leads], Asharq News, November 2025, <https://asharq.co/jnccq>.

<sup>100</sup> Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, "مرشحون للانتخابات يمتهون كرامة الإنسان" [Election Candidates Degrading Human Dignity], IOHR Iraq, 2025, <https://iohriq.org/ar/183-.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Times of Israel, "Iraq Heads to Elections Marred by Violence at Sensitive Moment for Middle East," Times of Israel, November 2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/iraq-heads-to-elections-marred-by-violence-at-sensitive-moment-for-middle-east/>.

<sup>102</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "Leaders Tighten Control as Repression Shapes Iraq's 2025 Elections," ACLED Reports, November 2025, <https://acleddata.com/report/leaders-tighten-control-repression-shapes-iraqs-2025-elections>.

<sup>103</sup> Al Araby Al Jadeed, "اغتيال مرشح للانتخابات بانفجار عبوة لاصقة في منطقة الطارمية شمالي بغداد" [Assassination of Election Candidate in Tarmiyah, North Baghdad, by Sticky Bomb Explosion], Al Araby Al Jadeed, November 2025, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/assassination-attempt-candidate-baghdad>.

<sup>104</sup> Arab Center Washington DC, "The 2025 Iraqi Election: Will Sudani Serve a Second Term?," Arab Center DC, November 2025, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-2025-iraqi-election-will-sudani-serve-a-second-term/>.



- **Security and rights concerns:**

- The **assassination of candidate Safaa al-Mashhadani** in Baghdad underscored the risks faced by participants.<sup>105</sup>
- **Militia intimidation** of voters persisted in areas under their influence.<sup>106</sup>
- **Journalists** encountered surveillance scandals,<sup>107</sup> bans on analysts appearing on television,<sup>108</sup> and restricted access to polling stations.

While procedurally successful, the elections entrenched the dominance of established blocs, narrowed the space for independents, and further constrained press freedom.

### 1.3 Judicial independence and rule of law

- Although Iraq's constitution guarantees judicial independence, in practice the judiciary is increasingly politicized and centralized, leaving it vulnerable to political pressure.
- Structural challenges include limited resources, pervasive corruption, and a backlog of counterterrorism cases that obstruct fair trial guarantees.
- Reform measures such as the creation of integrity courts and a judicial oversight body have been undermined by political influence.<sup>109</sup>
- The Federal Supreme Court has expanded its role beyond constitutional interpretation to direct political outcomes, often favoring dominant Shi'a parties.

<sup>105</sup> Doha Institute, "The 2025 Iraqi Parliamentary Elections," Doha Institute for Political Studies, November 2025, <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/iraq-parliamentary-elections-2025.aspx>.

<sup>106</sup> Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, "هيئة الإعلام العراقية تجبر 'ميتا' على حجب منشورات معارضة [Iraqi Media Commission Forces Meta to Block Opposition Posts]," IOHR Iraq, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/225b7b4r>.

<sup>107</sup> The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "فضيحة 'شبكة التنصت' داخل مكتب رئيس الوزراء تهز الأوساط السياسية [Scandal of 'Wiretapping Network' Inside Prime Minister's Office Shakes Iraq's Political and Media Circles]," Policy Analysis, 2025, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/fdyht-altnst-fy-alraq-azmt-hkm-wmkhawf-amnyt>.

<sup>108</sup> Reporters Without Borders (RSF), "العراق: هيئة الإعلام والاتصالات تصدر قرارات بمنع ظهور محللين سياسيين وتفرض قيوداً [Iraq: Media and Communications Commission Issues Decisions Banning Political Analysts and Imposing Broadcast Restrictions]," RSF Country Reports, 2025, <https://rsf.org/ar/country/iraq>.

<sup>109</sup> Zaid Al-Ali, The Shifting Landscape of Iraq's Judiciary, LSE Research Online, 2025, [https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/127311/1/Shifting\\_Landscape.pdf](https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/127311/1/Shifting_Landscape.pdf).



- A notable example was the 2023 ruling dismissing Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, widely seen as politically motivated.<sup>110</sup>
- Persistent corruption and threats against judges and lawyers further erode the rule of law and block access to justice.

### Legal Tools of Repression in 2025

<b>Anti Terrorism Law (2005)</b>	Vague provisions used to impose mass, arbitrary death sentences.
<b>Penal Code Article 403</b>	"Public morality" charges deployed against online content creators.
<b>Draft Protest Law</b>	Requires 5 day prior approval; bans nighttime demonstrations.
<b>Personal Status Law Amendment (2025)</b>	Requires 5 day prior approval; bans nighttime demonstrations.



<sup>110</sup> Deutsche Welle (DW), "القضاء العراقي ينهي عضوية رئيس البرلمان محمد الحلبوسي" [Iraqi Judiciary Terminates Membership of Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi], DW News, 2023, <https://p.dw.com/p/4YnxL>.



#### 1.4 Legal framework and human rights implications

- A stark gap exists between constitutional guarantees of fundamental freedoms and the reality of legal practice.
- **Broad and vague laws** are routinely used to suppress rights:
  - The **Counterterrorism Law** is applied expansively to target activists, opponents, and even relatives of suspects.
  - Restrictions based on undefined concepts such as "public order" and "morality" grant authorities sweeping powers to curtail freedom of expression and assembly.
- Iraq's refusal to ratify key international instruments, such as the **Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture**, underscores the absence of genuine political will to reform or align with global standards.

Therefore, this defective legal architecture—marked by vague laws, unchecked discretionary powers, and a lack of alignment with international standards—creates the enabling environment for the widespread and systematic human rights violations detailed in the following sections.



## Headline Indicators of Iraq's Human Rights Crisis

### Death Row Population

**8,000 detainees**

Awaiting execution under opaque and arbitrary judicial processes.

### Prison Overcrowding

**300% capacity**

Facilities operating at triple their intended capacity.

### Child Marriage

**28% of girls**

Married before 18; rates worsened after recent legal amendments.

### Voter Turnout

**56%**

November 2025 elections, marred by boycotts and vote buying.

### Price of a Vote

**\$200 (≈300,000 IQD)**

Reported cost of a single ballot in some districts.

### Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

**Over 1 million**

Still without durable solutions or civil documentation.

### Returnees from al Hol Camp

**9,500 since 2021**

Many face torture and abuse in al Jada'a camp.



## Section 2. Civil Rights and The Right to Life

Systematic violations of the rights to life, liberty, and personal security—committed by both state and non-state actors—have produced a pervasive climate of fear and mistrust. Institutions responsible for ensuring protection and justice have, in many cases, become instruments of repression, eroding the core foundations of human dignity.



## 2.1 Extrajudicial killings and arbitrary judicial executions

- **Mass executions:** Iraqi authorities continued conducting mass executions in flagrant violation of due process and fair-trial guarantees.<sup>111</sup> The Anti-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2005 remains the primary legislative tool enabling these abuses; its vague and overly broad provisions permit death sentences that fail to meet the international standard of "most serious crimes" (intentional killing).
- **Reliance on coerced confessions:** Courts routinely accept confessions extracted under torture, often as the sole evidence in ISIS-related cases.<sup>112</sup> Executions carried out under such conditions constitute arbitrary deprivation of life by the state under the guise of law.<sup>113</sup>
- **Scale of executions:** Dozens of executions were carried out during the reporting period, while an estimated 8,000 detainees remain on death row.<sup>114</sup>
- **Legal failures:** Efforts to secure pardons under the Anti-Terrorism Law have consistently failed. Its ambiguous language grants authorities sweeping powers to target not only suspects but also their relatives, without adequate fair-trial safeguards. This defective framework—falling below minimum international standards—underpins the majority of death sentences issued in Iraq.
- **Professional testimony:** One defense lawyer, speaking anonymously for fear of reprisal, captured the justice system's paralysis: *"It is impossible for me to prevent the execution of my clients... We do not know who will be targeted, for what case, for what reason, or when. I cannot even access their case files."*<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, "A/HRC/58/NGO/125," United Nations Documents, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/NGO/125>.

<sup>112</sup> U.S. Embassy in Iraq, Iraq 2024 Human Rights Report, August 2025, [https://iq.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2025/08/624521\\_IRAQ-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://iq.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2025/08/624521_IRAQ-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).

<sup>113</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), "سجناء العراق بين جدران الموت والإعدامات الطائفية (تقرير)" [Iraqi Prisoners Between Walls of Death and Sectarian Executions (Report)], WJWC Reports, 2025, <http://wjwc.org/images/2025/Iraqi/20prisons/20silent/20massacres.pdf>.

<sup>114</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), "السجون العراقية: مجازر صامتة" [Iraqi Prisons: Silent Massacres], WJWC Reports, 2025, <https://wjwc.org/images/2025/Iraqi/20prisons/20silent/20massacres.pdf>.


<sup>115</sup> Lawyer, interview with Women Journalists Without Chains, encrypted messaging application, June 2025.



## 2.2 Political assassinations

- **Targeting candidates:** Assassinations have become a central tool to silence opposition and suppress political competition. On **15 October 2025**, Sunni candidate **Safaa al-Mashhadani** of the Sovereignty Alliance was killed in Baghdad when an explosive device was planted under his car. The attack sent a clear message that political participation outside the will of dominant forces can cost lives.<sup>116</sup>
- **Journalists and activists:**

**Crackdown on Journalists and Digital Space**

	<b>Jamal al Badrani</b> Beaten by armed faction. Mosul (Nov 2024)		<b>Noor al Khafaji</b> Acid attack to the face. Baghdad (Feb 2025)
	<b>Shar Press Team</b> Assaulted; equipment confiscated. Sulaymaniyah (Aug 2025)		<b>Zoom TV</b> Headquarters shut down; equipment seized. Kurdistan Region
	<b>Sherwan Sherwani</b> Additional 4 year prison sentence. Kurdistan Region (Aug 2025)		<b>Al Hudood Website</b> Permanently censored. Online space



<sup>116</sup> BBC News Arabic, "اغتيال مرشح لمجلس النواب العراقي شمال بغداد" [Assassination of an Iraqi Parliamentary Candidate North of Baghdad], October 15, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/cvgkde29yx1o>.



- In Kurdistan, journalist **Hemin Mamand** survived an assassination attempt in Sulaymaniyah on **2 September 2025**, sustaining injuries after being shot by two unidentified assailants.
- In October **2025**, human rights lawyer and activist **Hamsa Jasim** was shot dead in Wasit province.<sup>117</sup>
- **Regional intervention:** On **January 2025**, Iran's Revolutionary Guard launched missiles at homes in Erbil, killing at least four civilians, including an infant.

### 2.3 Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance

- Security forces—including the **PMF militias** and Kurdish **Asayish units**—continued to carry out arbitrary arrests and detentions without judicial warrants.
- **Enforced disappearances:** The fate of thousands of individuals who went missing since **2014** and during the **2019** protests remains unknown. Many are suspected to have been executed extrajudicially.
- **Legislative failure:** The draft law on missing persons failed to criminalize such enforced disappearances or establish clear penalties, perpetuating a culture of total impunity.<sup>118</sup>

### 2.4 Torture, ill-treatment, and prison conditions

- **Systematic torture:** Evidence points to routine use of torture to extract confessions, particularly from Sunni Arabs accused of terrorism.
- **Prison conditions:** Official detention centers are described as "horrific," operating at **300% of capacity**, leading to disease outbreaks due to inadequate medical care.
- **Secret facilities:** Dozens of clandestine detention sites run by militias operate beyond oversight, where torture is reportedly systematic.

<sup>117</sup> 2M Media, "مقتل الناشطة همسة جاسم بالعراق.. ما علاقة مطلقي النار بشخصية نافذة؟" [The Killing of Activist Hamsa Jasim in Iraq: What Is the Connection Between the Shooters and an Influential Figure?], " September 2025, <https://2cm.es/1e-mR>.

<sup>118</sup> Amnesty International. Human Rights in Iraq. 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/iraq/report-iraq/>.



- **Case study:** In April 2025, engineer **Bashir Khalid Latif** died after severe torture in a Baghdad police station,<sup>119</sup> highlighting the brutality of these practices.
- **Al-Jadaa camp abuses:** Reports documented torture of dozens of Iraqis in **Al-Jadaa camp**, where many were transferred from Syria's Al-Hol camp. Since 2021,

### Targeting Vulnerable Groups and Civic Activists

#### Women (Personal Status Law)

February 2025 amendment legitimized child marriage under Ja'fari jurisprudence.

#### Tishreen Activists

Activist Ihsan al Hilali sentenced to 15 years (Apr 2025).

#### Torture Victims

Engineer Bashir Khaled Lateef died under torture in Baghdad police custody (Apr 2025).

#### Women Human Rights Defenders

Lawyer Hamsa Jassim assassinated in Wasit (Oct 2025).

#### Protesters

Live fire used against engineering graduates in Basra (Sep 2025); teacher protests suppressed nationwide.



<sup>119</sup> Saif Almuhana (@Saif\_almuhana), "Iraqi authorities consider increasing repatriations from al-Hol camp—estimated at more than 18,000—so that the majority are transferred by the end of 2027," X (Twitter), November 2025, [https://x.com/Saif\\_almuhana/status/1909013399419175224](https://x.com/Saif_almuhana/status/1909013399419175224).



approximately **9,500 individuals** have been repatriated from Al-Hol,<sup>120</sup> many subjected to arbitrary detention and ill-treatment.

The conversion of Iraq's judicial and security institutions into instruments of repression has entrenched arbitrary executions, political assassinations, enforced disappearances, and systematic torture—eroding the right to life and personal security and setting the stage for further restrictions on fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of expression, examined in the next section.

### Section 3. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Media, and the Internet

What was once a rare outlet for free expression—the digital sphere—has now become a central arena for systematic repression. Authorities employed a combination of legal, technological, and coercive tools to silence critical voices and suppress dissent. Increasing numbers of users faced long prison sentences during the reporting period solely for their online content.

#### 3.1 Targeting journalists and human rights defenders

Journalists and activists continued to face physical assaults, arbitrary arrests, and harassment, with perpetrators enjoying near-total impunity. Documented cases include:

- **November 2024:** Journalist Jamal al-Badrani was beaten in Mosul by members of an armed faction.<sup>121</sup>
- **24 February 2025:** Media professional Noor al-Khafaji was attacked in Baghdad when two unidentified men threw a liquid substance on her face.<sup>122</sup>
- **28 August 2025:** Security forces in Sulaymaniyah assaulted the team of Shar Press while covering a political trial, confiscating equipment including a camera and the

<sup>120</sup> Amnesty International, "Iraq: People Held in al-Jedah Centre Subjected to Torture and Enforced Disappearance After Arrests – New Investigation," press release, October 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/latest/press-release/2024/10/iraq-people-held-in-al-jedah-centre-subjected-to-torture-and-enforced-disappearance-after-arrests-new-investigation/>.

<sup>121</sup> 2M Media, "Assaults on Iraqi Journalists: Perpetrators Known but Above Accountability," September 2025, <https://2cm.es/1e-mP>.

<sup>122</sup> 2M Media, "Iraqi journalist assaulted in front of her home," September 2025, <https://2cm.es/1e-mP>.



phone of reporter Jawarwan Mahmoud. In the same region, authorities shut down Zoom TV and seized all its equipment.<sup>123</sup>

- **19 August 2025:** Journalist Sherwan Sherwani, detained since 2020, received an additional four-year sentence in Kurdistan, signaling deliberate intent to keep him imprisoned indefinitely.
- **November 2024:** Women's rights activist Doaa al-Asadi was arrested in Nasiriyah as part of a campaign targeting activists from the Tishreen protest movement.<sup>124</sup>



### 3.2 Cybercrime laws and digital censorship

- Authorities exploited vague provisions such as **Article 403 of the Penal Code**, which criminalizes anything deemed "immoral to the public," to prosecute internet users.

<sup>123</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), "Unprecedented Escalation in Human Rights Violations and Media Freedom Restrictions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," press release, September 4, 2025, <https://wjwc.org/ar/press-releases-ar/2025-09-04-10-32-01>.

<sup>124</sup> Sharika Wa Laken, "The Arrest of Doaa al-Asadi... and the Pursuit of Women of the Uprising," November 25, 2024, <https://bit.ly/3EztfDc>.



- In October 2025, the **Communications and Media Commission** threatened *Metawith* with an advertising ban unless it restricted posts alleging judicial corruption, effectively coercing global platforms into becoming instruments of repression.<sup>125</sup>
- Authorities also blocked websites, including the permanent shutdown of satirical news outlet Al-Hudood.
- Credible reports indicate that both federal and Kurdish authorities engaged in **surveillance of private online communications** without lawful authorization.

This organized digital repression not only violates the right to freedom of expression but also stifles public debate and paves the way for restrictions on freedom of assembly in physical spaces.

#### Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association

In the aftermath of the mass mobilization witnessed during the 2019 Tishreen uprising, authorities have systematically restricted both peaceful assembly and civic organizing. These measures—ranging from violent dispersal of protests to burdensome controls on unions, associations, and political groups—are designed to preserve the existing power structure and prevent any collective challenge to state or militia-aligned actors.

##### 4.1 Impunity and repression of Tishreen activists

- Six years after the uprising, authorities continued a "**revenge campaign**" against Tishreen activists, involving prosecutions and fabricated charges.
- Security forces and militias carried out violent home raids without warrants, harassed families, and pressured activists into surrender.
- In Nasiriyah, activists faced ongoing retaliation, including arrests based on outdated warrants and fabricated charges carrying potential death sentences. Many were forced into hiding or exile.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>125</sup> ARTICLE 19, "Iraq: Cooperation with Big Tech Must Not Put Freedom of Expression at Risk," November 2024, <https://www.article19.org/resources/iraq-cooperation-with-big-tech-must-not-put-freedom-of-expression-at-risk/>.

<sup>126</sup> Amnesty International, "Iraq: Six Years Since Tishreen Protests, Activists Persecuted, Freedoms in Peril," October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/latest/news/2025/10/iraq-six-years-since-tishreen-protests-activists-persecuted-freedoms-in-peril/>.



- In April 2025, activist Ihsan al-Hilali ("Abu Kawthar"), a prominent Tishreen leader, was sentenced to **15 years in prison** under Article 406 of the Penal Code for alleged murder.<sup>127</sup>
- Most critically, there has been **total failure to deliver justice** for the hundreds of protesters killed. Investigative committees were formed but never published findings, leaving perpetrators free. Financial compensation offered to victims' families cannot substitute for criminal accountability.

#### 4.2 Violent dispersal of peaceful protests

- Security forces repeatedly used excessive force to disperse peaceful demonstrations.
- Historical patterns reveal a shift in state tactics: while sectarian rhetoric was used to justify violent suppression of Sunni protests in 2012–2013, subsequent governments resorted to direct violence against the predominantly Shi'a Tishreen movement, often through militias linked to the PMF.
- In 2025, teachers' protests across several provinces were forcibly suppressed.<sup>128</sup>
- In September 2025, live ammunition was used to disperse engineering graduates in Basra demanding jobs.<sup>129</sup>
- In June 2025, dozens of demonstrators were pursued and arrested for similar demands.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Aljeebal, "15-Year Prison Sentence for Tishreen Leader 'Abu Kowthar' on Murder Charges," April 13, 2025, <https://aljeebal.com/posts/4933>.

<sup>128</sup> Aljeebal, "Dhi Qar Court Sentences Activist to Prison over Protest-Related Charges," July 2024, <https://aljeebal.com/posts/4818>.

<sup>129</sup> Aljeebal, "Renewed Protests in Nasiriyah after Arrests of Tishreen Activists," February 2025, <https://aljeebal.com/posts/9765>.

<sup>130</sup> Aljeebal, "Families of Detainees Demand Release of Tishreen Protesters in Dhi Qar," May 2025, <https://aljeebal.com/posts/6189>.



## Manipulating Democracy Through Violence and Fraud

### Political Money & Vote Buying

Distribution of prepaid cards, fuel coupons, and cash to secure votes.

### Candidate Exclusion

Reformist figures, especially linked to the Tishreen movement, systematically disqualified.

### Electoral Engineering

Use of the "Sainte Laguë 1.7" formula to sideline independents and favor major parties.

### Political Assassination

Killing of candidate Safaa al Mashhadani in Baghdad (15 October 2025).

### Impact

Consolidated dominance of ruling coalitions and entrenched elite power.



### 4.3 Restrictive draft law on demonstrations

- In August 2025, parliament debated the **Draft Law on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly**, which contained highly restrictive provisions.
- Key measures included banning nighttime protests and requiring prior approval five days in advance.



- The law seeks to transform a constitutional right into a conditional privilege subject to government discretion.<sup>131</sup>



Iraq's systematic repression of digital expression and peaceful assembly reflects a deliberate strategy to neutralize dissent. The combination of vague laws, unchecked surveillance, violent suppression, and restrictive legislation disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups, leaving them marginalized and deprived of basic rights. This erosion of civic space sets the stage for further violations against women, children, and marginalized communities, which will be examined in the following section.

## 5. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups

Vulnerable populations—including women, children, and internally displaced persons—bear the greatest burden of the state's failure to safeguard fundamental rights. Structural discrimination embedded in legislation, institutional practice, and social norms deepens

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131



their marginalization, leaving them disproportionately exposed to violence, exploitation, and systemic neglect.



### 5.1 Personal Status Law Amendment: A Major Setback for Women's Rights

- On **17 February 2025**, amendments to the Personal Status Law came into force, representing a significant regression from the constitutional principle of equality enshrined in Article 14.<sup>132</sup>
- The amendment allows couples to choose between the civil code or a new code based on Shi'a Ja'fari jurisprudence, creating parallel sectarian legal systems and undermining decades of progress.
- Sunni religious leaders opposed the amendment and refused to draft a separate code, underscoring its political and sectarian nature.
- **Most damaging impact:** The Ja'fari code legitimizes child marriage by setting no minimum age, in contrast to the civil law's threshold of **18 years**. UNICEF data shows

<sup>132</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Personal Status Law Amendment Sets Back Women's Rights," March 10, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/10/iraq-personal-status-law-amendment-sets-back-womens-rights>.

that **28% of girls in Iraq are already married before 18**. The amendment risks worsening this trend, exposing girls to violence and denying them education.

- This development constitutes a clear violation of Iraq's obligations under the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** and the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, both ratified by Iraq.

## 5.2 Gender-Based Violence and Political Participation

- Women in public life continue to face violence and harassment, reinforced by a culture of impunity.
- Protective mechanisms such as shelters remain scarce, weak, and subject to raids by authorities, leaving survivors without genuine protection.
- In the Kurdistan Region, survivors of gender-based violence face additional barriers: women cannot enter or leave government shelters without judicial orders, despite the existence of a domestic violence law enacted 13 years ago.<sup>133</sup>
- These restrictions highlight the gap between legal frameworks and actual access to justice and protection.

## 5.3 Rights of Children, Migrant Workers, and Internally Displaced Persons

- **Child labor:** Evidence indicates widespread child labor. A survey by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) covering October 2024–March 2025 found that nearly half of communities reported child labor, including its worst forms such as forced recruitment and sexual exploitation.<sup>134</sup>
- **Migrant workers:** Structural exclusion persists, as migrant workers fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior rather than the Ministry of Labor, leaving them outside the protections of Iraq's labor law.
- **Internally displaced persons (IDPs):** More than **one million people** remain displaced, struggling to access basic services due to lack of official documentation.

<sup>133</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Iraq Country Chapter, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/iraq>.

<sup>134</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC), Iraq Protection Needs Overview Q4 2024 – Q1 2025, June 2025, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/IRC%20Iraq%20Protection%20Needs%20Overview%20Q4%202024%20-%20Q1%202025.pdf>.



### Conclusion

The year **2025** marked a decisive turning point in Iraq's human rights trajectory. Violations have shifted from episodic and chaotic violence to a regime of systematic repression carried out jointly by state institutions and armed groups operating under the veneer of legality. Instead of serving as safeguards, the law and judiciary have been weaponized to legitimize impunity and entrench the dominance of factional and militia-aligned actors over political decision-making and economic power.

This transformation has produced an illusion of "security calm" that masks an increasingly fragile stability—one sustained not by rule of law, but by the suppression of dissent, the contraction of civic space, and the internal militarization of the state. As accountability erodes, the social contract further disintegrates, leaving the most vulnerable—especially women, children, and displaced populations—to bear the heaviest burden.

The findings of this report affirm that Iraq's continued reliance on sectarian power-sharing, coercive governance, and political paralysis is fundamentally unsustainable. This trajectory creates the conditions for delayed upheaval and places the country's future as a functioning state of institutions at profound risk. Reversing this path requires urgent structural reform, credible international engagement, and accountability mechanisms capable of restoring human dignity, dismantling entrenched impunity, and rebuilding a civic environment in which rights are genuinely protected.



## KUWAIT: LAWLESS AND STATELESS

### Introduction

The period spanning late **2024** through **2025** marked one of the most severe regressions in Kuwait's modern political and civil rights landscape. What began in May **2024** with an Amiri decree dissolving the National Assembly—and suspending key articles of the Constitution—rapidly evolved into an entrenched constitutional crisis that reshaped the country's governance model. By concentrating sweeping powers in the hands of the executive authority, Kuwait entered a phase of nearly unchecked governance, where critical oversight frameworks ceased to function and essential balances within the state were dismantled.

This report examines the human rights implications of this transformation, focusing on how the erosion of parliamentary life, the proliferation of executive decrees, and the weakening of judicial independence have directly impacted freedoms, civil protections, and political participation. It documents not only individual violations but also the structural shifts that enabled them, aiming to provide an analytical account of Kuwait's human-rights trajectory during this pivotal period.

### Section I. Political and Legal Context

The systematic dismantling of oversight mechanisms began with the suspension of parliamentary life. In Kuwait's constitutional system, the National Assembly functions as a primary check on executive authority. With its dissolution—and without any timeline for restoration—the state entered a political void that enabled the government to legislate by decree, shield itself from accountability, and reshape institutional structures without public debate or parliamentary scrutiny.

Understanding this context is essential for interpreting the human-rights abuses documented in this report. The absence of an elected legislative body not only undermined the principle of separation of powers but also weakened the state's ability to uphold its international obligations, particularly in areas involving civil liberties and judicial safeguards.

## 1. The Nature of the Political System and the Crisis of Accountability

Throughout the reporting period, Kuwait operated without its central democratic institution. Legislative and public-policy authority was effectively monopolized by the Emir and a government appointed through executive order. This concentration allowed the executive to enact far-reaching decrees affecting rights, citizenship, security affairs, and digital governance without institutional oversight.

The security sector's configuration further complicated the accountability landscape. The Kuwait National Guard—structurally independent of both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior—maintains an autonomous chain of command while "supporting the army as needed." Although this dual structure is theoretically designed to provide balance, the absence of unified civilian oversight over parallel security bodies raises serious concerns. In a context where checks on executive power have collapsed, such overlapping mandates can create opaque zones of authority where abuses go uninvestigated.

## 2. Political Participation in the Absence of Parliament

The dissolution of the National Assembly obliterated formal political participation at the national level. All unofficial political blocs—already constrained by the country's prohibition of political parties—lost their only platform for engaging in debates, scrutinizing public policy, or challenging government actions. Civil society, already operating in a restricted environment, became further marginalized.





These restrictions were intensified by:

- The absolute ban on political parties
- Mandatory prior authorization from the Ministry of Interior for all public gatherings
- The persistent and discriminatory exclusion of the stateless "Bidoon" community from any form of political participation, whether as voters or candidates

The continued political marginalization of the Bidoon—who remain denied citizenship, basic documentation, and access to key rights—illustrates how the government's crisis-management approach deepened longstanding structural inequalities.

### 3. The Erosion of Judicial Independence

Although Kuwait's Constitution emphasizes judicial independence, the reporting period saw alarming legislative and administrative interventions targeting the judiciary. Two developments were particularly significant:

- **The continuation of judicial "Kuwaitization" policies:** This long-standing program, justified as a strategy to nationalize the judiciary, has strained the court system by reducing the number of experienced foreign judges without introducing parallel measures to strengthen judicial capacity. Concerns have grown over whether the program's political undertones compromise judicial competence and impartiality.
- **The issuance of Decree-Law No. 68 of 2025:**<sup>135</sup> Issued in May 2025 during heightened pressure on government critics—including the prosecution of former MP Waleed al-Tabtabaei—the decree reduced the membership of the Supreme Judicial Council from nine to seven members. Crucially, it removed two of the most senior Kuwaiti advisors from its structure. This amendment, imposed by executive decree during a period of suspended parliamentary oversight, signaled a deliberate effort to reconfigure the judiciary's highest oversight body in a manner likely to weaken independent judicial voices. The timing and nature of the restructuring strongly suggest political motives.
- **The Extradition of Political Activist Salman al-Khaldi:** Perhaps the clearest illustration of the judiciary's compromised independence was the January 2025 extradition of

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135

political activist Salman al-Khaldi from Iraq to Kuwait. Celebrated by Kuwaiti authorities as a significant security achievement, the extradition raised profound concerns:

- Al-Khaldi had obtained asylum in the United Kingdom.
- He faced cumulative prison sentences totaling **21** years, primarily for online speech offenses such as "insulting the Emir."
- His nationality had been revoked in April **2024**, rendering him stateless and heightening his vulnerability to abuse.

Political and Judicial Landscape: A Fundamental Transformation		
Event / Measure	Date	Immediate Impact
Dissolution of Parliament and suspension of constitutional articles	May 2024	Complete legislative vacuum; concentration of power in the Emir and executive authority
Decree-Law 68/2025	May 2025	Reduction of Supreme Judicial Council from 9 to 7 members; removal of senior judges; weakening of judicial independence

Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) has voiced grave concern that Al-Khalidi may be subjected to torture given the nature of the charges against him, and that he is unlikely to receive a fair trial in Kuwait amid the continuing erosion of judicial independence.<sup>136</sup> The case underscored how politicized judicial institutions can be weaponized against critics.

The weakening of the judiciary not only undermines individual rights but also erodes the entire legal ecosystem required to protect political and civil liberties—a theme explored in subsequent sections.

## Section II. Political and Civil Rights

The weakening of the institutional framework translated into a sharp escalation in violations of core civil and political rights. State authorities, emboldened by the absence of legislative and judicial oversight, expanded their use of arbitrary arrest, cross-border repression, and cyber-surveillance to silence political dissent.





### 1. Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Isolation

The case of *Salman al-Khaldi* serves as the most emblematic example of Kuwait's increasing reliance on cross-border repression. His forcible return—despite international protection—was accompanied by substantial risk of incommunicado detention, torture, and politically motivated prosecution.

**The gravity of al-Khaldi's case is compounded by three factors:**

- His denationalization, undertaken in April 2024, stripped him of legal protections.
- The charges against him stemmed from peaceful expression, including social-media activity such as alleged "insults" directed at the prince.<sup>137</sup>
- Past allegations of unlawful surveillance by Kuwaiti intelligence suggest that prosecutions may rely on evidence obtained through illegal methods.<sup>138</sup>



<sup>137</sup> Kuwaiti Student Salman al-Khaldi Extradited to Kuwait Following His Arrest in Iraq, MENA Rights Group, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://menarights.org/en/case/salman-alkhaldi>.

<sup>138</sup> Leaks Expose Espionage Case Against Citizens in Kuwait, Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://rawabetcenter.com/archives/114499>.

These combined elements point to a broader institutional pattern in which arbitrary deprivation of nationality, digital monitoring, and vague security laws are used to criminalize dissent.

## 2. Torture, Ill-Treatment, and Conditions of Detention

Concerns over torture in Kuwait's detention facilities intensified during the reporting period. While the March 2025 conviction of two officers—a Colonel and a Lieutenant Colonel from the Juvenile Investigations Department—for torturing minors is a rare positive step toward accountability, it simultaneously confirms that torture remains a systemic problem. The case demonstrated:

- The use of torture to extract confessions<sup>139</sup>
- Institutional failures that allowed senior officers to operate with impunity
- The need for independent monitoring of detention centers

In al-Khaldi's case, these structural weaknesses amplify fears that he may suffer similar abuses, particularly given the political nature of his charges.

## 3. Fair-Trial Guarantees and Judicial Vulnerability

**Defendants in political and state-security cases routinely face:**

- Limited access to legal counsel
- Restrictions on appeal mechanisms
- Courts influenced by executive pressure
- Prosecutions based on broad or vague criminal provisions

The changes introduced under Decree-Law 68/2025 further heightened the risk of political interference. For individuals like al-Khaldi—whose cases rest on speech-related charges—the degradation of judicial independence effectively eliminates meaningful access to justice.

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<sup>139</sup> Kuwait 2024 Human Rights Report, U.S. Department of State, accessed November 29, 2025, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521\\_KUWAIT-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521_KUWAIT-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).



The suppression of political opposition through the courts is intrinsically linked to the broader assault on freedom of expression, examined in the next section.

### Section III. Freedom of Expression, Media, and Digital Rights

The collapse of parliamentary oversight created a legislative vacuum that the executive branch rapidly filled with new restrictions on speech, media activity, and online expression. The government used this period to advance a legal framework aimed at criminalizing dissent and tightening control over the digital public sphere.

#### 1. Restrictive Legal Proposals Targeting Speech

In October 2025, the government announced it was studying a new, comprehensive media law. The proposed law sought to regulate all broadcasting, publishing, and digital content, including influencers and online creators.<sup>140</sup> Key features included:

- Mandatory licensing for all media and online activities
- Fines beginning at 10,000 Kuwaiti dinars
- Prison sentences of up to three years for offenses such as "insulting the Emir"
- Prohibitions on publishing statements by the Emir or Crown Prince without prior authorization
- Bans on criticizing religion, the Constitution, public morals, or releasing confidential communications<sup>141</sup>

The proposal risked imposing a chilling effect on public discourse and ran counter to Kuwait's obligations under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

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<sup>140</sup> New Media Regulation Law Marks a Qualitative Leap for Kuwait's Media System, The Times Kuwait, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://timeskuwait.com/new-media-regulation-law-marks-a-qualitative-leap-for-kuwaits-media-system/>.

<sup>141</sup> Kuwait Considering a Comprehensive New Media Law, Al Tamimi & Company, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.tamimi.com/news/kuwait-considering-a-comprehensive-new-media-law/>.



The passage of Law No. 11 of 2025, amending the Cybercrime Law, further entrenched restrictions. Its vague terminology allows authorities to interpret online activity broadly—turning peaceful criticism into criminal conduct.

## 2. Prosecution of Critics and Human-Rights Defenders

Authorities continued to deploy criminal, media, and cybercrime laws to prosecute:

- Social-media users
- Human-rights activists
- Critics accused of "insulting state symbols"
- Bidoon activists advocating for documentation and citizenship rights

The absence of clear legal definitions for many of these offenses contributes to widespread self-censorship, as individuals fear prosecution for speech that would be protected in any open society.

## 3. Artistic and Academic Restrictions

Artistic and literary freedom remain tightly regulated. The Ministry of Information censors works deemed politically, socially, or morally sensitive.<sup>142</sup> Academic institutions also face internal restrictions, particularly concerning research or classroom discussions related to governance, identity, or political reform. These controls contribute to a broader environment of intellectual repression.

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<sup>142</sup> Kuwait Enacts Stricter Flag Law to Preserve National Symbolism and Unity, The Times Kuwait, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://timeskuwait.com/kuwait-enacts-stricter-flag-law-to-preserve-national-symbolism-and-unity/>.



Restrictions on expression naturally extend to the right to peaceful assembly—examined in the following section.



#### Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association

Civil society organizations, activists, and community groups operated under tightening constraints during the reporting period. The executive deployed legislative amendments and administrative practices to curtail peaceful organizing and community mobilization.<sup>143</sup>

##### 1. Legislative Repression: The National Flag Law (Decree-Law 73/2025)

In June 2025, the government issued Decree-Law 73/2025, amending the National Flag Law. The amendment introduced a new Article 3 bis, which prohibited the display of any flags, symbols, or banners representing:

- Religious groups
- Social or tribal communities

<sup>143</sup> Decree Amending the National Flag Law Issued, Al Jarida, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.aljarida.com/article/65150>.



- Sects
- Factions or informal associations

#### Penalties for violations included:

- Up to three years' imprisonment
- Fines between **2,000** and **10,000** Kuwaiti dinars

Although the government justified the law as necessary to "preserve national unity,"<sup>144</sup> its vague and broad wording gives authorities wide discretion to criminalize peaceful gatherings, community events, and rights-related demonstrations.

#### Key Repressive Laws Enacted in 2025

##### Comprehensive Media Law

###### Proposed (Oct 2025)

Fines starting at **10,000 KD**; up to **3 years imprisonment** for "insulting the Emir"; mandatory licensing for platforms and influencers

##### National Flag Law 73/2025

###### Enacted (June 2025)

Ban on tribal/sectarian flags; up to **3 years in prison**; fines between **2,000–10,000 KD**

##### Migrant-Labor Regulations

###### Implemented (July 2025)

Employer exit permit reinstated; family-visa salary threshold raised to **800 KD**; **120 jobs restricted to citizens**

#### Notable Individual Cases

<sup>144</sup> Decree on Kuwait's National Flag Law Issued, Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=3156789&language=ar>.



**Salman al-Khaldi (Jan 2025):** Forcibly extradited from Iraq despite asylum status in the UK; faces serious risk of torture.



**Mohammed al-Barghash (June 2025):** Arrested after posting a video on X requesting a meeting with the Minister of Interior.

## 2. Administrative Restrictions and Selective Enforcement

Authorities continued to require "advance permission" for all public gatherings. In practice, this mechanism is used to block politically sensitive demonstrations. Public advertising for unlicensed gatherings is also prohibited, including on social-media platforms.

Non-citizens—including the Bidoon—are categorically barred from participating in public assemblies, further institutionalizing discrimination.

- The Case of Bidoon Activist Mohammed al-Barghash:  
On 11 June 2025, Bidoon activist **Mohammed al-Barghash** was arrested after posting a video on the platform "X" requesting a meeting with the Minister of Interior. His arrest exemplifies:
  - The criminalization of peaceful advocacy
  - The instrumentalization of the security apparatus to silence marginalized voices<sup>145</sup>
  - The vulnerability of stateless individuals who lack basic legal protections

The combined effect of these practices is a shrinking civic space where peaceful assembly is treated as a security threat rather than a democratic right.

<sup>145</sup> Kuwait's Crackdown on Stateless Voices: The Case of Mohammed al-Barghash, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.adhrb.org/2025/07/kuwaits-crackdown-on-stateless-voices-the-case-of-mohammed-al-barghash/>.



## Section V. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups

The reporting period witnessed a marked retreat in the protection of fundamental rights for several population groups in Kuwait, including women, the stateless Bidoon community, children, and migrant workers. Across all these categories, state actions and legislative amendments introduced in 2025 reveal a pattern of structural discrimination that deepened pre-existing inequalities and exposed entire communities to heightened vulnerability.

### Women and Girls: A Climate of Contradiction

Kuwait's approach to women's rights in 2025 was defined by sharp contradictions. On paper, the country maintains legislation aimed at combating domestic violence, and in recent years it has taken limited steps toward legal reform. In practice, however, implementation remains weak, inconsistent, and hindered by institutional resistance.

In September 2025, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women urged Kuwait to "**strengthen the enforcement of reforms**" aimed at eliminating gender-based violence.<sup>146</sup> Her statement underscored a persistent gap between legislative promises and on-the-ground realities, where women continue to face significant barriers in seeking protection and justice.

- **Revocation of citizenship rights linked to marriage**

The most alarming deterioration in women's rights occurred within Kuwait's citizenship framework. Two developments were particularly consequential:

- **Abolition of Naturalization Through Marriage (April 2025)**<sup>147</sup> Amendments to the Nationality Law enacted in April 2025 abolished the longstanding

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<sup>146</sup>UN Expert Urges Kuwait to Enhance Protections Against Violence Against Women – End of Mission Statement, United Nations Documents, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/158>.

<sup>147</sup> New Amendments to Kuwait Nationality Law: No Citizenship for Foreign Wives, Kuwait Times, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://kuwaittimes.com/article/12845/kuwait/politics/new-nationality-law-amendments-foreign-wives-excluded/&authuser=1>.

provision that allowed foreign women married to Kuwaiti men to acquire citizenship through marriage. This reform not only eliminated an established pathway to legal stability for thousands of families but also signaled a broader shift toward exclusionary citizenship policies.

- **Mass Revocation of Citizenship from Naturalized Women<sup>148</sup>**

The government simultaneously initiated large-scale withdrawals of nationality affecting "tens of thousands" of individuals. Women who had obtained citizenship by marriage were disproportionately targeted. The consequences were immediate and severe: loss of access to healthcare, employment, banking services, state benefits, and essential documentation. The UN Special Rapporteur described this unprecedented wave of revocations as "without modern parallel."

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<sup>148</sup> Kuwait: Mass Citizenship Revocations Leave Families in Limbo, DAWN MENA, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://dawnmena.org/a-crisis-of-statelessness-inside-kuwaits-mass-revocation-of-citizenship/>.

These measures have effectively dismantled previous legal protections for women married to Kuwaiti citizens and exposed them to statelessness, insecurity, and economic abuse.



### The Bidoon: Escalating Statelessness and Structural Discrimination

The Bidoon community—long subjected to state policies that classify them as "illegal residents"—faced yet another year of acute marginalization. Administrative practices within the Central Apparatus for Resolving the Status of Illegal Residents continued to enable abuse, coercion, and denial of rights.

- **Coercive Documentation Practices:** Credible reports reveal that Central Apparatus officials routinely require Bidoon activists to sign blank documents when applying for essential papers. These documents are later filled in with statements alleging that the individual holds another nationality—an accusation used to justify denial of services or legal residency. Such practices not only violate due-process standards but also amount to systemic coercion.
- **Creation of a "New Bidoon Class" Through Mass Denationalization:** The mass withdrawal of citizenships in 2025 produced a new wave of stateless individuals, compounding an already entrenched humanitarian crisis. As of 4 August 2025, the number of people stripped of nationality had reached 68,553, representing 4.4 percent of Kuwait's 1.545 million citizens.<sup>149</sup> Rather than moving toward a durable solution, Kuwait's policies expanded the stateless population and entrenched intergenerational exclusion.
- **Denial of Access to Emergency Healthcare:** WJWC documented cases in which Bidoon individuals were denied emergency medical treatment in public hospitals due to the absence of valid identity documents. Such refusals constitute a violation of the right to health and place lives at imminent risk.<sup>150</sup>
- **Pressure to Declare a "Substitute Nationality":** Throughout 2025, authorities continued demanding that Bidoon individuals "correct their legal status" by declaring an alternative nationality. Reports again confirmed the practice of

<sup>149</sup> "Let's Make Kuwait Pure Again" ... Roots and Consequences of Citizenship Revocations in Kuwait, TinyURL (original source), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/22pmf65o>.

<sup>150</sup> Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Kuwait, U.S. Department of State, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/kuwait/>.

forcing activists to sign blank forms that later assert foreign citizenship—further undermining their claims to recognition and residency.<sup>151</sup>

### Children's Rights: Regressive Legislation and Unequal Protections

Several legislative amendments passed in 2025 significantly altered the legal landscape governing children's rights. While some reforms aimed to structure caregiving systems, others reinforced discrimination based on gender and parentage.

- **September 2025 Amendment: Mandatory Registration Under the Father's Nationality**

Amendments to the Child Rights Law required all newborns to be registered under the father's citizenship file, even in cases where the father is absent, unidentifiable, or unable to confer nationality.

This measure strengthens gender-based discrimination by formalizing the father's exclusive role in nationality transmission. It also introduced penalties for families who fail to comply.<sup>152</sup>

- **June 2025: Decree-Law 74/2025 Concerning Children of Unknown Paternity**

This amendment transferred authority over children born to non-Kuwaiti mothers with unidentified fathers from the Minister to the Family Custody Committee, a body with expanded powers to regulate care and placement. The law also mandates enrollment in compulsory education. While the provision aims to standardize oversight, it raises concerns about discretionary decision-making and insufficient judicial oversight.

- **April 2025: Limited Citizenship Rights for Children of Kuwaiti Women**

Revisions to the Nationality Law granted restricted citizenship entitlements to children of Kuwaiti mothers and non-Kuwaiti fathers. Although touted as a

<sup>151</sup> Country Policy and Information Note, Kuwait: Bidoons, August 2024 (Accessible), UK Home Office, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/kuwait-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-kuwait-bidoons-august-2024-accessible>.

<sup>152</sup> Kuwait: Cabinet Approves New Law on Child Registration, Lexis Middle East Law, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.lexis.ae/2025/09/10/kwt-cabinet-approves-new-law-on-child-registration/>.

reform, the provision stops far short of equality and leaves these children without the full spectrum of rights afforded to children of Kuwaiti men.

Collectively, these amendments reflect a legal environment in which children's rights remain subordinate to rigid nationality rules and discriminatory administrative systems.

### **Migrant Workers: Erosion of Rights and the Return of Restrictive Controls**

Migrant workers—who form the backbone of Kuwait's labor force—experienced a significant rollback of rights throughout 2025. The re-entrenchment of the sponsorship (kafala) system and new administrative restrictions deepened their vulnerability to exploitation.<sup>153</sup>

- **July 2025: Reintroduction of Employer "Exit Permits"**

On 1 July 2025, a new requirement took effect obligating all private-sector workers to obtain an exit permit from their employer before leaving the country.

This measure marks a return to the most abusive features of the kafala system, severely restricting freedom of movement and enabling employers to exert near-total control over workers' mobility.

- **Additional Restrictions Introduced in 2025**

Other measures imposed during the year include:

- Raising the minimum monthly salary required to sponsor a family to **800** Kuwaiti dinars
- Reserving **120** professions exclusively for Kuwaiti citizens
- Requiring employers, beginning **1 November 2025**, to upload detailed records of working hours and leave days into a new digital platform operated by the Public Authority for Manpower.

While some administrative changes could increase transparency, they do not address underlying power imbalances and may instead facilitate state surveillance rather than worker protection.

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<sup>153</sup> Kuwait's Exit Permit Requirement Puts Migrant Workers at Risk, Human Rights Watch (HRW), accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/15/kuwaits-exit-permit-requirement-puts-migrant-workers-at-risk>.

- **Persistent Labor Abuses**

Despite repeated government pledges, widespread violations remain pervasive, particularly among domestic workers.<sup>154</sup> These include:

- Confiscation of passports
- Withholding of wages
- Excessive working hours
- Restrictions on communication and movement

The persistence of these abuses highlights the absence of meaningful enforcement mechanisms and the failure to implement international labor-rights norms.



## Conclusion

The past year marked one of the most severe declines in Kuwait's human-rights record in recent memory. The dissolution of the National Assembly and suspension of constitutional

<sup>154</sup> 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Kuwait, U.S. Department of State, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/kuwait/>.



articles in May 2024 opened the door to a governance model dominated by executive decrees, opaque decision-making, and diminished institutional checks.

The issuance of Decree-Law 68/2025, restructuring the judiciary's highest body, cemented the erosion of judicial independence. Parallel restrictions—such as the National Flag Law (73/2025) and the proposed comprehensive media law—tightened state control over public space, criminalized peaceful criticism, and curtailed both civic and digital freedoms.

Socially, Kuwait saw the emergence of a new class of stateless individuals, an unprecedented wave of citizenship revocations, and intensified discrimination against the Bidoon. Women's rights deteriorated sharply due to regressive nationality reforms, while migrant workers experienced new mobility restrictions through the reimposed exit-permit system.

**Against this backdrop, the path forward requires:**

- **Immediate restoration of constitutional life**, including parliamentary elections
- **Revision of repressive legislation**, particularly in the domains of expression and assembly
- **Establishment of fair judicial review mechanisms** to restore due-process guarantees
- **Protection of citizenship as a fundamental right** rather than a tool of political control
- **Safeguards for vulnerable communities**, including women, children, the Bidoon, and migrant workers

Only through structural reforms and renewed institutional accountability can Kuwait begin reversing the profound damage inflicted during this period.



## MOROCCO: SILENT REPRESSION, GEN Z AWAKENING

### Introduction

Since **2021**, Morocco has experienced a steady erosion of human rights, unfolding within a political environment increasingly defined by the consolidation of executive power at the expense of oversight institutions such as parliament, political parties, and civil society organizations. This shift has constricted public freedoms and narrowed civic space, turning critical voices and peaceful social movements into targets of heightened security and judicial pressure.

The year **2025** marked a decisive moment in this trajectory. The "Generation Z Protests" of September **2025** reflected a surge of youth-led political awareness, shaped by deep socioeconomic frustration and growing intolerance toward corruption and inequality. Young people mobilized both online and, in the streets, demanding reform and accountability. Authorities responded with a security-driven crackdown, carrying out sweeping arrests of activists and journalists — underscoring the government's reliance on coercive tools to manage social tensions.

These developments further underscored the contraction of Morocco's civil and civic landscape. In addition, the government's normalization agreements with Israel have imposed new constraints on dissenting or pro-Palestinian activities, exposing a stark contradiction between official narratives of commitment to human rights and democratic values and the realities of repression on the ground.



## Section I. Political and Legal Framework

The political and legal environment forms the bedrock upon which fundamental rights are either protected or eroded. In Morocco, state institutions—most notably the judiciary—have been systematically deployed as instruments of repression, silencing independent voices and institutionalizing control. This weaponization of the legal system has gravely undermined public trust in the rule of law.

During the reporting period, these tendencies became increasingly visible. Authorities continued to exploit judicial processes to suppress dissent, staging trials that consistently failed to meet fair-trial standards. The targeting of prominent figures such as historian Maati Monjib and lawyer Mohammed Ziane exemplifies this pattern, with charges framed around vague allegations of financial misconduct or "insulting state institutions." Such broadly defined accusations serve as convenient pretexts to intimidate and penalize critics.

This strategy of codified repression extends beyond the punishment of individual activists or intellectuals. Its deeper objective is to cultivate a pervasive climate of fear, self-censorship, and political caution among journalists, civil society actors, and ordinary citizens.

A sharp contradiction persists between Morocco's official rhetoric in international forums—where the government emphasizes its commitment to reform—and its domestic practices, which reveal an escalating trend of civic restriction. This duality functions as a deliberate tactic: deflecting external criticism while tightening control internally. The normalization agreements signed with Israel in 2020 have further entrenched these restrictions, as criticism of normalization is routinely cast as an attack on the "supreme interests of the state," thereby providing additional justification for criminalizing peaceful dissent.



### 1. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code

In September 2025, Morocco enacted Law No. 03-23, introducing revisions to the Criminal Procedure Code. Officials framed the measure as a milestone in advancing justice and reinforcing the rule of law. The new provisions promise stronger safeguards: closer judicial scrutiny of pre-trial detention, compulsory reasoning for detention orders, and wider availability of legal aid. They also expand protections for individuals held in police custody



and strengthen support mechanisms for victims, with particular emphasis on women and children.

Yet the central obstacle lies beyond the legislative text. Enduring structural weaknesses—chief among them the judiciary's lack of independence—continue to block meaningful application of these reforms. As long as courts remain vulnerable to political influence, the amendments risk being reduced to formal promises rather than genuine guarantees. The gap between law on paper and practice on the ground underscores the urgent need for systemic change to ensure that procedural rights are not only codified but effectively upheld.

## 2. Legal Framework for the Right to Strike

In March 2025, the Constitutional Court reaffirmed the constitutionality of Organic Law No. 97-15 regulating the right to strike. Although the ruling clarified the legal foundation of this right, the law remains suspended pending its publication in the Official Gazette, delaying its practical effect.

## 3. Restrictions on Anti-Corruption Mechanisms

Civil society organizations raised serious concerns over proposed amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code prior to their adoption—particularly Article 7, which restricts NGOs from acting as civil parties in corruption cases involving public funds. Critics warned that this provision would significantly weaken civil society's capacity to combat financial crimes, describing it as "a serious regression" and a direct constraint on transparency and accountability.

These restrictions expose a deeper contradiction within Morocco's judicial reform agenda: while authorities promote advanced safeguards to enhance international credibility, they simultaneously impose legal constraints that limit meaningful external oversight. As a result, the reform framework appears modern on paper but remains largely ineffective in practice, particularly as key provisions are shaped by political considerations linked to major national projects, including preparations for the 2030 World Cup. This instrumentalization of the legal system undermines judicial independence and weakens the judiciary's capacity to protect rights, creating conditions in which violations of civil liberties can proliferate.



## Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

The prevailing restrictive legal framework has manifested in tangible violations that undermine civil rights and compromise the personal security of citizens. Throughout 2025, the deterioration of civil liberties and the erosion of protections for the right to life became increasingly evident. This regression was particularly pronounced in the state's management of peaceful assemblies and in the conditions of detention imposed on political prisoners. Such practices illustrate the systemic gap between formal legal guarantees and their implementation, highlighting the persistence of structural impediments to the effective protection of fundamental rights.

### 1. Excessive Use of Force Against Mass Protests

In late September 2025, Morocco witnessed the rise of the "Generation Z Protests," spearheaded by the youth-led movement GenZ212.<sup>155</sup> Marking the largest nationwide demonstrations in recent years, the protests spread across major urban centers including

<sup>155</sup> Facebook, Profile page, accessed November 22, 2025,  
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61581713843912>.



Casablanca, Agadir, Marrakech, Tangier, and Rabat. The mobilization reflected deep frustration over deteriorating public services, soaring unemployment, entrenched corruption, and the government's heavy expenditure on preparations for the 2030 World Cup.

While the protests began peacefully, human rights organizations reported that security forces responded with excessive force and carried out mass arbitrary arrests, underscoring the widening gap between citizens' demands for accountability and the state's repressive practices.



- **Casualties and Injuries:** Three protesters were killed in the aftermath of the demonstrations, with dozens more injured.<sup>156</sup> Among the victims was Abdessamad Oubla, a 22-year-old film student,<sup>157</sup> and another 25-year-old male protester. In a televised statement on 2 October, a Ministry of Interior spokesperson sought to justify the use of lethal force, alleging that protesters had thrown stones and carried

<sup>156</sup> Amnesty International, "Morocco: Halt Use of Excessive Force Following Crackdown on Youth Protests," October 2025, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/morocco-halt-use-of-excessive-force-following-crackdown-on-youth-protests/>.

<sup>157</sup> H1 News, "Report on Morocco Protests," accessed November 22, 2025, <https://h1.nu/1eJ8R>.

knives.<sup>158</sup> He claimed that tear gas was deployed first to disperse crowds, and that live ammunition was used only "in self-defense."

- **Unlawful Lethal Force:** Amnesty International documented video evidence showing security vehicles "deliberately driving toward protesters" in Oujda on 30 September 2025, resulting in serious injuries. Such behavior constitutes unlawful and disproportionate use of lethal force, inconsistent with any legitimate threat assessment.
- **Mass Arrests:** The Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of 409 individuals,<sup>159</sup> while reports indicated that police detained nearly 1,000 people,<sup>160</sup> filing criminal charges against at least 270 protesters, including 39 children,<sup>161</sup> some of whom remain in detention. Courts sentenced several protesters to prison terms and fines,<sup>162</sup> with many others facing prolonged sentences.<sup>163</sup>
- **Escalation of Security Strategy:** The violent response to the Generation Z Protests signals a shift in internal security strategy toward the militarization of responses to social demands. The resort to excessive force—including lethal methods such as vehicle ramming—against demonstrations rooted in deep economic and social grievances represents a major escalation. This approach appears designed to impose blanket deterrence against any mass mobilization outside state control, reflecting both a lack of trust in dialogue mechanisms and the depth of social discontent linked to corruption and the erosion of public services.

<sup>158</sup> Morocco World News, "Third Person Succumbs to Injury After Gendarmerie Opened Fire in Lqiaa, Agadir," October 2025, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/10/261381/third-person-succumbs-to-injury-after-gendarmerie-opened-fire-in-lqiaa-agadir/>.

<sup>159</sup> Medias24, "Manifestations: Le rappel à l'ordre du ministère de l'Intérieur," October 1, 2025, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://medias24.com/2025/10/01/manifestations-le-rappel-a-lordre-du-ministere-de-linterieur/>.

<sup>160</sup> France 24, "Deaths in Morocco Protests after Clashes with Police," October 2, 2025, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20251002-deaths-morocco-protests-clashes-with-police>.

<sup>161</sup> H1 News, "Report on Morocco Protests," October 2025, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://h1.nu/1eJbz>.

<sup>162</sup> Lakome2, "Generation Z and the Protest Movement," October 2025, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://lakome2.com/generationz/395214/>.

<sup>163</sup> Facebook, Post, October 2025, accessed November 22, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17RgDvTkFC/>.



## Violent Response to Protests – September 2025

("Gen Z 212" Movement)

### Protesters killed

#### 3 individuals

Included a 22-year-old film student and a 25-year-old man.

### Use of lethal force

#### Documented ramming of protesters by security vehicles in Oujda (30 Sept 2025)

Resulted in severe injuries, including one leg amputation.

### Mass arrests

#### ~1,000 reported

Ministry of Interior publicly confirmed 409 arrests.

### Judicial prosecutions

#### ~270 protesters

Included 39 minors; several protesters received prison sentences.

### Victims of systematic violations

#### At least 20 individuals

Investigated or prosecuted for online expression or political opinions during the year.

## 2. Systematic Violations

During the reporting period, Women Journalists Without Chains documented a series of systematic abuses targeting activists and critical voices. These included repeated arrests of individuals for expressing opinions critical of the authorities or their political positions; restrictions on movement that prevented journalists and activists from attending international events or leaving the country; and persistent judicial harassment and

administrative summons designed to exhaust activists and obstruct their human-rights work.

The case of human-rights defender Fouad Abdelmoumni illustrates this pattern: in March 2025 he was sentenced to six months in prison in what rights organizations described as retaliation for his outspoken criticism of the authorities. Data from the Moroccan Coalition for the Support of Political Prisoners indicates that at least 20 people were investigated or prosecuted in a single year solely for their digital activity or political views.

These violations are not isolated incidents but part of a broader strategy aimed at silencing free expression and undermining peaceful opposition — particularly in the digital sphere, which has become a central arena for criticism and accountability.



### Section III. Freedom of Expression, Media, and the Internet

An independent press and unhindered digital space constitute essential channels for public accountability, especially for younger generations. Aware of this, Moroccan authorities have intensified efforts to restrict these spaces, resulting in a marked decline in press-freedom indicators and escalating pressure on journalists and digital activists.



Women Journalists Without Chains documented at least **20** cases of journalists who faced rights violations linked to their professional activities over the past two years. Several cases stood out during the reporting period:

### 1. Judicial Harassment of Journalists and Activists

- **Hamid El Mahdaoui:** On **11 November 2024**, a Rabat court sentenced journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui to **18 months** in prison and imposed a staggering fine of **1.5 million Moroccan dirhams** (approximately **USD 150,000**) for allegedly defaming the Minister of Justice.<sup>164</sup>
- **Fouad Abdelmoumni:** A well-known activist, Abdelmoumni was arrested on **30 October 2024** and temporarily released on **1 November**.<sup>165</sup> In **March 2025**, the Casablanca Court sentenced b to six months in prison and a fine over a Facebook post criticizing Moroccan-French relations and pointing to spyware use.<sup>166</sup> The charges included "insulting organized bodies" and "spreading false allegations."
- **Youssef El Hirsch and Abdelrahman Zenkad:** In **March 2025**, blogger Youssef El Hirsch was arrested and subsequently sentenced in May to **18 months** in prison for Facebook posts deemed "insulting to public officials and organized bodies." Blogger Abdelrahman Zenkad was similarly arrested over online posts.<sup>167</sup>
- **Journalist Hanan Bakour:** Summoned for questioning on accusations of "inciting hatred" after posting online solidarity with Gaza.
- **Journalist Loubna Fallah:** Received an official summons regarding online comments authorities interpreted as "damaging to the country's image."

<sup>164</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2025: Morocco and Western Sahara. January 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/morocco-and-western-sahara>.

<sup>165</sup> ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Morocco: Activist Sentenced for Peaceful Speech." March 27, 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/27/morocco-activist-sentenced-peaceful-speech>.

<sup>167</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2025: Morocco and Western Sahara. January 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/morocco-and-western-sahara>.



## Freedom of Expression and Digital Media

### Violations against journalists

At least 20 journalists subjected to abuses directly related to their professional work over the past two years.

### Harsh sentences - Hamid

#### El-Mahdaoui

November 2024: sentenced to 18 months in prison and fined approx. USD 150,000 for defamation.

### Harsh sentences – Fouad

#### Abdelmoumni

March 2025: sentenced in absentia to 6 months in prison and fined for a Facebook post critical of Moroccan-French relations.

### Harsh sentences - Youssef

#### El-Hirch

May 2025: sentenced to 18 months in prison for Facebook posts.

### "Pardon then Smear" Pattern

July 2025 royal pardon released ~2,500 prisoners, including journalists Omar Radi, Soulaïman Raïssouni, and Taoufik Bouachrine; they were immediately targeted by smear campaigns and harassment by pro-government media.

## 2. The "Pardon Followed by Defamation" Pattern

In July 2025, King Mohammed VI issued a royal pardon covering approximately 2,500 detainees, including journalists Omar Radi, Soulaïman Raïssouni, and Taoufik Bouachrine. All three had been imprisoned on charges labeled as "moral crimes," primarily sexual assault—accusations that rights organizations have repeatedly identified as a systematic tool used to discredit critical voices and erode their professional and social credibility.



The pardon, however, did not translate into genuine relief. Following their release, documented reports show that the three journalists continued to face defamation campaigns, harassment, and intimidation by pro-government media outlets.<sup>168</sup> This pattern of "pardon followed by smear" reflects the use of royal pardons as a cosmetic gesture aimed at reducing international pressure over the detention of journalists and prisoners of conscience, while sustained media hostility and professional marginalization preserve the punitive effect long after their release.

### 3. Internet Freedom and Transnational Repression

Internet freedom in Morocco is classified as "Partly Free" with a score of 54/100.<sup>169</sup> Although the government did not engage in systematic blocking of websites or social-media platforms during the reporting period, the digital environment remains constrained by pervasive self-censorship.

Human rights groups also reported instances of transnational repression, including harassment, surveillance, and threats targeting Moroccan and Sahrawi activists abroad—especially those advocating for self-determination.<sup>170</sup>

The suppression of freedom of expression is inseparably connected to restrictions on the right to assembly. Together, they constitute two facets of the same strategy: asserting full control over the public sphere and silencing dissenting voices.

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<sup>168</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists. "Morocco." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://cpj.org/mideast/morocco>.

<sup>169</sup> Freedom House. Freedom on the Net 2025: Morocco. 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-net/2025>.

<sup>170</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Morocco. July 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521\\_MOROCCO-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521_MOROCCO-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).



## Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association

### 1. Restrictions on Peaceful Demonstrations

The right to peaceful assembly is a core benchmark of any functioning democracy. Yet during the reporting period, authorities prioritized security responses over dialogue, treating social and political demands as security threats rather than legitimate grievances.

In September 2025, cities across the country witnessed large demonstrations led by Generation Z activists. Protesters chanted slogans such as "Dignity before bread" and "No to marginalization," calling for sweeping political and economic reforms, stronger anti-corruption measures, and improvements in education and public services.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains. "بيان صحفيات بلا قيود حول أحداث 30 سبتمبر." September 30, 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.wjwc.org/ar/press-releases-ar/2025-09-30-19-08-31>.

- **Documented Incidents of Violence:**

On 1 October, social media circulated a video showing a dark-colored security vehicle ramming into protesters at a roundabout in Oujda on the night of 30 September, before speeding away. A second video—posted the same day and geolocated by researchers—captured another security truck striking a group of demonstrators roughly 350 meters from the same roundabout, crushing one man against a wall before reversing and driving off.<sup>172</sup>

According to media reports, at least two people were injured in these incidents:

- Wassim El-Taibi (17): his mother stated he required urgent medical care.
- Amin Boussada (19): his father confirmed that his left leg was amputated as a result.

The youth-led mobilization drew wide international media attention, with analysts describing it as evidence of a fracture in Morocco's economic model<sup>173</sup> and the rise of a generation unwilling to accept politics of silence.<sup>174</sup> Coverage underscored a deeper shift in political consciousness among the country's youth.

## 2. Targeting Opponents of Normalization with Israel

Repression also extended to opponents of normalization with Israel. Following the "Carrefour Salé" protests in early 2025, the Rabat Court of Appeals handed down prison sentences against activists who had organized a peaceful sit-in to denounce the sale of products originating from Israeli settlements. Women Journalists Without Chains described these rulings as "a clear violation of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly."

<sup>172</sup> Morocco World News. "Moroccan NGOs Sound Alarm over Legal Reforms Threaten UN Action." June 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/06/221062/moroccan-ngos-sound-alarm-over-legal-reforms-threaten-un-action/>.

<sup>173</sup> Reuters. "Youth-Led Unrest Exposes Cracks in Morocco's Economic Model." October 6, 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/youth-led-unrest-exposes-cracks-moroccos-economic-model-2025-10-06/>.

<sup>174</sup> Le Monde Afrique. "Morocco Cracks Down on Gen Z." October 18, 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2025/10/18/morocco-cracks-down-on-gen-z\\_6746543\\_124.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2025/10/18/morocco-cracks-down-on-gen-z_6746543_124.html).



### 3. Restrictions on Civil Society and Legal Reforms

In June 2025, coalitions of Moroccan NGOs issued warnings about proposed amendments to Law 03-23 (before its full implementation), arguing that the changes were designed to weaken their role in combating corruption and defending public funds. Particular concern centered on Article 7 of the draft reform, which introduces new obstacles and imposes restrictive criteria on associations before they can establish themselves as civil parties in corruption cases. Civil society representatives characterized these amendments as "a serious setback."

### 4. Restrictions on Access to Western Sahara

The restricted access to Western Sahara continues to impede independent assessment of human rights conditions in the territory. Moroccan authorities maintain tight controls over Sahrawi activists advocating self-determination, frequently banning gatherings, harassing activists, and obstructing the work of local NGOs.<sup>175</sup> Allegations of intimidation, surveillance, and discrimination against Sahrawi residents persist, creating a hostile environment for independent civic activity.

International observers—including journalists, parliamentarians, and lawyers—remain barred from entering the territory or are expelled upon arrival,<sup>176</sup> further limiting transparency.

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<sup>175</sup> Human Rights Watch. Morocco/Western Sahara. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/north-africa/morocco/western-sahara>.

<sup>176</sup> United Nations Security Council. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara, S/2025/612. July 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://docs.un.org/fr/S/2025/612>.



## Section V. Women's Rights

Within the reporting timeframe, women journalists and activists were subjected to a dual layer of repression: state-driven judicial and security harassment on one hand, and orchestrated smear and incitement campaigns on the other. These campaigns sought to tarnish reputations, delegitimize female activists, and isolate them socially—ultimately weakening the broader human rights movement.

Women Journalists Without Chains documented multiple cases of gender-specific violations, particularly during protest coverage, where female journalists faced online threats, digital harassment, and verbal aggression. The aim was not only to obstruct their professional work but also to intimidate them into withdrawing from public engagement, especially on sensitive issues.

This pattern of direct attacks was compounded by the proliferation of smear campaigns and incitement, often coordinated through fake social media accounts. Such tactics exposed women activists to digital violence and direct threats to their personal safety. In response,



human rights organizations urged Moroccan authorities to implement UN recommendations by establishing a national protection mechanism for women human rights defenders.

The targeting of women activists is not merely an infringement on individual rights. It reflects a deliberate strategy to weaken the broader human rights and civil society movement by undermining one of its most vital and influential pillars.

### 1. Reforms to the Family Code and Economic Empowerment

Despite the repressive climate, Morocco witnessed notable progress in women's economic and civil rights during the reporting period, especially through proposed reforms to the Family Code (2025). Key proposals included:

- Abolishing the "**taassib**" rule (a principle of Islamic inheritance law that requires female heirs to share property with male relatives, even distant ones) to enhance women's inheritance rights.
- Creating a legal framework to recognize women's contributions to marital wealth and household labor.
- Strengthening judicial oversight over polygamy.
- Advancing gender-responsive economic policies aligned with development agendas.
- Introducing a draft law to expand women's political representation through women-only electoral districts.

These measures represent significant steps toward economic justice and political empowerment for women, though full implementation remains dependent on broader institutional reforms.



## 2. Deficiencies in Women's Health Care

Public health care for women continued to face serious shortcomings. The situation was exacerbated by the recent deaths of several pregnant women in a public hospital in Agadir, which triggered widespread anger and fueled protests.<sup>177</sup>

## 3. Major Public Investments and Sporting Events

At the same time, Morocco is preparing to host the Africa Cup of Nations in December 2025 and to co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup. Reports indicate that the government is allocating approximately USD 5 billion to build stadiums, sports complexes, public transport infrastructure, and new accommodation facilities.



<sup>177</sup> Morocco World News. "Protest in Agadir over Catastrophic Hospital Conditions after Six Women Die under Questionable Care." September 25, 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025.

<https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/09/259286/protest-in-agadir-over-catastrophic-hospital-conditions-after-six-women-die-under-questionable-care/>.



## Conclusion

The period from late 2024 to late 2025 in Morocco was characterized by a form of "legal duality": the state sought to improve its legislative image through judicial reforms and updates to the Family Code, while simultaneously tightening its security grip and criminalizing dissent. This contradiction became most visible in the violent response to the September 2025 protests, raising serious concerns about the sustainability of the government's stated institutional reforms.

Additional concerns include continued restrictions on anti-corruption mechanisms and the persistent "closed rights zone" in Western Sahara.

### **To ensure meaningful human-rights accountability, the report recommends:**

- Immediate investigations into the excessive use of force during protests.
- Protection of freedom of expression, including safeguarding journalists and digital activists.
- Expansion of women's rights, including legal access to abortion in cases of rape.
- Unconditional access for international observers to Western Sahara.
- Removal of restrictions undermining civil society participation in corruption cases.

Morocco's future trajectory will depend on its willingness to reconcile its reformist rhetoric with genuine respect for fundamental rights and civic freedoms.



## YEMEN: LAWLESS AND UNACCOUNTABLE

### Introduction

In **2025**, Yemen remained engulfed in one of the world's most complex and severe humanitarian and human-rights crises—a trajectory that began with the Houthi militia's coup against state institutions in September **2014**. That event marked a decisive turning point in the collapse of state structures, eroding the rule of law and creating fertile ground for grave violations against civilians across all social groups.

Despite the existence of an undeclared truce, Houthi forces continued to commit serious breaches of international humanitarian and human-rights law. Documented practices included indiscriminate shelling of residential neighborhoods in Taiz and Hodaidah, systematic sniper attacks, and the ongoing threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance. Women and children accounted for at least one-third of casualties.

Major incidents in **2025** revealed a consistent pattern of civilian targeting. Among them were large-scale Houthi offensives in Al-Bayda and Raymah, and a devastating explosion in the residential district of Sarf, Sana'a, where rockets and explosives stored inside a civilian building killed or injured at least **150** people. The incident was described as a "full-fledged war crime."

The Houthis also exploited regional escalation to intensify domestic repression, carrying out unprecedented waves of arrests against activists, journalists, academics, and even international organizations and their staff—aimed at silencing society and instilling fear.

Other actors also committed serious violations. In areas under the Southern Transitional Council (STC), arbitrary arrests and crackdowns on peaceful demonstrators were reported. Support from the Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition to armed groups outside state institutions further weakened the internationally recognized government, undermining its ability to protect civilians. Meanwhile, U.S. and Israeli military strikes caused dozens of civilian deaths and widespread destruction of infrastructure.

This dire rights environment intersects with a worsening humanitarian crisis:

- **19.5 million people** require urgent assistance.
- **4.7 million internally displaced persons** live in harsh conditions.
- Only **40% of health facilities** remain operational.
- **6 million children** need immediate educational support.
- Acute malnutrition is widespread.



**Note:** Women Journalists Without Chains emphasizes these figures represent only the minimum documented. Actual violations are likely far higher, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas where access restrictions and information control severely hinder monitoring.










### Violations by Type and Responsible Parties (Jan–Oct 2025)

Violation Type	Total Cases	Visual Breakdown
Direct killings & injuries	680	Houthis 460 (67.6%)    US/Israeli 220 (32.4%)
Extrajudicial killings	46	Houthis 41 (89.1%)    STC 2 (4.3%)    Gov 2 (4.3%)    Others 1 (2.2%)
Deaths under torture	14	Houthis 12 (85.7%)    STC 2 (14.3%)
Sniper victims	24	Houthis 24 (100%)
Landmine victims	98	Houthis 98 (100%)
Large-scale civilian attacks	14	Houthis 14 (100%)
Torture cases	34	Houthis 29 (85.3%)    STC 5 (14.7%)
Physical assaults	52	Houthis 33 (63.5%)    STC 7 (13.5%)    Gov 5 (9.6%)    Others 7 (13.5%)
Arbitrary detention / disappearances	985	Houthis 900 (91.4%)    STC 73 (7.4%)    Gov 7 (0.7%)    JF 5 (0.5%)
Forced displacement / sieges	212	Houthis 197 (93%)    US/Israeli 15 (7%)
City & village blockades	9	Houthis 9 (100%)
Attacks on assemblies	13	Houthis 3 (23%)    STC 10 (77%)
Attacks on humanitarian orgs	14	Houthis 14 (100%)
Looting humanitarian aid	3	Houthis 2 (67%)    STC 1 (33%)
House demolitions	13	Houthis 13 (100%)
Infrastructure destruction	32	Houthis 4 (12.5%)    US/Israeli 28 (87.5%)
Private property destruction	133	Houthis 88 (66.2%)    US/Israeli 45 (33.8%)
Looting property	104	Houthis 93 (89.4%)    Gov 2 (1.9%)    JF 5 (4.8%)    STC 4 (3.8%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,480</b>	—



### Total Violations by Category (Jan–Oct 2025)

Category of Violation	Number of Violations	Visual Share
Grave violations of the right to life (killings, extrajudicial killings, deaths under torture, sniper victims, bombardments, landmines, injuries)	862	 34.7%
Physical assaults & torture	86	 3.5%
Kidnappings / enforced disappearances / arbitrary detention	985	 39.7%
Forced displacement / city sieges	221	 8.9%
Attacks on civil rights, peaceful assemblies, humanitarian organizations	30	 1.2%
Destruction of property & infrastructure (houses, aid looting, public facilities)	282	 11.4%
Large-scale attacks on civilians	14	 0.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,480</b>	<b>100%.</b>

### Section I. Political and Legal Framework

The disintegration of state structures and proliferation of armed actors have systematically undermined the rule of law in Yemen, leaving civilians without meaningful legal protection. This institutional collapse forms the strategic backdrop for all violations documented in this report, where impunity has become the norm rather than the exception.

- 1) **Fragmented authority:** Since 2014, the Houthis have consolidated control over state institutions in Sana'a and northern regions, using them as instruments of repression.
- 2) **Weak government capacity:** The internationally recognized government's ability to protect civilians has been severely eroded. Saudi-UAE-led coalition's support to parallel armed formations—such as the STC and Joint Forces—has fragmented the state's command-and-control structures, created competing loyalties within the



security sector, and ultimately eroded the government's monopoly over the legitimate use of force.

- 3) **Southern deterioration:** Continued STC dominance, backed by the UAE, has accelerated the collapse of security and judicial systems in the south, where its forces operate as "parallel security agencies" engaging in detention, torture, and repression beyond any legal oversight.
- 4) **International dimension:** U.S. and Israeli military operations targeting infrastructure and civilian areas in Houthi-controlled zones have compounded civilian suffering.



This collapsed political and legal environment entrenches a climate of impunity, emboldening all parties to expand the scope of violations—a dynamic explored in subsequent sections of the report.

## Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

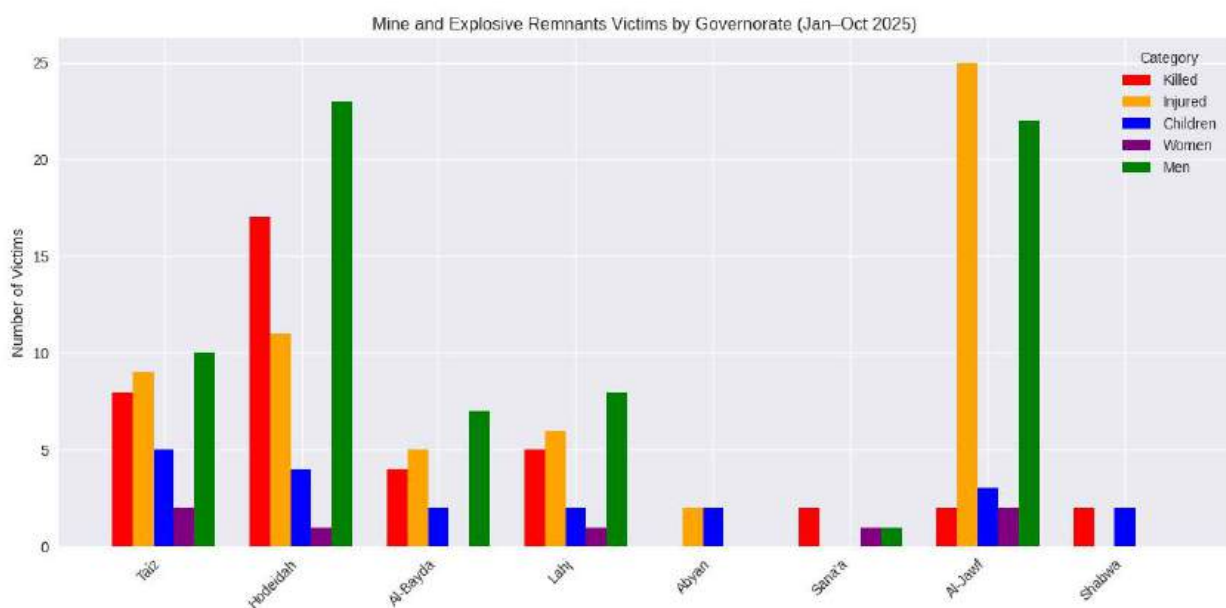
The right to life and physical integrity remained the most directly and systematically violated right by all parties to the conflict in Yemen. Throughout 2025, patterns of killing and physical assaults against civilians continued—both deliberate and indiscriminate—reflecting a complete disregard for international humanitarian law.

### Violations by Houthi Forces

Houthi militias continued to target civilians in a systematic manner, resulting in **178** civilian deaths and **282** injuries, including **66** children and **31** women. The methods employed were diverse, with the following proving most lethal:

#### 1) Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War

- The most deadly weapon, causing **98** deaths and injuries across at least eight governorates.
- Women and children accounted for at least one-third of victims.



- Their indiscriminate nature transforms vast areas into permanent "death fields."

## 2) Systematic Sniping

- Sniper fire caused **24 casualties** across at least four governorates, most prominently Taiz.
- This tactic imposed a climate of constant fear and paralyzed daily life in local communities.

### Total Sniper Victims by Houthi Militia (Jan–Oct 2025)

Governorate	Killed	Injured	Children	Women	Men	% of Total
Taiz	3	16	6	4	9	75%
Al-Bayda	1	0	0	1	0	5%
Lahj	1	1	1	0	0	10%
Al-Dhale	1	1	0	1	0	10%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 3) Indiscriminate Shelling

- Drone strikes and mortar fire on villages and residential areas killed and injured more than **30 civilians**, while destroying homes.

## 4) Extrajudicial Killings and Field Executions

- Journalists Without Chains documented **46 cases**, many linked to raids, abductions, and torture.



## Shocking Numbers

Unprecedented deterioration under the pretext of "national security."

### Total executions

**+1,000 people**

By October 2025 – highest  
since 1989

### Daily execution rate

**4–9 people**

Recently escalated to alarming  
levels

### Arbitrary arrests

**+20,000 people**

During the June 2025  
conflict alone

### Refugee deportations

**1.5 million**

Afghan refugees forcibly  
expelled

### Femicide (2024)

**172 cases**

One killing every two days

### Deaths in custody

**29 prisoners**

First half of 2025 (torture and  
medical neglect)

### Journalists detained

**Dozens**

The highest rates globally

### Compulsory hijab cases

**30,000**

Hundreds arrested; 30,000  
cases processed under "Noor  
Plan" since spring 2024

## 5) Militarization of Residential Areas

- The catastrophic explosion of a secret weapons depot in Sarf, Sana'a, killed or injured over 150 civilians and destroyed dozens of homes.
- The incident constitutes a full-fledged war crime.



#### 6) Large-Scale Attacks

- Operations in Hanakat al-Masoud (Al-Bayda) and al-Mu'adhdhab (Raymah) exemplified a deliberate strategy of terrorizing populations through excessive force, including shelling, sieges, and arbitrary arrests.

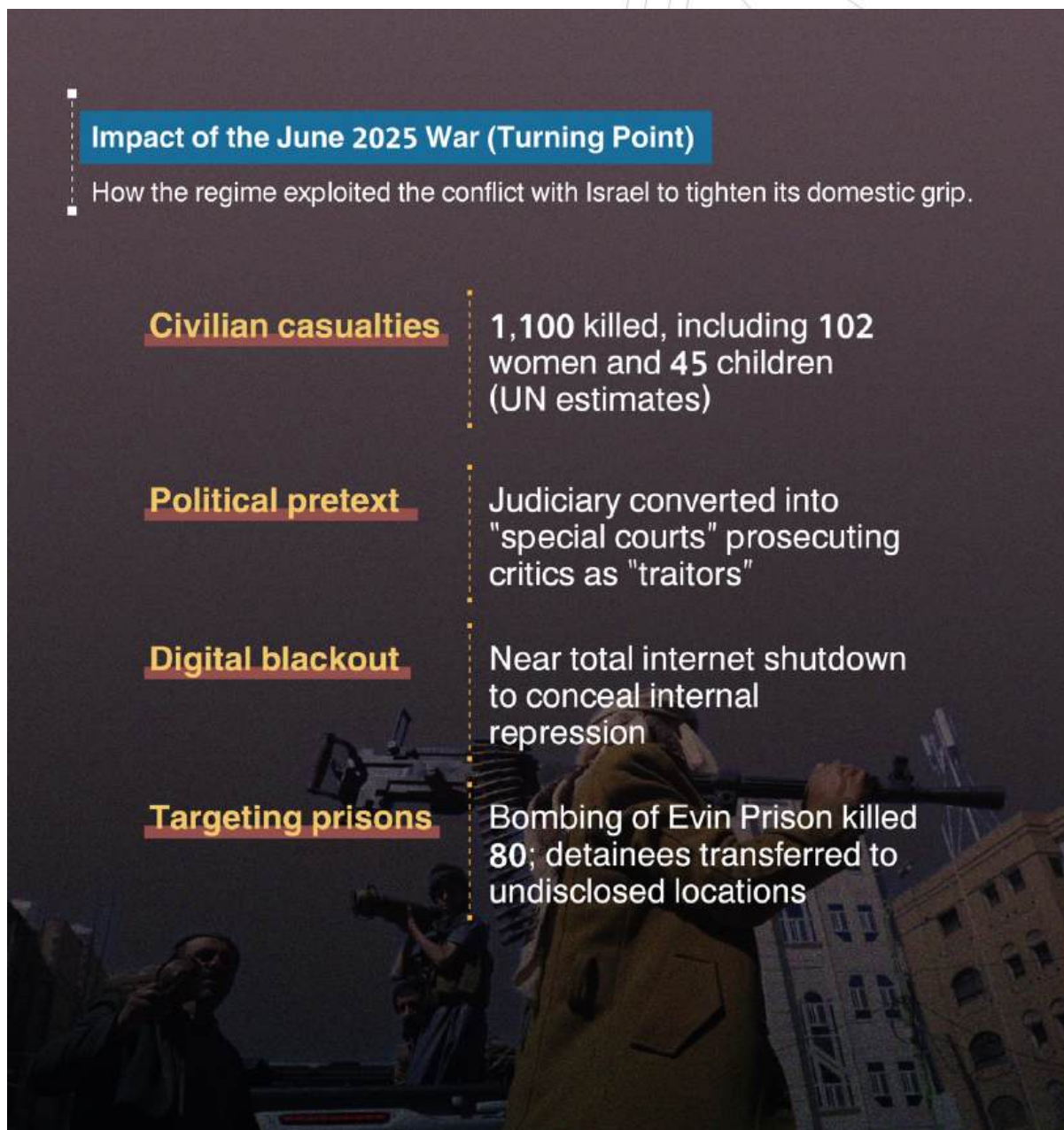
#### 7) Arbitrary Arrests and Torture

- Thousands were detained in Houthi-controlled areas, with some released through tribal mediation or ransom payments.
- Documented 34 cases of torture, many resulting in severe injuries or permanent disabilities.
- 12 detainees died under torture in Houthi prisons or shortly after release, indicating a systematic pattern of torture leading to death.
- These practices, combined with unlawful trials and unjust sentences, reveal a punitive system designed to subjugate opponents and intimidate civil society amid the collapse of judicial safeguards.

#### 8) Forced Displacement Policies

- At least 197 families were forcibly displaced from governorates including Al-Bayda, Taiz, Sana'a, Amran, Ibb, and Hodaidah.
- Methods included direct raids, burning of property, and forced expulsions under armed threat (e.g., the al-Warwari family in Amran).

- Other cases stemmed from large-scale attacks and sieges (e.g., Hanakat al-Masoud, Al-Bayda), or pervasive security harassment (e.g., Mawiyah district, Taiz; multiple areas in Ibb).



**Impact of the June 2025 War (Turning Point)**

How the regime exploited the conflict with Israel to tighten its domestic grip.

<b>Civilian casualties</b>	1,100 killed, including 102 women and 45 children (UN estimates)
<b>Political pretext</b>	Judiciary converted into "special courts" prosecuting critics as "traitors"
<b>Digital blackout</b>	Near total internet shutdown to conceal internal repression
<b>Targeting prisons</b>	Bombing of Evin Prison killed 80; detainees transferred to undisclosed locations

### Violations Against Humanitarian Organizations and Staff

2025 witnessed a tragic escalation of Houthi violations against international organizations and their personnel, particularly UN agencies in Sana'a and other controlled areas.



- 1) These attacks disrupted humanitarian projects, pushing millions toward famine and disease outbreaks.
- 2) Documented 73 violations since January, peaking between August and October.
- 3) Included 34 kidnappings of aid workers (at least three women), raids, and looting of property from at least 12 international organizations.



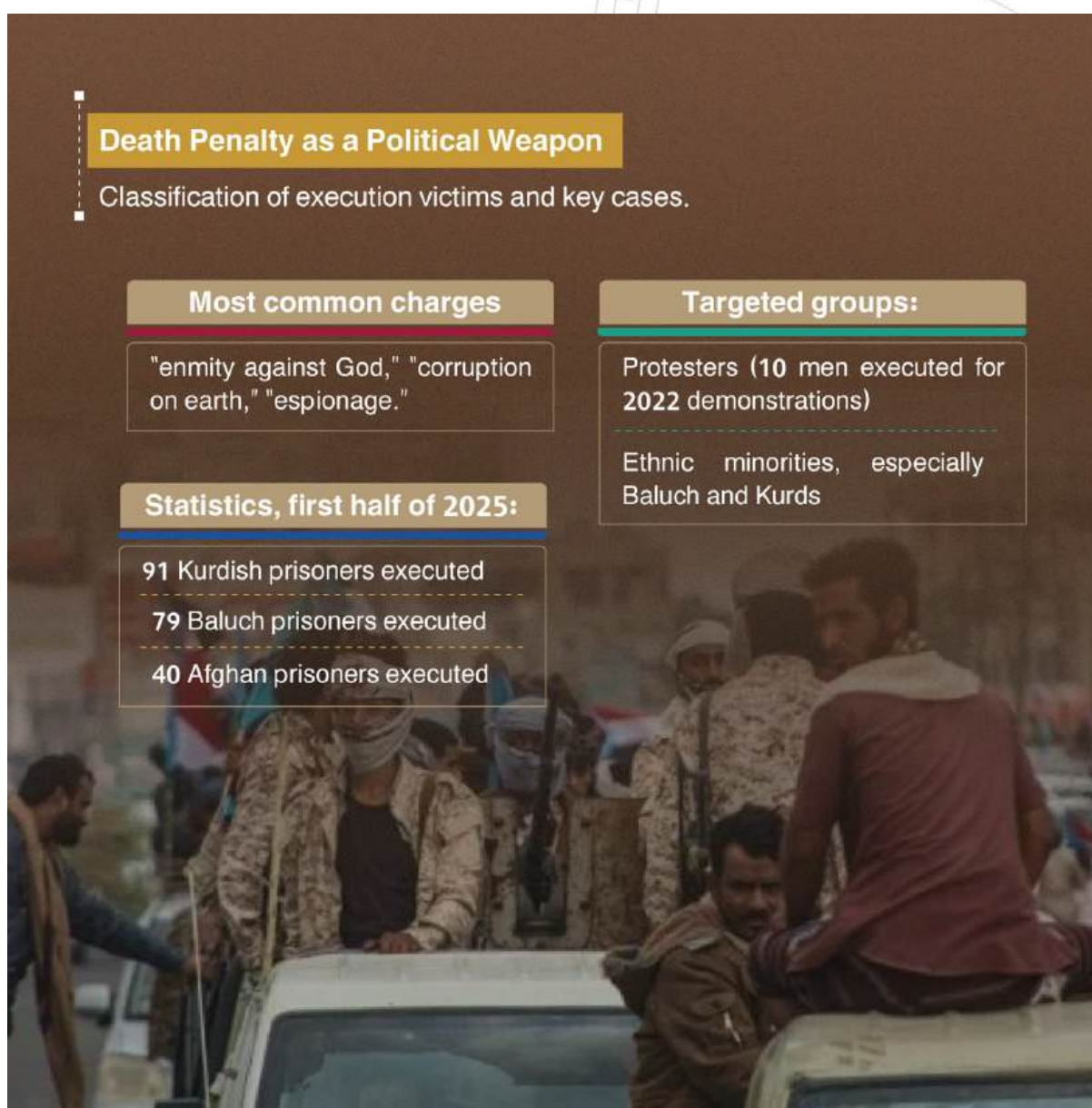
- 4) The death of Ahmed Ba'alawi, a World Food Programme employee abducted in Saada in February and killed after a month in detention, epitomizes the brutal conditions of captivity and systematic targeting of humanitarian staff.

#### Violations by the Southern Transitional Council (STC)

##### In STC-controlled areas, Women Journalists Without Chains documented:

- 1) Two extrajudicial killings in Shabwa and Lahj.
- 2) Two deaths under torture in Security Belt prisons, including the case of political activist Anis al-Jardami, who died in al-Nasr prison after severe torture linked to his political activity.

- 3) Five additional torture cases in facilities such as al-Nasr, Waddah Hall, and Camp 20, involving beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, and prolonged isolation.
- 4) Continued operation of illegal detention centers, interference with prosecutorial and judicial processes, obstruction of release orders, and pressure on judges.
- 5) Documented one case of looting humanitarian aid and four cases of private property confiscation, alongside restrictions on freedom of movement through STC security



### Death Penalty as a Political Weapon

Classification of execution victims and key cases.

Most common charges	Targeted groups:
"enmity against God," "corruption on earth," "espionage."	Protesters (10 men executed for 2022 demonstrations)
	Ethnic minorities, especially Baluch and Kurds

#### Statistics, first half of 2025:

- 91 Kurdish prisoners executed
- 79 Baluch prisoners executed
- 40 Afghan prisoners executed

### Violations by the Internationally Recognized Government and Allied Forces



- 1) Excessive force by government security forces in Hadramawt led to the killing of Mohammed Saeed Yadin during protests.
- 2) In Taiz, extrajudicial killings included the murder of lawyer Abdulrahman al-Najashi by police officers and the assassination of Iftihan al-Mashhari, Director of the Cleaning Fund.
- 3) One civilian was killed by Joint Forces in the western coastal region.

### U.S. and Israeli Airstrikes

These strikes reached the threshold of war crimes, directly targeting civilians and their property.

- 1) Resulted in 97 civilian deaths and 123 injuries.
- 2) Women Journalists Without Chains documented fatalities throughout the year, noting that actual numbers may be higher.

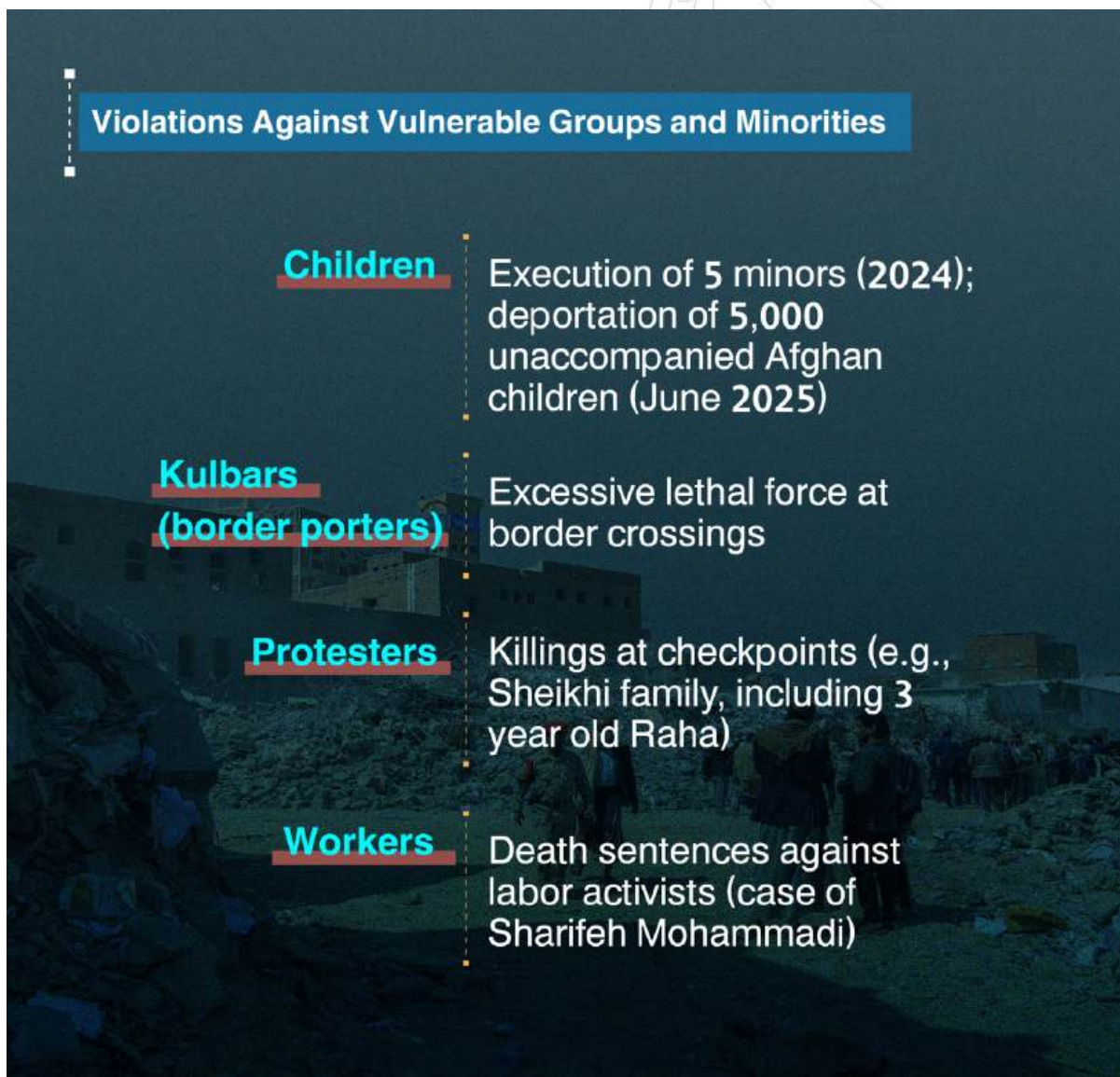
### Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet

In 2025, repression intensified sharply as all parties adopted it as a deliberate strategy to silence dissent, intimidate civil society, and consolidate control over the public narrative. Freedom of expression has effectively become a criminalized act—punishable by abduction, enforced disappearance, or torture.

#### A. Violations by Houthi Forces

- 1) Houthi militias carried out unprecedented waves of repression targeting hundreds of civilians—including academics, journalists, doctors, and activists—across most governorates under their control.
- 2) The intensity of these campaigns rose sharply from May, peaking between July and October.
- 3) Women Journalists Without Chains documented 895 cases of abduction and enforced disappearance, including individuals who merely commemorated the September 26 Revolution.
- 4) Additional practices included systematic phone searches at checkpoints, reinforcing a climate of fear and control.

- 5) The abduction of prominent lawyer Abdulmajid Sabrah from his office in Sana'a exemplifies the grave risks faced by human-rights defenders; his fate remains unknown.



#### B. Violations by the Southern Transitional Council (STC)

- 1) In Aden and surrounding areas, the STC continued to target journalists and activists, preventing coverage of popular protests and arresting individuals for critical opinions.
- 2) Documented 73 cases of abduction, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearance affecting political and human-rights activists, journalists, unionists, government employees, children, and peaceful demonstrators.



- 3) These violations were carried out through night raids and detention in illegal facilities operated by the Security Belt or Presidential Storm Brigades, with detainees denied family contact or legal counsel.
- 4) Journalist Nasih Shakir remains imprisoned by the STC for years.
- 5) In July, journalists Dalil Yusuf and Alaa al-Salali were assaulted by civilians acting under informal surveillance in Aden, taken to a police station, and coerced into signing pledges not to practice journalism without prior authorization—an explicit violation of press freedom.
- 6) In April, the STC launched campaigns of incitement and defamation against journalists in Aden, heightening risks to their safety by fueling hostility toward dissenting voices.

### C. Violations by the Government and Allied Forces

- 1) Journalists Without Chains documented seven arbitrary arrests of activists and journalists in Taiz, Marib, and Hadramawt.
- 2) Joint Forces under Tareq Saleh and the "Shield of the Nation" units abducted at least five activists and journalists over social-media posts, reflecting a systematic policy of restricting freedom of expression.

The silencing of individuals serves primarily to prevent organized collective action, leading directly to broader restrictions on freedom of assembly and association.

## Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association

In 2025, violations extended beyond the suppression of individuals to deliberate attempts to dismantle social cohesion and prevent any form of independent civic organization. Armed actors recognized that peaceful gatherings and independent organizations posed direct challenges to their authority and responded with brutal repression.

### A. Suppression of Peaceful Assemblies

#### 1) Houthi Militia:

- Continued to ban all peaceful gatherings in areas under their control.



- Even minimal criticism was met with abduction or killing.
- Abductions targeted all who participated in or commemorated the September 26 Revolution, including children under five.
- Hundreds of civilians—including activists, lawyers, journalists, writers, politicians, and ordinary citizens—were abducted.
- Repressive practices included bans on assemblies, severe restrictions on freedom of expression and movement, widespread checkpoints, prolonged detentions, phone and property searches, and degrading treatment of women.

These measures reflect a systematic policy of terrorizing civil society and entrenching a culture of fear.

## 2) Southern Transitional Council:

- WJWC documented **10** attacks on peaceful assemblies in Aden.
- Methods included beatings, dragging, and arbitrary detention.
- Women were specifically targeted, coerced into signing pledges prohibiting future participation.

## 3) Government Forces:

- In Hadramawt, government forces used excessive force and live ammunition against demonstrators demanding basic services such as electricity and water.

## B. Violations Against Organizations

2025 was described as a "tragic phase" for international organizations in Houthi-controlled areas.

- 1) WJWC documented **73** violations (as noted earlier), including the abduction of **34** UN and international staff, at least three of whom were women.
- 2) Raids and looting affected the property of at least **12** organizations.
- 3) These actions demonstrate a systematic intent to obstruct humanitarian work and intimidate staff.



The targeting of civic space disproportionately affects the most vulnerable groups in society, who are exploited and instrumentalized as tools in the conflict.

## Section V. Women's Rights and Vulnerable Groups

The targeting of society's most vulnerable—particularly women and children—reflects a profound collapse of social and moral protection systems. Warring parties have instrumentalized these groups, exploiting their fragility to advance military and ideological agendas.

### A. Violations Against Women

- 1) **Civilian casualties:** Thirty-one women were among those killed or injured directly by the Houthi militia.
- 2) **Forced recruitment:** The so-called *Zainabiyat* played an active role in recruiting underage girls, coercing them into security and intelligence tasks, exposing them to sexual violence and exploitation.

**Women's Rights: Gender Apartheid**  
Systematic violations against women and girls.

- Hijab and Chastity Law**  
Up to 15 years' imprisonment, flogging, exclusion from education and employment
- "Noor Plan"**  
Hundreds arrested; 30,000 cases processed against women
- Honor killings**  
60+ cases documented (March–September 2025), with near total impunity
- Economic persecution**  
Closure of 365 shops and organizations for non compliance with hijab rules



- 3) **Targeting activists:** In Aden, the STC targeted female activists, while the assassination of Iftihan al-Mashhari in Taiz stands as a stark example of women in public office being deliberately attacked.

## B. Violations Against Children

- 1) **Child soldier recruitment:** The Houthis continued systematic child recruitment. A UN Panel of Experts documented at least **214 children conscripted** and **75 killed** during combat operations.
- 2) **Mechanisms of exploitation:** Recruitment relied on summer camps for ideological indoctrination, intimidation, extortion, and denial of aid to families who resisted. Children were subjected to dangerous combat training and, in some cases, drug use to maintain control.
- 3) **STC abuses:** The STC committed violations against children, including arbitrary detention and degrading treatment such as forced head shaving.

## C. Forced Displacement

- 1) **Houthi practices:** At least **197** families were forcibly displaced from Al-Bayda, Taiz, Sana'a, Amran, Ibb, and Hodaidah through shelling, sieges, and direct threats.
- 2) **External strikes:** U.S. and Israeli airstrikes caused the displacement of **15** families.
- 3) These violations occurred within the broader context of external military interventions that contravene international law, warranting separate analysis.

## Section VI. Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law

The international dimensions of Yemen's conflict—direct military interventions and external support to local actors—have produced grave violations of international humanitarian law and deepened civilian suffering. International law has failed to provide adequate protection, leaving Yemen a battleground for regional and global rivalries at the expense of civilian lives and property.



### A. U.S. and Israeli Airstrikes

- 1) These strikes constituted serious violations of international humanitarian law, rising to the level of war crimes.
- 2) Documented **308** violations, resulting in **97** civilian deaths and **123** injuries, alongside widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure.
- 3) Targeted civilian assets included:
  - Five residential buildings
  - Three ports
  - Seven power stations
  - Sana'a International Airport
  - A cement factory
  - Civilian aircraft
  - A media institution headquarters

### B. Role of the Arab Coalition (Saudi Arabia and the UAE)

- 1) Strategic support from the coalition to armed formations operating outside state institutions—such as the STC, Joint Forces, and Shield of the Nation units—has weakened the internationally recognized government and undermined its capacity to protect civilians.
- 2) This support entrenched fragmented authority, expanded the scope of violations, and reinforced a climate of impunity, as these formations operate under external loyalties and beyond legal accountability.

The failure of international law to shield civilians from external attacks compounds the erosion of rule of law domestically, creating a bleak environment for human rights in Yemen.

### Conclusion

The human-rights situation in Yemen during **2025** reveals the vast and systematic scale of grave violations committed by all parties against civilians. Documentation highlights the persistence of repression and terror, the devastating impact of airstrikes, and a serious



deterioration of the rule of law, marked by expanding impunity and the continued absence of judicial safeguards.

This reality imposes urgent responsibilities on the international community and all parties to the conflict to protect civilians. Silence in the face of these crimes is no longer acceptable.

#### Recommendations:

- Ensure accountability for perpetrators of these crimes.
- Strengthen mechanisms of international oversight and justice.
- Prevent the continued targeting of civilians and violations of their fundamental rights amid an escalating humanitarian and human-rights crisis.



## IRAN: A PARANOID REGIME WITH A BIGGER CUDGEL

### Introduction

Between late 2024 and late 2025, the Islamic Republic of Iran experienced a marked and alarming decline in its human rights landscape. While the international armed conflict with Israel in June 2025 did not initiate this deterioration, it significantly accelerated it. The confrontation provided the authorities with a convenient pretext to expand state repression under the broad and ill-defined justification of "national security." In its wake, Iran intensified mass arrests, curtailed fundamental freedoms on an unprecedented scale, and deepened its surveillance apparatus.

This report demonstrates that these violations are not individual or sporadic acts. Instead, they reflect a deeply entrenched and institutionalized system of repression that has hollowed out civil and political rights, silenced dissent, and disproportionately targeted vulnerable and marginalized communities.

### Section I – Political and Legal Framework

Iran's human rights crisis is rooted in its political and judicial structures—systems deliberately engineered not only to enable violations but to shield perpetrators from accountability. These institutions serve as mechanisms for consolidating power, systematically transforming the state into an apparatus of coercion rather than a guarantor of justice.

#### 1. Political System: Structures of Domination and Repression

- **Supreme Leader's absolute authority:** The Supreme Leader holds unchecked and overarching authority over all branches of government. This centralization of power eliminates meaningful oversight and renders political decision-making opaque and unaccountable.
- **Guardian Council's control:** Through its sweeping mandate to vet electoral candidates and supervise legislation, the Guardian Council ensures that political offices remain the preserve of regime loyalists. This engineered exclusion



undermines representative governance and suffocates avenues for peaceful political participation.

- **Role of the IRGC:** The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operates not only as a military force but also as an ideological and economic powerhouse. Through its engineering arm, *Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters*, it dominates strategic sectors such as water and energy. Domestically, the IRGC spearheads arrests of activists and suppresses protests, while the Basij paramilitary enforces moral codes and internal security.
- **Impact of June 2025 conflict:** In the aftermath of the clashes with Israel, authorities detained more than 20,000 people, labeling them "traitors," "spies," or "foreign collaborators."<sup>178</sup> This wave of arrests illustrates how peaceful protest, reform demands, and social grievances were reframed as existential security threats—met with coercion instead of dialogue, and force instead of accountability.

## 2. Judiciary: Instrument of Repression, Not Justice

- **Revolutionary Courts:**<sup>179</sup> Function as political tools rather than independent judicial bodies.<sup>180</sup> After June 2025, special courts were established to prosecute alleged "traitors."<sup>181</sup>
- **Expansion of capital punishment:** A draft law broadened the death penalty to cover vague national security charges, leading to a surge in executions after unfair trials—potentially amounting to crimes against humanity.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities Unleash Wave of Oppression After Hostilities with Israel," September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/iran-authorities-unleash-wave-of-oppression-after-hostilities-with-israel/>.

<sup>179</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Iran, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/iran>.

<sup>180</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities Must Halt Executions After Horrifying Increase," October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/iran-un-member-states-must-urgently-press-authorities-to-halt-executions-after-horrifying-increase/>.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, "Iran's Espionage Law: A Dissent-Silencing Tool," 2025, <https://wjwc.org/images/PDF/Irans/20Espionage/20Law/20A/20Dissent-Silencing/20Tool.pdf>.



- **Institutionalized impunity:** Authorities consistently fail to investigate human rights violations or hold perpetrators accountable. Families of victims and human rights lawyers face harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary detention.
- **Systemic denial of justice:** This entrenched failure enables the state to escalate its assault on civil liberties, paving the way for broader repression across all spheres of public life.

**Impact of the June 2025 War (Turning Point)**

How the regime exploited the conflict with Israel to tighten its domestic grip.

- Civilian casualties**  
1,100 killed,  
including 102 women and  
45 children (UN estimates)
- Political pretext**  
Judiciary converted into  
"special courts" prosecuting  
critics as "traitors"
- Digital blackout**  
Near-total internet  
shutdown to conceal  
internal repression
- Targeting prisons**  
Bombing of Evin Prison  
killed 80; detainees  
transferred to undisclosed  
locations

## Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

The patterns outlined here reveal not sporadic misconduct but a systematic state policy aimed at extinguishing independent expression. By weaponizing the June 2025 crisis, the



government executed a sweeping assault on fundamental freedoms and dismantled remaining spaces for opposition. In such a context, comprehensive documentation assumes critical significance, serving both as a foundation for international accountability efforts and as a barrier to impunity for those responsible for grave violations.

### 1. Escalation of the Death Penalty: State-Sanctioned Killing

The reporting period witnessed a shocking escalation in the use of capital punishment, underscoring its deployment as a political weapon to instill fear and crush dissent.

- By October 2025, more than **1,000 executions** had been documented, averaging four per day, rising recently to nine.<sup>183</sup> This represents the highest number recorded in Iran since 1989.<sup>184</sup>
- The death penalty was systematically applied against protesters and minority activists—particularly Baluch and Kurdish communities—on vague charges such as *"enmity against God"* or *"corruption on earth."*<sup>185</sup>
- Trials were routinely summary in nature, relying on confessions extracted under torture.

<sup>183</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "UN Experts Appalled by Unprecedented Execution Spree in Iran with Over 1000 Killed in Nine Months," September 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/un-experts-appalled-unprecedented-execution-spree-iran-over-1000-killed-nine>.

<sup>184</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities Must Halt Executions After Horrifying Increase," October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/iran-un-member-states-must-urgently-press-authorities-to-halt-executions-after-horrifying-increase/>.

<sup>185</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Iran, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/iran>.



- Targeted groups included political activists, demonstrators (ten men executed in connection with the 2022 protests),<sup>186</sup> and ethnic and religious minorities. Many executions were carried out in secret, without prior notification to families or legal counsel.

### Strangling Civil Society and Freedom of Expression

A war on words and humanitarian action.

1	2	3
Press freedom	Digital repression	Civil society organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>45 Iranian journalists abroad and their families threatened</li><li>Tehran Journalists' Association forcibly closed (August 2025)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Deployment of mercenary spyware against activists for the first time</li><li>"Anti-Fake News Bill" introduced, with penalties extending to execution</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Association for the Protection of Street Children shut down (November 2025)</li><li>Founder Hossein Mirbehari arrested and held incommunicado</li></ul>

#### Other forms of unlawful killing included:

- Deaths in custody:** At least 29 prisoners died in the first half of 2025, some under torture and others due to deliberate denial of medical care. In one case, prisoner Aydin Shariatmadar was shot by guards in hospital; authorities claimed he attempted escape, a claim refuted by eyewitnesses.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran, "Scores of Political Prisoners Will Be Executed in Iran Without an International Outcry," August 2025, <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/08/scores-of-political-prisoners-will-be-executed-in-iran-without-an-international-outcry/>.

<sup>187</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Iran HRM Monthly Report: June 2025," July 10, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/07/10/iran-hrm-monthly-report-june-2025/>.



- **"Honor" killings:** More than 60 women were killed between March and September 2025, with near-total impunity.<sup>188</sup>
- **Kulbars (cross-border porters):** Excessive lethal force was repeatedly used against Kurdish porters along border areas.<sup>189</sup>

### Voices Facing Death

- **Bakhshan Azizi and Warisheh Moradi:** Kurdish activists sentenced to death for "armed rebellion against the state" after torture and unfair trials, exemplifying systematic targeting of minority activists.<sup>190</sup>
- **Sharifeh Mohammadi:** A labor activist sentenced to death despite a Supreme Court ruling overturning her conviction, highlighting the judiciary's subservience to security agencies. Her sentence was later commuted to 30 years' imprisonment.<sup>191</sup>
- **Kohkan:** A child bride from the Baluch minority facing execution for killing her husband after years of domestic abuse, a case that exposes the tragic intersection of child marriage, discriminatory laws, and a flawed judicial system.<sup>192</sup>

## 2. Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance

Arbitrary detention remains a deliberate policy aimed at neutralizing opposition and fostering a climate of fear.

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<sup>188</sup> United Nations News, "Iran: Human Rights Investigators Alarmed by 'Surge in Repression' and Spike in Executions Following Israeli Airstrikes," October 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166242>.

<sup>189</sup> Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, "Special Report on Widespread Human Rights Violations in Iran in the First Six Months of 2025," June 2025, <https://hengaw.net/fa/report-statistics/2025/06/article-12>.

<sup>190</sup> European Parliament, "Resolution on the Systematic Repression of Human Rights in Iran, Cases of Pakhshan Azizi and Wrishe Moradi, and Taking of EU Citizens as Hostages," October 29, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/fi/product/product-details/20251029DPU40498>.

<sup>191</sup> Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), "Death Sentence of Labor Activist Sharifeh Mohammadi Commuted to 30 Years' Imprisonment," November 2025, <https://www.en-hrana.org/death-sentence-of-labor-activist-sharifeh-mohammadi-commuted-to-30-years-in-prison/>.

<sup>192</sup> Iran Human Rights, "Goli Kouhkan; Undocumented Baluch Child Bride to Be Hanged Due to Inability to Pay Blood Money," November 2025, <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/8144/>.



- During the June 2025 war with Israel, authorities launched an unprecedented crackdown, arbitrarily detaining more than **20,000 individuals** under the pretext of "national security."
- Targets included activists, journalists, ethnic and religious minorities, and families of victims of earlier protests, reflecting an intent to erase collective memory of resistance.
- Systematic violations of due process were documented: arrests without warrants, incommunicado detention, and denial of legal representation. These practices constitute grave breaches of international law, facilitating enforced disappearance and leaving detainees in a complete legal vacuum.
- Following the Israeli attack on Evin Prison in June 2025, authorities forcibly transferred political prisoners to harsher facilities such as Greater Tehran and Qazvin prisons. In many cases, the fate and whereabouts of detainees remain unknown, amounting to enforced disappearance.

### Stories from Behind Bars

- **Toomaj Salehi:** The arrest of the prominent rapper exemplifies systematic violations. According to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, he was held incommunicado and denied basic rights, punished for his artistic expression.
- **Hiwa Seyfizadeh:** A performer arrested on stage in Tehran, illustrating the severe repression of artistic and cultural expression.
- **Preventive arrests:** Former political prisoners and activists—including Mohammad Banazadeh Amirkhizi (79),<sup>193</sup> Hossein Asmani Nejad (64), and Morteza Asadi (47),<sup>194</sup> a former political science lecturer—were detained without legal basis in a pre-emptive strategy to intimidate society and suppress dissent.

<sup>193</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Arrest of Mohammad Banazadeh Amirkhizi in Iran," August 2, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/08/02/arrest-of-mohammad-banazadeh-amirkhizi-in-iran/>.

<sup>194</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Ruling Regime Launches Coordinated Arrests Targeting Families of Political Prisoners," August 5, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/08/05/ruling-regime-launches-coordinated-arrests-targeting-families-of-political-prisoners/>.



### 3. Torture, Ill-Treatment, and Dire Prison Conditions

Torture is not incidental but integral to state policy, designed to break detainees' will and extract coerced confessions later used in sham trials.

- Common methods included physical and sexual assault, psychological threats, and prolonged solitary confinement.
- Courts relied heavily on torture-induced confessions, absent material evidence, to impose sentences including death.<sup>195</sup>
- Detainees were held in undisclosed locations, placing them outside legal protection. For example, political prisoner Bijan Kazemi and Toomaj Salehi were subjected to prolonged solitary confinement—Salehi for 252 days, far exceeding the international maximum of 15 days.<sup>196</sup>
- Reports confirmed flogging sentences imposed on activists and journalists.<sup>197</sup>
- Statistics underscore the brutality: 29 prisoners died in custody in the first half of 2025, including four from torture and 17 from deliberate medical neglect.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>195</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, "Opinions Adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at Its 101st Session, 11–15 November 2024," November 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session101/a-hrc-wgad-2024-53-iran-advance-edited-version.pdf>.

<sup>196</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Arbitrary Arrests in Iran: A War on Justice, a Humiliation of Humanity," May 27, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/05/27/arbitrary-arrests-iran-a-humiliation-of-humanity/>.

<sup>197</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Impunity for Perpetrators of Journalist Repression: A Systematic Violation of Justice and Freedom of Expression," November 1, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/11/01/impunity-for-perpetrators-of-journalist-repression-a-systematic-violation-of-justice-and-freedom-of-expression/>.

<sup>198</sup> Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, "گزارش ویژه همنگاو از نقض گسترده حقوق بشر در ایران در شش ماه نخست ۲۰۲۵," June 2025, <https://hengaw.net/fa/report-statistics/2025/06/article-12>.



- Prison conditions were characterized by extreme overcrowding,<sup>199</sup> lack of hygiene and ventilation, food shortages, denial of medical care, and deliberate mixing of political prisoners with violent offenders.

## Shocking Numbers

Unprecedented deterioration under the pretext of "national security."

### Total executions

+1,000 people

By October 2025 – highest since 1989

### Daily execution rate

4–9 people

Recently escalated to alarming levels

### Arbitrary arrests

+20,000 people

During the June 2025 conflict alone

### Refugee deportations

1.5 million

Afghan refugees forcibly expelled

### Femicide (2024)

172 cases

One killing every two days

### Deaths in custody

29 prisoners

First half of 2025 (torture and medical neglect)

### Journalists detained

Dozens

The highest rates globally

### Compulsory hijab cases

30,000

Hundreds arrested; 30,000 cases processed under "Noor Plan" since spring 2024

<sup>199</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), "4.2.2. Arbitrary Arrests, Illegal Detention and Prison Conditions," Country Guidance: Iran 2025, <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-iran-2025/422-arbitrary-arrests-illegal-detention-and-prison-conditions>.



### Testimonies of Brutality

- **Mahmoud Sadeghi:** A political prisoner who attempted suicide in solitary confinement due to harsh conditions; after treatment, he was deliberately placed with violent criminals as punishment.<sup>200</sup>
- **Babak Shahbazi:** A political prisoner who, in an August 2025 letter, described repeated torture and being forced to sign fabricated confessions.<sup>201</sup>
- **Mutilation:** In Urmia Prison, authorities amputated the fingers of three men convicted of theft, described by the UN as "state-sanctioned mutilation," reflecting disregard for human dignity.<sup>202</sup>
- **Notorious prisons:** Qarchak Prison in Varamin, housing female political prisoners, is widely condemned for inhumane conditions, including lack of clean water, inadequate medical care, and insufficient nutrition.

### 4. Systematic Impunity

Impunity is not accidental but the direct outcome of legal and judicial structures designed to shield perpetrators.

- The case of former Prosecutor General Saeed Mortazavi exemplifies high-level impunity: despite his direct role in the torture and killing of a journalist, he was never held accountable and later obtained a license to practice law within the judiciary.<sup>203</sup>
- Authorities pursue a deliberate policy of persecuting victims' families and lawyers seeking justice.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Iran, 2025.

<sup>201</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran, "Scores of Political Prisoners Will Be Executed in Iran Without an International Outcry," August 2025, <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/08/scores-of-political-prisoners-will-be-executed-in-iran-without-an-international-outcry/>.

<sup>202</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Iran HRM Monthly Report: June 2025," July 10, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/07/10/iran-hrm-monthly-report-june-2025/>.

<sup>203</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Impunity for Perpetrators of Journalist Repression: A Systematic Violation of Justice and Freedom of Expression," November 1, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/11/01/impunity-for-perpetrators-of-journalist-repression-a-systematic-violation-of-justice-and-freedom-of-expression/>.

<sup>204</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Ruling Regime Launches Coordinated Arrests Targeting Families of Political Prisoners," August 5, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/08/05/ruling-regime-launches-coordinated-arrests-targeting-families-of-political-prisoners/>.



- In July 2025, security forces raided the home of political prisoner *Farzad Joudarzi* twice, assaulting family members, arresting his mother, and attempting to detain his sister Rosita. Officials stated she would remain detained until her daughter surrendered herself, amounting to state-sponsored hostage-taking.<sup>205</sup>

These grave violations of the right to life and dignity are inseparably linked to the suppression of freedom of expression, which constitutes the next battleground for state control.

### Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet

The Iranian authorities regard full control over the flow of information as a vital instrument for maintaining power and preventing the organization of effective opposition. The June 2025 crisis triggered an unprecedented tightening of censorship, with "national security" invoked as a blanket justification for silencing critical voices and legitimizing comprehensive repression of media and digital freedoms.

#### Suppression of Press Freedom and the Arts

Iran remains among the world's largest jailers of media professionals. As one Iranian journalist observed: *"We were literally hunted down; many of us were forced into silence or exile."*<sup>206</sup>

#### Key developments during the reporting period included:

- **Harsh prison sentences upheld** against journalists Niloufar Hamed and Elaheh Mohammadi, who reported on the death of Jina Mahsa Amini.
- **Forced closure of the Tehran Journalists' Association office** on 19 August 2025, described by the association as "a flagrant assault on professional independence and press freedom."

<sup>205</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor, "Ruling Regime Launches Coordinated Arrests Targeting Families of Political Prisoners," August 5, 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/08/05/ruling-regime-launches-coordinated-arrests-targeting-families-of-political-prisoners/>.

<sup>206</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, testimony post on social media, September 2025.

- **Censorship of the arts:** The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance imposed strict controls on all forms of artistic expression, with particular targeting of dissenting artists, exemplified by the ongoing persecution of rapper Toomaj Salehi.

Authorities intensified surveillance following the June 2025 events, merging digital monitoring with physical control. Vehicle checkpoints enabled "surprise" inspections of mobile phones, with arrests based on social media posts. This tactic aimed to eliminate any safe space for expression in both digital and private spheres.

Cybercrime laws were weaponized to prosecute individuals accused of "collaboration" or spreading "false news." State media broadcast coerced "confessions" of targeted individuals—including Christians accused of being "Mossad mercenaries"—raising serious concerns that such statements were extracted under torture.<sup>207</sup>

### Digital Repression and Internet Control

Iran possesses a sophisticated infrastructure for internet censorship, designed to isolate citizens from the outside world and monopolize information flows.

- **National Information Network (NIN):** Enables authorities to disconnect the country from the global internet at will.<sup>208</sup>
- **Internet shutdowns:** During the June 2025 conflict, near-total shutdowns were imposed, facilitating intensified domestic repression beyond international scrutiny.<sup>209</sup>
- **"Anti-Fake News Bill":** Introduced by President Masoud Pezeshkian's government under the guise of national security, the bill's vague definitions grant sweeping

<sup>207</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities Unleash Wave of Oppression After Hostilities with Israel," September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/iran-authorities-unleash-wave-of-oppression-after-hostilities-with-israel/>.

<sup>208</sup> Andy Greenberg, "How the Iranian Government Shut Off the Internet," Wired, November 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/iran-internet-shutoff/>.

<sup>209</sup> Iran International, "'No Way to Pay': Banking, Internet Outage Hit Iranians Amid Israeli Strikes," June 17, 2025, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202506177109>.



powers to criminalize any content contradicting official narratives, with penalties extending to capital punishment.<sup>210</sup>

- **Spyware deployment:** 2025 marked the first documented use of advanced commercial mercenary spyware against Iranian activists, representing a dangerous escalation in state surveillance capabilities.<sup>211</sup>

### Transnational Repression

The regime's efforts to silence dissent extended beyond Iran's borders, targeting exiled opponents through digital surveillance, threats to families inside Iran, and attempted kidnappings and assassinations.

- In 2025, increasing cases of transnational repression were documented, including interrogation, intimidation, and monitoring of families of Iranian journalists abroad. More than 45 media professionals in seven countries faced credible threats.<sup>212</sup>
- A prominent example was the assassination attempt against activist Masih Alinejad in New York, orchestrated by the Iranian government. In March 2025, two men involved in the plot were sentenced to 25 years in prison.<sup>213</sup>

The suppression of freedom of expression naturally extends to the prohibition of physical gatherings that could challenge state authority, underscoring the regime's determination to eliminate all avenues of dissent.

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<sup>210</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran, "Iran: Proposed Cyber Bill Gives Authorities Sweeping New Powers to Block and Punish Online Content," July 2025, <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/07/iran-proposed-cyber-bill-gives-authorities-sweeping-new-powers-to-block-and-punish-online-content/>.

<sup>211</sup> Filter Watch, "Wartime Cyber Crackdown and the Emergence of Mercenary Spyware Attacks," July 22, 2025, <https://filter.watch/english/2025/07/22/cyber-threat-intelligence-report-h1-2025/>.

<sup>212</sup> United Nations News, "Iran: Human Rights Investigators Alarmed by 'Surge in Repression' and Spike in Executions Following Israeli Airstrikes," October 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166242>.

<sup>213</sup> CBS News, "Men Convicted in Attempted Assassination of Iranian Journalist in NYC Sentenced to 25 Years in Prison," November 21, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/nyc-iranian-journalist-attempted-assassination-suspects-sentenced/>.



## Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association

The suppression of the right to assembly is not simply a violation in itself; it is a strategic prerequisite for all other forms of repression. Authorities understand that preventing public gatherings is the most effective way to paralyze organized opposition before it can emerge.

### Use of Lethal Force as State Policy

In the aftermath of the *"Women, Life, Freedom"* protests, brutal repression continued under conditions of total impunity, emboldening security forces to employ excessive force. Instead of investigating violations, the authorities imposed harsh sentences—including executions—on demonstrators. During the reporting period, **Mojtaba Korkor** and **Mehran Bahramian** were executed for their participation in those protests.<sup>214</sup>

The deployment of lethal force to disperse demonstrations and at checkpoints remains an established state policy, demonstrating that deadly force is used as a tool of social control rather than as a response to genuine threats. Documented cases include:

- **Sheikhi family killings:** In July 2025, security forces opened fire on a vehicle at a checkpoint, killing four members of the Sheikhi family, including three-year-old Raha.
- **Baluch women killed:** Two Baluch women, Khan Bibi Bamri and Lali Bamri, were shot dead in July 2025.<sup>215</sup>

### Strangulation of Civil Society

Authorities pursued a systematic campaign against independent civil society organizations, leading to the near-total erosion of civic space.

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<sup>214</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities Unleash Wave of Oppression After Hostilities with Israel," September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/iran-authorities-unleash-wave-of-oppression-after-hostilities-with-israel/>.

<sup>215</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities Unleash Wave of Oppression After Hostilities with Israel," September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/iran-authorities-unleash-wave-of-oppression-after-hostilities-with-israel/>.

- In November 2025, the government shut down the **Association for the Protection of Street Children and Workers**, one of the country's oldest and most respected NGOs supporting at-risk children.



### Strangling Civil Society and Freedom of Expression

A war on words and humanitarian action.

1	2	3
Press freedom	Digital repression	Civil society organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 45 Iranian journalists abroad and their families threatened</li> <li>■ Tehran Journalists' Association forcibly closed (August 2025)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Deployment of mercenary spyware against activists for the first time</li> <li>■ "Anti-Fake News Bill" introduced, with penalties extending to execution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Association for the Protection of Street Children shut down (November 2025)</li> <li>■ Founder Hossein Mirbehari arrested and held incommunicado</li> </ul>

- Co-founder and child rights defender **Hossein Mirbehari** was arrested on 15 October 2025 and remains in incommunicado detention without charge or disclosure of his whereabouts. His fragile health, following chemotherapy, raises serious concerns. Security forces also closed the organization's office and confiscated its equipment, effectively halting its operations at a time when child labor and street children crises are worsening.<sup>216</sup> This measure is widely viewed as part of a broader campaign to dismantle independent civil society.

#### Authorities also continued targeting women's rights activists and academics:

- On 10 March 2025, a wave of arrests targeted women's rights defenders after their participation in International Women's Day events. Among those detained was **Leila**

<sup>216</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran, "Iran Shuts Down Oldest NGO Supporting Vulnerable Children, Detains Founder," November 2025, <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/11/iran-shuts-down-oldest-ngo-supporting-vulnerable-children-detains-founder/>.



**Pashaei**, arrested after speaking out against compulsory hijab and the death penalty for women.<sup>217</sup>

- Swedish-Iranian academic **Ahmadreza Jalali** remains at risk of execution, with the Supreme Court upholding his death sentence in August 2025.<sup>218</sup>

This comprehensive repression disproportionately affects specific population groups already subject to multiple layers of discrimination, compounding their vulnerability and exposing them to heightened risks of abuse.

### Section V. Women's Rights and Vulnerable Groups

During the reporting period, Iranian state policies systematically targeted specific population groups with the aim of subjugating them and reinforcing regime dominance. This targeting has created a system of layered discrimination, where gender, ethnicity, religion, and class intersect to determine the degree of repression faced by individuals.

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<sup>217</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities Target Women's Rights Activists with Arbitrary Arrest, Flogging and Death Penalty," March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/iran-authorities-target-womens-rights-activists-with-arbitrary-arrest-flogging-and-death-penalty/>.

<sup>218</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Over 1000 People Executed as Authorities Step Up Horrifying Assault on Right to Life," September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/iran-over-1000-people-executed-as-authorities-step-up-horrifying-assault-on-right-to-life/>.



## WOMEN'S RIGHTS: GENDER APARTHEID

SYSTEMATIC VIOLATIONS AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.

### HIJAB AND CHASTITY LAW

UP TO 15 YEARS' IMPRISONMENT, FLOGGING, EXCLUSION FROM EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### "NOOR PLAN"

HUNDREDS ARRESTED; 30,000 CASES PROCESSED AGAINST WOMEN

### HONOR KILLINGS

60+ CASES DOCUMENTED (MARCH–SEPTEMBER 2025), WITH NEAR-TOTAL IMPUNITY

### ECONOMIC PERSECUTION

CLOSURE OF 365 SHOPS AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR NON-COMPLIANCE WITH HIJAB RULES



### A. Women and Girls: Institutionalized Gender Apartheid

Authorities intensified efforts to entrench a system of *gender apartheid*, designed to fully subordinate women and girls.

- **Compulsory Hijab Law:** The "Family Protection through Promotion of Chastity and Hijab" law codifies a complex repressive framework across **74** articles, imposing severe penalties—including up to **15 years'** imprisonment, flogging, and exclusion from education and employment—for violations of dress codes. The law obliges



institutions and individuals to report infractions, a measure observers describe as a form of gender apartheid and a systematic war against women's dignity.<sup>219</sup>

- **"Noor Plan" enforcement:** Since spring 2024, authorities escalated enforcement, with hundreds arrested and more than 30,000 cases processed for "improper hijab."<sup>220</sup> Sentences included imprisonment and flogging. Artists were particularly targeted: between late 2024 and early 2025, female performers such as Haifa Seyfzadeh, Zahra Esmaeili,<sup>221</sup> and Parasto Ahmadi were arrested for performing without compulsory hijab.<sup>222</sup> Reports indicate 644 women were arrested in 2024, and 365 organizations and businesses were forcibly closed.
- **Control over women's lives:** September 2025 saw the return of the "morality police," intensified surveillance through public cameras, and confiscation of women's social media accounts to enforce prescribed lifestyles.<sup>223</sup> At least 365<sup>224</sup> organizations and businesses were shut down for non-compliance with hijab rules.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>219</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, "Iran: The Shameful Medieval Law Must Be Abolished," December 19, 2024, <https://wjwc.org/ar/newsar/2024-12-19-08-44-27>.

<sup>220</sup> Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), گزارش دوره‌ای: وضعیت حقوق بشر در ایران [Periodic Report: Human Rights Situation in Iran], 2024, <https://www.hra-news.org/periodical/a-179/#A12>.

<sup>221</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran, "Gender Apartheid in Iran is Crushing Women's Lives and Futures." March 2025. <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/03/gender-apartheid-in-iran-is-crushing-womens-lives-and-futures/>.

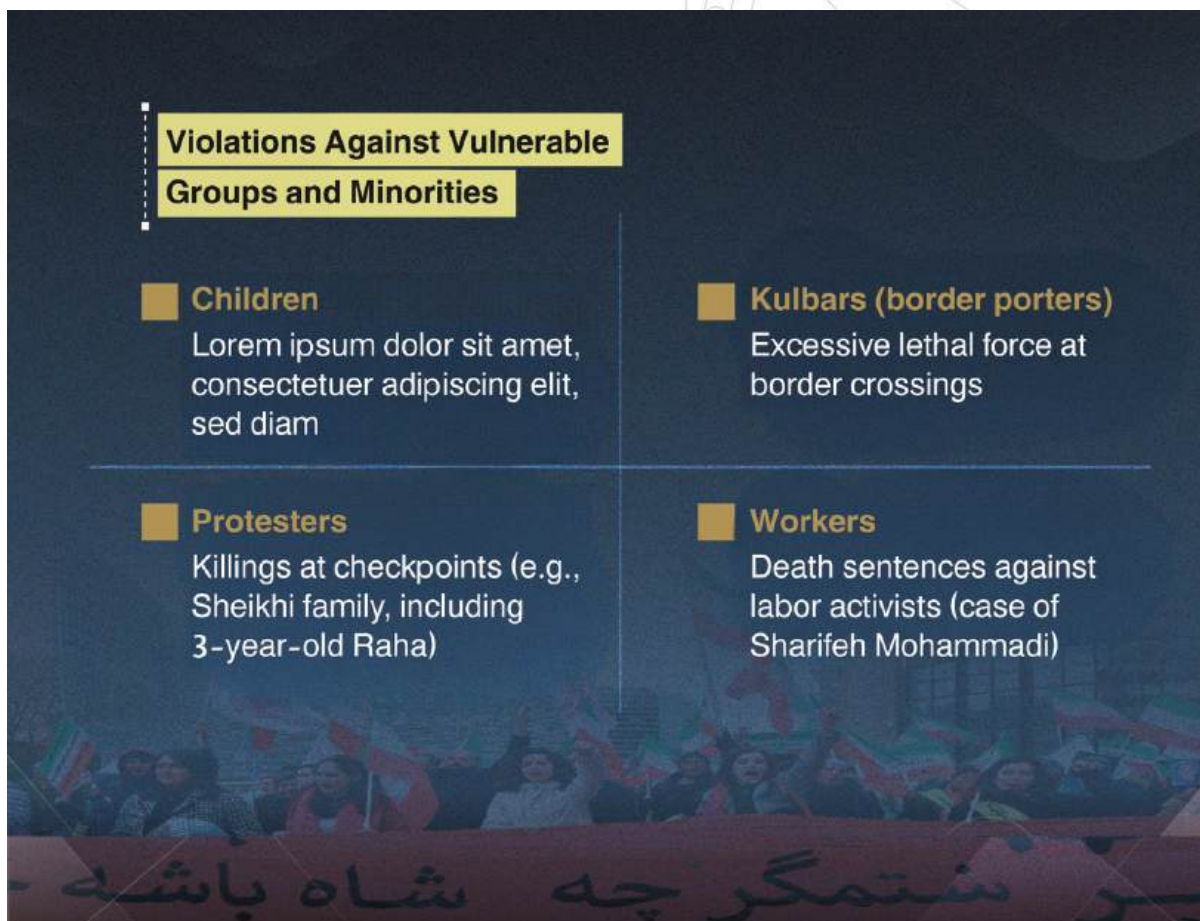
<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Filter Watch, "Wartime Cyber Crackdown and the Emergence of Mercenary Spyware Attacks," July 22, 2025, <https://filter.watch/english/2025/07/22/cyber-threat-intelligence-report-h1-2025/>.

<sup>224</sup> United Nations News, "Iran: Human rights investigators alarmed by 'surge in repression' and spike in executions following Israeli airstrikes," October 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166242>.

<sup>225</sup> See previous report (e.g., Hengaw, Kurdistan Media, Stop Femicide Iran, Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan International, etc.).

- **Legal discrimination:** Women face entrenched inequality in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and travel laws, contributing to an economic participation rate of only 17% despite higher educational attainment.<sup>226</sup>



- **Femicide crisis:** Gender-based killings remain pervasive, with 172 cases documented in 2024—an average of one every two days.<sup>227</sup> Iran's Penal Code entrenches impunity: Article 220 exempts fathers from retribution for killing their children, while Article 630 permits husbands to kill wives suspected of adultery. The case of *Kohkan*, a child bride sentenced to death for killing her abusive husband, epitomizes the intersection of child marriage, discriminatory laws, and judicial failure.

<sup>226</sup> Human Rights Watch, "It's a Men's Club: Discrimination Against Women in Iran's Job Market," May 26, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/26/its-mens-club/discrimination-against-women-irans-job-market>.

<sup>227</sup> Stop Femicide Iran, Annual Report on Violence Against Women in Iran, 2024, April 2025, <https://stopfemicideiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/VIOLENCE-AGAINST-ANNUAL-REPORT-2024-final-5.pdf>.



## B. Children's Rights

Children continued to face egregious violations:

- **Death penalty:** Five individuals executed in 2024 were minors at the time of the alleged offenses, in direct contravention of international law.<sup>228</sup>
- **Forced deportations:** In June 2025 alone, more than 5,000 unaccompanied Afghan children were deported from Iran to Afghanistan.<sup>229</sup>

## C. Workers, Refugees, and Minorities

Other vulnerable groups experienced multifaceted repression, which intensified during and after the Israeli war on Iran:

- **Workers:** The economic crisis, exacerbated by institutional corruption, has severely impacted labor activists. The death sentence against labor activist *Sharifeh Mohammadi* exemplifies the extreme repression faced by this group.
- **Afghan refugees:** Authorities carried out mass deportations affecting more than 1.5 million people during and after June 2025, citing unsubstantiated espionage claims. This created a humanitarian crisis at the border, compounded by deliberate stigmatization in state media. At least 40 Afghan prisoners were executed in the first half of 2025.<sup>230</sup>
- **Ethnic and religious minorities:** Systematic repression persisted against Kurds, Baluch, and Baha'is. Kurdish activists *Bakhshan Azizi* and *Warisheh Moradi* were sentenced to death. Statistics show 91 Kurdish prisoners and 79 Baluch prisoners executed in the first half of 2025. Baha'is were subjected to media vilification and arrests on fabricated espionage charges following the conflict.

<sup>228</sup> Kurdistan Media, گزارش سالانه وضعیت حقوق بشر در ایران, December 2024, <https://kurdistanmedia.com/fa/news/2024/12/88>.

<sup>229</sup> Afghanistan International, "ایران: افغان‌ها را برای کاهش استفاده از یارانه‌های دولتی اخراج می‌کنیم", June 29, 2025, <https://www.afintl.com/fa/liveblog/202506290406>.

<sup>230</sup> Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, گزارش ویژه همین‌گاو از نقض گسترده حقوق بشر در ایران در شش ماه نخست ..., June 2025, <https://hengaw.net/fa/report-statistics/2025/06/article-12>.



## Section VI. Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law

The June 2025 armed conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the United States resulted in catastrophic loss of life and extensive destruction, while simultaneously laying bare egregious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). The following documented incidents illustrate the scale and nature of these violations:

- **Civilian casualties:** United Nations estimates indicate approximately 1,100 deaths, including 102 women and 45 children.
- **Targeting of civilian areas and infrastructure:** Attacks struck residential zones and vital infrastructure, in violation of the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution. Such actions may amount to war crimes.
- **Healthcare under attack:** Twenty-seven incidents of violence against the health sector were documented, including the bombing of Evin Prison's clinic and the killing of 16 health workers.
- **Evin Prison strike:** A direct attack on Evin Prison killed around 80 individuals. Given that the facility housed political prisoners who were not combatants, this strike constitutes a clear breach of the principle of distinction under IHL.

Evidence demonstrates that these attacks violated core humanitarian principles, including distinction, proportionality, and precaution. The deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure and medical facilities may rise to the level of war crimes.

In response to developments in the conflict and Iran's conduct, on **28 August 2025**, European parties to the nuclear agreement reinstated UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. These measures further exacerbated the country's economic and humanitarian crisis.



### Conclusion

The human rights situation in Iran between late 2024 and late 2025 reveals a deliberate and institutionalized system of repression. Legal, security, and economic instruments are systematically deployed against the Iranian people. The June 2025 military conflict with Israel was not an aberration but an accelerant, intensifying the regime's long-standing war on fundamental rights.

Systematic impunity, suppression of basic freedoms, entrenched discrimination against women and minorities, and worsening economic and environmental crises collectively paint a bleak picture of the future of human rights in the country.

**Call to Action:** The international community must intensify pressure on the Iranian authorities to halt these grave violations and take concrete steps to ensure accountability for those responsible. Sustained international engagement is essential to break the cycle of repression and impunity and to safeguard the fundamental rights of all individuals in Iran.



## TUNISIA: NASCENT AUTHORITARIANISM, OLD TOOLS

### Introduction

Between late 2024 and 2025, Tunisia experienced a marked and accelerating deterioration of fundamental rights and civic space. State institutions and public authorities undertook a series of measures that consolidate executive power, neutralize independent oversight, and restrict core civil and political liberties. What began as legal and administrative restructuring has translated into systematic repression: the progressive subordination of the judiciary, widescale use of criminal prosecutions and administrative suspensions to silence dissent, renewed reliance on the death penalty as a deterrent against speech, and coercive measures targeting migrants, civil-society organizations, journalists and women's rights defenders. These developments threaten to entrench a new, illiberal governance model unless the foundations of judicial independence and legal safeguards are restored and repressive decrees are rescinded.

### Section I. Political and Judicial Framework

Judicial independence and constitutionally mandated checks and balances are indispensable to protect human rights. Since the suspension of parliamentary functions in July 2021, Tunisia's executive branch has progressively neutralized constitutional institutions and the judiciary, converting them into instruments for implementing political priorities and suppressing opposition.

A pivotal moment in this process was the promulgation of Presidential Decree No. 35 of 2022,<sup>231</sup> which conferred on the president direct powers to dismiss judges. The decree's implementation culminated in the simultaneous removal of 57 judges—a measure denounced by judicial bodies as tantamount to a "massacre of the judiciary." The resulting consolidation of control over the courts has allowed criminal proceedings to be repurposed as mechanisms of political control rather than being applied as neutral, independent adjudication.

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<sup>231</sup> Human Rights Watch, Tunisia: Arbitrary Dismissals a Blow to Judicial Independence, June 10, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/10/tunisia-arbitrary-dismissals-blow-judicial-independence>.



This takeover of the judicial apparatus was visible in successive mass prosecutions. In the so-called "conspiracy" case, courts conducted collective trials of some **40** opposition figures, lawyers and activists, producing aggregate sentences totaling up to **66** years' imprisonment. A follow-on proceeding—referred to as "conspiracy case 2"—reinforced the pattern of mass trials used to degrade and intimidate opposition voices. International observers and rights organizations characterized these proceedings as perfunctory and lacking essential guarantees of due process.



## The Erosion of Judicial Independence and the Consolidation of Authoritarian Power

### Parliament Freeze

**July 2021**

Marked the beginning of the executive branch's unprecedented concentration of power.

### Decree on Judicial Dismissal

**Decree No. 35 of 2022**

Granted the president unilateral authority to dismiss judges.

### Mass Judicial Firings

**57 judges**

Removed in a single sweep, widely described as a "massacre of the judiciary."

### "Conspiracy Case" Proceedings

**40 individuals**

Group prosecutions targeting opposition figures, lawyers, and activists.

### Cumulative Prison Sentences

**Up to 66 years**

Total harsh sentences issued under the so-called "conspiracy" case.

### Disqualified / Prosecuted Presidential Candidates

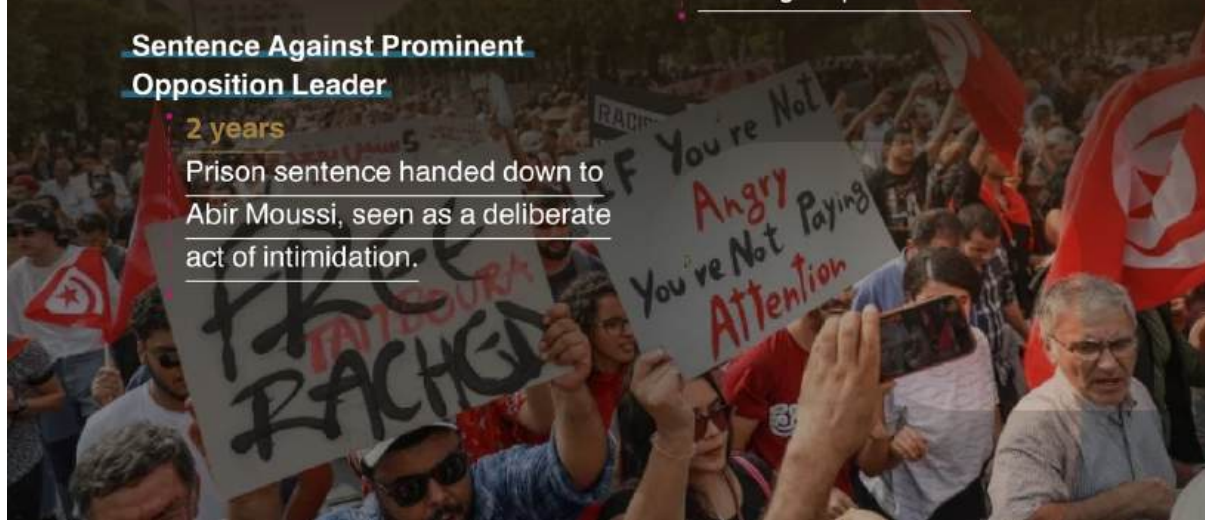
**4 candidates (+ Abir Moussi)**

Sentenced to eight months' imprisonment and barred from running for president.

### Sentence Against Prominent Opposition Leader

**2 years**

Prison sentence handed down to Abir Moussi, seen as a deliberate act of intimidation.



The undermining of judicial safeguards extended into the electoral sphere. Tunisia's presidential election cycle in 2024 was conducted in an environment that fell short of minimum standards for pluralism and competitiveness. Although mid-2025 saw symbolic gestures—such as the release of a number of detained activists—these measures did not



address the structural causes of the democratic backsliding. Instead, authorities pursued an array of coercive tactics that included:

- **Disqualification of candidates:** The Independent High Authority for Elections refused the nominations of prominent figures—including Abdel Latif al-Makki and Mondher al-Zanidi—on procedural grounds despite court rulings ordering their reinstatement.<sup>232</sup>
- **Pre-emptive arrests:** Presidential aspirant Ayachi Zammel was detained prior to the formal announcement of his candidacy on allegations of forging endorsements.
- **Criminal convictions and bans:** Four additional presidential hopefuls, among them Nizar al-Shari and Mourad Masoudi, received eight-month prison sentences and were barred from running. Prominent opposition leader Abir Moussi was sentenced to two years' imprisonment—a clear signal intended to deter potential challengers.<sup>233</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Amnesty International, Tunisia: At Least 97 Arrested as Authorities Escalate Pre-Election Crackdown, September 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/tunisia-at-least-97-arrested-as-authorities-escalate-pre-election-crackdown/>.

<sup>233</sup> Reuters, Tunisian Court Imprisons Four Presidential Candidates, Bans Them from Election, August 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tunisian-court-imprisons-four-presidential-candidates-bans-them-election-2024-08-05/>.

Collectively, these measures have dismantled core judicial and political guarantees, producing a climate of impunity that enables authorities to escalate repression from institutional restrictions to direct violations of individual rights.



**Escalating Attacks on Civil Rights and the Right to Life**

- Total Number of Political Detainees**
  - \* More than **80**
  - \* As of November **2024**, including lawyers, journalists, and activists.
- Maximum Sentence for Online Expression**
  - \* **Death penalty**
  - \* Issued against citizen **Saber Shouchan** (3 October **2025**) over Facebook posts.
- Death Sentences in 2024**
  - \* More than **12**
  - \* Reflects an alarming increase in the use of capital punishment as a tool of repression.
- Total Individuals on Death Row**
  - \* **148**
  - \* Recorded by the end of **2024**.

## Section II. Violations of Civil Rights and The Right To Life

The deterioration of judicial safeguards has been accompanied by an upsurge in severe violations of civil and personal security rights. Arbitrary detention has become a routine instrument to silence critics, with expansive prosecutions targeting politicians, journalists, lawyers and activists.

Following the October **2024** presidential election—which resulted in the re-election of President Kais Saied—security operations intensified. By November **2024**, more than **80** individuals were reportedly detained for political reasons or for exercising fundamental rights; detainees included lawyers, journalists and human-rights defenders.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>234</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Tunisia – Country Chapter, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/tunisia>.

A particularly alarming development is the reintroduction of the death penalty as a tool of state repression. On 3 October 2025, a Tunisian court sentenced citizen Saber Chouchane to death in relation to Facebook posts deemed to constitute an "assault on state security." This ruling represents a watershed: it marks the deployment of capital punishment in response to peaceful expression and establishes a dangerous precedent in which non-violent speech may attract the severest of penalties. Rights groups had already documented more than 12 death sentences issued during 2024, bringing the cumulative number of persons sentenced to death to 148 by the end of that year.<sup>235</sup> The revival and application of capital punishment in this context constitutes a profound erosion of the state's obligation to protect the right to life and freedom of expression.

### Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression and The Press

Restrictions on free expression and press freedom have intensified, with the authorities converting legal and digital spaces into arenas of surveillance, prosecution and censorship. The principal legislative instrument deployed against dissent is Presidential Decree No. 54 of 2022—ostensibly aimed at "combating false news"—which prescribes punitive measures, including terms of imprisonment of up to ten years. This broad, vaguely worded framework has been applied to target journalists, bloggers and activists, contributing to a palpable return to the climate of fear that preceded 2011.

#### Documented indicators of press repression during the reporting period include:

- At least 30 summonses or detentions of journalists since early 2024 (reported by the organisation "Bila Qiyoud").
- Thirty-five recorded field violations against media professionals in 2025, including bans on reporting and harassment (National Observatory for the Defence of Press Freedom).
- Direct action against foreign media: refusal of foreign reporters to film and confiscation of equipment (Reuters, September 2025).

<sup>235</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Tunisia – Country Chapter, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/tunisia>.

- A drop in Tunisia's global press-freedom ranking to **121** (Reporters Without Borders, 2025).

The shrinking of digital and traditional media space has both constrained public debate and facilitated the extension of state repression to other vulnerable populations.



**Systematic Suppression of Free Expression and Press Freedom**

- Repressive Legal Instrument**
  - \* Presidential Decree No. 54 of 2022
  - \* Used to prosecute journalists and bloggers under the guise of combating "false information."
- Maximum Penalty Under Decree 54**
  - \* 10 years in prison
  - \* Severe sentences designed to silence critical voices.
- Journalist Summons and Detentions**
  - \* 30 cases
  - \* Since early 2024, according to Women Journalists Without Chains.
- Field Violations Against Journalists**
  - \* 35 cases
  - \* Recorded in 2025, including obstruction, harassment, and denial of access.
- World Press Freedom Index**
  - \* Rank 121 globally
  - \* Tunisia's decline in Reporters Without Borders' 2025 global index.

#### Section Iv. Freedom of Assembly and Association

From late 2024 through 2025, civil-society organizations faced increasing administrative and judicial harassment. Authorities employed arbitrary administrative suspension orders, prosecutions and bureaucratic scrutiny to obstruct independent civic activity and—in several instances—to criminalize humanitarian and rights-protection work.



In late 2025, a wave of temporary administrative suspension orders affected at least 14 Tunisian and foreign NGOs, each initially halted for 30 days. Four prominent organizations received such orders within a three-week span between October and November 2025:<sup>236</sup> the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD), the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), the independent media platform Nawaat, and the Tunisian branch of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT).

Authorities justified these measures by invoking investigations into "suspect foreign funding" and claims of protecting "national interests." On 21 October 2025, pro-government press reported that the public prosecutor had authorized security units to open probes into foreign financing received by dozens of associations from the Open Society Foundations, citing analyses by the Tunisian Financial Analysis Committee.<sup>237</sup>

The crackdown extended beyond NGOs to environmental activists. Demonstrations against pollution in the city of Gabès in May and October 2025 were met with force, arrests and criminal charges.<sup>238</sup> One young environmental activist, Dali Rtimi, arrested during a peaceful protest in May 2025, faces serious charges including "assault on a public official," "insurrection," and "forming a criminal group," offences that carry penalties of up to ten years under Article 127 of the Penal Code.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Amnesty International, Tunisia: Escalating Crackdown on Human Rights Organizations Reaches Critical Levels, November 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/tunisia-escalating-crackdown-on-human-rights-organizations-reaches-critical-levels/>.

<sup>237</sup> Amnesty International, Tunisia: Escalating Crackdown on Human Rights Organizations Reaches Critical Levels, November 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/tunisia-escalating-crackdown-on-human-rights-organizations-reaches-critical-levels/>.

<sup>238</sup> Politico Pro / E&E News, Violence Erupts During Protests Over Tunisian Phosphate Plant Pollution, October 16, 2025, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/10/16/violence-erupts-during-protests-over-tunisian-phosphate-plant-pollution-00611226>.

<sup>239</sup> The New Arab, Tunisian Activist May Face 10 Years in Jail Over Gabes Protest, November 2025, <https://www.newarab.com/news/tunisian-activist-may-face-10-years-jail-over-gabes-protest>.



## Targeted Civil Society Organizations and Legal Violations

(October 2024 – November 2025)

Organization	Thematic Focus	Date of Action	Legal Justification/ Charge	Violation of Due Process/Rights
Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD)	Women's rights, legal support	Late October 2025	Administrative / Foreign Funding	Arbitrary suspension without legal basis; disruption of essential protection services
Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES)	Social and economic rights	Late October 2025	Administrative / Foreign Funding	Arbitrary suspension; perceived retaliation for support of environmental and social protests
Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR)	Humanitarian relief / refugee protection	Trial opened October 16, 2025	"Aiding illegal entry" (Law 40/1975)	Criminalization of legitimate humanitarian assistance; violation of refugee protection obligations
Nawaat	Independent media	October 31, 2025	Decree Law 88 (suspension)	Silencing of independent journalism; lack of formal notification and denial of appeal mechanisms

### Section V. Women's Rights

Women's rights suffered a compounded impact from the political regression. Structural setbacks in women's political representation—resulting from earlier legislative changes—were compounded in 2025 by direct attacks on the organizations that provide protection, legal aid and monitoring for survivors of gender-based violence.



The suspension of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) in late October 2025 is a striking example.<sup>240</sup> Beyond violating freedom of association, the suspension effectively dismantled key support mechanisms available to survivors — legal counsel, psychosocial support and monitoring of the 2017 law combating violence against women. The paralysis of a central service provider has materially weakened the implementation of

## Targeting Civil Society and Marginalized Communities

### Suspended Civil Society Organizations

#### At least 14 groups

Subjected to arbitrary administrative shutdown orders for 30 days in late 2025.

### Charges Against Environmental Activist

#### Penalties of up to 10 years

Faced by activist Mohammed Ali Rtimi under Article 127 of the Penal Code.

### Women's Rights

#### Weakening of protection mechanisms

Suspension of key feminist NGOs such as ATFD has crippled enforcement of the 2017 Law on Violence Against Women.

### Prominent Organizations Affected

#### 4 major groups

Including ATFD, FTDES, Nawaat, and the national branch of the World Organisation Against Torture.

### Violations Against Migrants

#### Mass forced deportations

Intensified since 2024, peaking in April 2025 during the dismantling of Sfax migrant camps.

<sup>240</sup> APA News, Tunisia: FIDH Condemns Suspension of Two Prominent NGOs, October 2024, <https://apanews.net/tunisia-fidh-condemns-suspension-of-two-prominent-ngos/>.



existing protections and exacerbated gaps in accountability, particularly in the absence of a legally recognized offence of "femicide."

## Section VI. Rights of Migrants and Asylum-Seekers

The treatment of migrants and asylum-seekers provides a revealing indicator of the state of human rights protection. Since 2024, Tunisian authorities have reportedly carried out mass expulsions of migrants toward the Libyan and Algerian borders, in contravention of the international principle of non-refoulement.<sup>241</sup> These operations peaked in April 2025 when security forces dismantled migrant camps near Sfax and forcibly transferred displaced individuals to remote desert locations.<sup>242</sup>

Concurrently, official rhetoric increasingly stigmatized African migrants, framing them as a demographic "threat" and scapegoating them for economic and social grievances. This hostile discourse not only fails to justify coercive return and expulsion practices but also fuels xenophobic violence and discriminatory enforcement on the ground,<sup>243</sup> exposing migrants to a dual risk of state and community-based abuse.

## Conclusion

The documented record for the period under review demonstrates a deliberate and systematic contraction of Tunisia's civic and political space. The executive's neutralization of the judiciary, the instrumentalization of criminal law and administrative measures against independent media, civil-society organizations and vulnerable groups, and the re-emergence of capital punishment for speech-related offences collectively create a trajectory toward entrenched authoritarian governance. This erosion has been reinforced by the repressive application of Decree 54 and escalating prosecutions of journalists, culminating in the arbitrary suspension of prominent human rights organizations such as

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<sup>241</sup> Amnesty International, Joint Statement: Tunisia is not a place of safety for people rescued at sea, October 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/10/joint-statement-tunisia-is-not-a-place-of-safety-for-people-rescued-at-sea/>.

<sup>242</sup> APA News, Tunisia: FIDH condemns suspension of two prominent NGOs, October 2024, <https://apanews.net/tunisia-fidh-condemns-suspension-of-two-prominent-ngos/>.

<sup>243</sup> Human Rights Watch, Tunisia: Migrants Face Abuse and Deportation, August 10, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/10/tunisia-migrants-face-abuse-deportation>.



ATFD and FTDES, alongside discriminatory practices against migrants, which together dismantle the mechanisms of protection and accountability. If sustained, this trajectory risks institutionalizing a new authoritarian order. Urgent corrective measures are required: ending executive dominance over the judiciary, repealing repressive decrees, and reopening civic and political space are essential steps to restore rights and freedoms and prevent the consolidation of systemic repression.



## SYRIA: A LEGACY OF HORROR

### Introduction

In **2025**, Syria stood at a decisive crossroads. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime briefly raised hopes for governance based on accountability, justice, and respect for rights. Those hopes quickly collapsed as entrenched repression resurfaced and violence escalated in the absence of effective authority. Instead of recovery, the post-Assad period unfolded in a fragmented landscape where rival actors intensified an already dire human rights crisis. Forces aligned with the nascent government, remnants loyal to the former regime, tribal and sectarian militias, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and Israeli forces operating inside Syrian territory all contributed to widespread abuses.

This deterioration was not a rupture but the continuation of decades of state-driven coercion. Its most devastating moment came in **2011**, when peaceful protests were crushed, unleashing a conflict that reshaped Syria's social, political, and demographic fabric. The regime's collapse closed one chapter of authoritarianism but failed to secure a stable transition. A persistent security vacuum, proliferating centers of power, and fragile institutions created fertile ground for the perpetuation—and escalation—of violations.

This report documents the most significant abuses recorded in **2025**. It begins with an overview of the political and security dynamics that enabled them, then examines their impact on civil and political rights and on the country's most vulnerable communities. The findings highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive, rights-based transitional framework capable of delivering justice, rebuilding institutions, and safeguarding the dignity of all Syrians.

### **First: Political Framework**

Transitional Syria in **2025** was defined by a fractured political and security order. The absence of a unified chain of command and the splintering of armed forces created conditions in which multiple actors operated with near-total impunity, fueling widespread violations. Conflicts were multifaceted, involving not only the security and military forces of the new government but also remnants of the Assad regime, tribal and sectarian militias,

and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which continued to function outside state structures.

Violent confrontations between these groups were compounded by acts of reprisal carried out beyond formal institutions, underscoring the depth of societal divisions and the enduring legacy of past repression. This fragmented environment provided the framework within which grave and systematic abuses against civilians persisted, illustrating how the collapse of centralized authority entrenched instability and perpetuated cycles of violence.

## Section I Grave Violations of Civil Rights and the Right to Life

The collapse of the Assad regime ended one of the darkest and most systematic periods of state-led repression in Syria's modern history. Yet while the scale and machinery of terror once exercised by the regime have diminished, the fragile security landscape of 2025 continues to fuel grave abuses—particularly against civilians caught between competing armed actors. These violations do not reflect a return to the horrors of the past decade, but rather the difficult, uneven reality of a country still struggling to rebuild institutions capable of protecting its citizens.

### 1. Violations of the Right to Life

Documented statistics reveal that over 3,000 civilians have lost their lives from the start of 2025 through August, including at least 450 children and women. The patterns of rights violations during this period have varied, as outlined below:

#### A. Clashes and Retaliatory Violence

- **Coastal Killings (March):**

The governorates of Tartous and Latakia experienced one of the most violent incidents of the year when remnants of Assad-aligned forces ambushed a government security patrol. The attack reignited old grievances and triggered a wave of retaliatory mobilizations across rival factions. Despite efforts by the new government to contain the crisis, escalating cycles of revenge resulted in more than 1,800 deaths, including 32 medical workers—underscoring how remnants of the former regime continue to destabilize communities.



- **Suwayda Clashes (July):**

Persistent security gaps also contributed to intense sectarian and tribal confrontations in Suwayda. What began as reciprocal kidnappings between Druze factions and Bedouin tribes escalated into widespread armed clashes and property destruction. More than 1,000 people were killed, including civilians, security personnel, members of the Suwayda Military Council, and Bedouin tribes.

## **B. Assassinations**

Assassinations represent one of the most troubling legacies of the transitional period. From January to April, 395 targeted killings by unknown perpetrators were documented;<sup>244</sup> by June, the number had risen to 1,020 civilians.<sup>245</sup> These figures reveal a double failure: state institutions could not identify the perpetrators, and rights groups and journalists were unable to investigate them. This entrenches impunity and allows such crimes to persist. Killings occur either through direct execution or by abducting victims, murdering them, and discarding their bodies.

## **C. Deaths from Torture and Landmines**

Twenty-eight deaths under torture were documented in the first ten months of 2025—responsibility was distributed among several actors: 16 cases attributed to the Syrian Interim Government, 10 to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and one each to remnants of the Assad regime and the Syrian National Army.<sup>246</sup>

Landmines and explosive remnants of war remain among the deadliest legacies of the previous era. In the first half of 2025 alone, 367 civilians were killed by explosions caused

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<sup>244</sup> Alaraby Television, "Assassinations in Syria by Unknown Perpetrators: Figures and Information Revealed for the First Time," May 30, 2025, <https://www.alaraby.com/news/>.

<sup>245</sup> Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), "Documentation of the Killing of 2,818 People, Including 201 Children and 194 Women," July 3, 2025, <https://snhr.org/arabic/>.

<sup>246</sup> .....



by mines planted by Assad forces and other armed groups over the past decade. These remnants continue to pose a daily threat to Syrians resettling in their communities.<sup>247</sup>

## 2. Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance

Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance remain among the most painful, unresolved files. Tens of thousands of people detained during Assad's rule are still missing, including entire families such as that of **dentist Rania al-Abbasi**, arrested in **2013** with her husband and six children.

In **2025**, more than **1,500** new cases of detention or disappearance were recorded across different territories. The SDF accounted for the largest share, targeting critics, opponents, and those refusing conscription. Government agencies were responsible for hundreds more, often citing security concerns or past affiliations.

Despite the release of approximately **24,000** detainees since Assad's fall—an unprecedented breakthrough after years of total opacity—this number represents only about **15%** of the more than **160,000** people believed to have been detained during the conflict. The vast majority remain unaccounted for, reflecting the immense burden carried over from the former regime and the urgent need for a unified national mechanism to address these cases.<sup>248</sup>

## 3. Mass Graves

The post-regime period has revealed some of the most horrific crimes committed by Assad's security services. Dozens of mass graves have been uncovered across the country, containing thousands of unidentified victims. The largest, discovered in **Qatifa** north of Damascus, spans **5,000** square meters and is believed to contain the remains of tens of thousands of detainees buried in deep trenches and concealed under concrete.

<sup>247</sup> Insight Organization, "Human Rights Violations During the First Half of 2025," July 23, 2025, <https://insight-md.org/?p=1374>.

<sup>248</sup> Reports by the Syrian Network for Human Rights.



## Mass Graves and Enforced Detention

### Mass Graves

#### Qatifa Site

The largest grave uncovered to date—about **5,000 m<sup>2</sup>**—believed to contain the remains of tens of thousands of detainees executed or tortured to death, buried in trenches and covered with concrete.

#### Additional Discoveries

New graves found near Mezzeh Military Airport (seven sites holding over **1,000** bodies) and in Deir ez-Zor, Homs, Daraa, and Eastern Ghouta, confirming an organized system of mass killing and clandestine disposal.

### Forensic Protection

Human rights groups, including Women Journalists Without Chains, have called for applying the Bournemouth Protocol to preserve these sites as evidence of crimes against humanity.

## Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance

### Legacy of the Former Regime

The fate of more than **160,000** detainees remains unknown; the case of Dr. Rania al-Abbasi and her six children remains emblematic.

### New Violations

Over **1,500** new cases of arbitrary detention and disappearance were recorded this year across all areas of control.

### Responsible Actors

The SDF is among the principal parties involved, targeting critics, activists, and those refusing conscription.





### Discoveries continued throughout 2025:

- **February:** Seven suspected sites near Mezzeh Military Airport containing over 1,000 victims.
- **March:** Three bodies exhumed near Yabroud.
- **June–July:** Mass graves found in Deir ez-Zor, Homs, and Daraa.
- **September:** About 100 remains uncovered in Al-Atiba, Eastern Ghouta, alongside additional remains in Damascus's Al-Tadamon neighborhood.

Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) urged the adoption of the **Bournemouth Protocol** to secure these sites as critical forensic evidence for future accountability.<sup>249</sup>

### Section II. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Media

Although the fall of the dictatorial regime dismantled the state apparatus that had monopolized information for decades, the media landscape in Syria in 2025 remains profoundly perilous. Journalists and media workers continue to operate in an environment marked by fragmented authority, the absence of enforceable legal protections, and a persistent culture of impunity for attacks against the press.

During the first ten months of 2025, at least **47 violations against journalists** were documented across the country. These included **3 killings, 28 injuries, 13 arrests and detentions, and 3 cases of threats, intimidation, or obstruction of coverage.**

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<sup>249</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, "Syria: Mass Graves Serve as Critical Evidence of the Atrocities Committed by the Assad Regime," December 2024.



## Targeting Media Freedom and Journalists

Syria remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. In the first ten months of the year, 47 violations were documented, including killings, injuries, arrests, and enforced disappearances. Since 2011, 725 media workers have been killed and 486 remain missing.

1

### Killings (3)

- Mohammad Khaiti (disappeared, later found dead)
- Sari Majid al-Shoufi (killed while covering clashes)
- Hassan al-Zoubi (shot by a sniper on assignment)

2

### Arrests and Detentions (13)

- Hiba Koussa tortured in SDF custody before release
- Aya Hamidi still forcibly disappeared
- Foreign and local journalists detained by Israeli occupation forces in Quneitra

3

### Injuries (28)

- Seven journalists assaulted and beaten in Suwayda
- Four others injured in direct Israeli targeting in Quneitra countryside

### The year's most notable cases include:

- **Mohammad Khaiti**, whose body was discovered in Qalamoun in May, days after he disappeared.
- **Sari Majid al-Shoufi**, a photographer for the *Suwayda 24* network, killed in July while documenting local clashes.



- **Hassan al-Zoubi**, director of the Daraa Governorate Media Office, who was shot dead by sniper fire the same month while on assignment.

Journalists were also subjected to physical assaults and attempts to silence their reporting. Seven media workers, including correspondents for international outlets, were beaten in **Suwayda** in May while covering protests. In **Quneitra**, four journalists were injured in a direct Israeli attack on the countryside, underscoring the risks posed by foreign military operations inside Syrian territory.

Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances also continued to target journalists. Thirteen cases of detention were recorded, most notably:

- The detention of **French journalist Sylvain Mercade** and lawyer **Mohammed Fayyad** in Quneitra on January 8 by Israeli occupying forces.
- The arrest of journalists **Nader Dabbou** and **Nour Golan** in June under similar circumstances.
- The detention of journalist **Hiba Koussa** in Raqqa, where she was subjected to physical and psychological torture before her release in July. Her colleague **Aya Hamidi** remains forcibly disappeared.
- The arrest of journalist **Nour Suleiman** in Damascus following an illegal home raid and summons, before being released after official intervention.

While today's violations stem from a fractured transitional context rather than a centralized state policy of repression, their impact remains severe. The lack of mechanisms to investigate attacks on journalists, prosecute perpetrators, or guarantee safe reporting conditions continues to undermine public trust and obstruct the development of a free and independent press.

These recent abuses also compound a catastrophic legacy. Since 2011, at least **725 media workers have been killed, 559 of them at the hands of Assad regime forces**, making Syria one of the deadliest countries in the world for journalists. The fate of **486 journalists** remains



unknown, forcibly disappeared in regime prisons or in areas previously controlled by extremist groups.<sup>250</sup>

As Syria attempts to move beyond the era of absolute suppression, safeguarding freedom of opinion and expression remains one of the most urgent challenges. A genuine democratic transition cannot be realized without protecting the voices of those who document events, expose violations, and serve as the public's window to truth.

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<sup>250</sup> Syrian Network for Human Rights, "The Role of the Press in the Transitional Justice Process in Syria After Years of Repression and Intimidation," October 30, 2025.



## Grave Violations of the Right to Life (January - August 2025)

### Civilian Killings

Over 3,000 civilians, including more than 450 children and women.

Resulting from clashes, reprisals, and targeted assassinations.

### Coastal Massacres

More than 1,800 people killed in Tartous and Latakia (March).

Related to reprisals among remnants of the regime, government forces, and other factions.

### Suwayda Clashes

Over 1,000 fatalities (July).

Driven by intense tribal and sectarian conflicts due to a prevailing security vacuum.

### Assassinations

1,020 civilians documented in the first half of 2025.

Characterized as extrajudicial killings, with state institutions failing to conduct investigations.

### Deaths Due to Torture

28 documented deaths from torture in the first ten months.

16 cases attributed to transitional government bodies;

10 cases linked to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

### Landmine Victims

367 civilians killed in the first half of 2025.

Ongoing threat from war remnants





### Section III. Freedom of Assembly and Association

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association is essential for any society seeking to transition toward democracy, accountability, and inclusive public participation. Yet in Syria in **2025**, these freedoms remain severely constrained. The unstable security environment, the proliferation of armed actors, and the absence of coherent political and legal frameworks collectively hinder citizens' ability to gather, organize, or participate in civic life without fear.

Although specific incidents of violations were not documented in the available source material, the broader context leaves little doubt that Syrians continue to face substantial obstacles to exercising these rights. Persistent insecurity, threats from armed groups, and sporadic clashes discourage public gatherings, while the lack of state capacity to guarantee protection further heightens the risks associated with peaceful assembly. Civil society organizations, already weakened by years of conflict and repression, struggle to rebuild in an atmosphere marked by uncertainty, intimidation, and the absence of stable institutional backing.

This restrictive climate disproportionately affects marginalized groups, particularly women, whose participation in public life is undermined not only by insecurity but also by targeted violence and systemic discrimination.

### Section IV. Women's Rights

Syrian women continue to endure grave and multifaceted violations that reflect both the enduring legacy of past repression and the dangers inherent in the current transitional phase. Despite the fall of the authoritarian regime that once systematically targeted women activists, detainees, and human rights defenders, the prevailing chaos and fragmented security landscape leave women exposed to escalating violence, discrimination, and diminished protections.

One of the most horrific crimes recorded in **2025** occurred on **3 February** in **Manbij**, when a car bomb detonated beside a truck carrying female farm workers. The explosion killed **21 women and children** and injured at least **20 others**. The deliberate targeting of civilian

women in this manner may constitute a war crime and illustrates the extreme vulnerability women continue to face in conflict-affected areas.<sup>251</sup>

Women also suffer from violations that mirror broader patterns of abuse documented throughout the conflict:

- **Enforced Disappearance:**

The ongoing disappearance of **Dr. Rania al-Abbasi**, her husband, and six children remains emblematic of the tens of thousands of cases of forced disappearance committed under the former regime. Their fate, still unknown more than a decade later, symbolizes the enduring trauma borne by Syrian families.

- **Arrest and Torture:**

Female journalists and activists continue to be targeted across areas controlled by various authorities.

- **Heba Koussa** was detained in Raqqa, where she was subjected to physical and psychological torture before her release.
- **Aya Hamidi**, her colleague, remains forcibly disappeared.
- **Nour Suleiman** was arrested following an illegal raid on her home in Damascus before being released after official intervention.

- **Killings:**

Women were among the more than **3,000** civilians killed in **2025**. The **Sahel massacre**, which claimed over **1,800** lives, included a significant number of civilian victims, among them women and medical personnel.

The suffering of Syrian women is further compounded by displacement. Millions of internally displaced persons and refugees—many of them women heading households—grapple with hardships ranging from lack of documentation and legal protection to limited access to healthcare, livelihood opportunities, and safe living conditions. Their plight underscores the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies and accountability mechanisms that recognize the disproportionate burdens borne by women across the Syrian conflict.

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<sup>251</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, "Syria: Car Bomb Kills and Injures 37 Female Farm Workers," February 2025.



## Sixth: The Refugee and Displaced Persons Crisis

The year 2025 marked a defining shift in the Syrian displacement landscape. Following the collapse of the Assad regime, Syria witnessed what the UNHCR described as *"the largest return movement since the beginning of the crisis."* Nearly 3 million refugees and internally displaced persons returned to their areas of origin, including 485,000 voluntary returns documented this year alone. Yet despite this significant movement, more than 6 million Syrians remain refugees abroad, and over 5 million continue to live in internal displacement.<sup>252</sup>

Most returnees did not find conditions that could be described as safe, dignified, or sustainable. Instead, they encountered a bleak and often dangerous reality:

- Severely damaged infrastructure and a near-total absence of basic services, particularly electricity and water.
- Persistent security threats due to the widespread presence of weapons, explosive remnants, and landmines.
- A lack of functioning state institutions capable of ensuring protection or facilitating reintegration.
- Thousands forced to settle in makeshift shelters, partially collapsed homes, or informal camps.

In neighboring countries—especially Lebanon, which hosts approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees—restrictive policies intensified. Forced evictions, increased raids, and tightened residency rules pushed thousands to return under duress. These circumstances raise serious concerns about coerced returns, which constitute a violation of the principle of non-refoulement under international law. The overall picture indicates that many return movements were not the result of free and informed choice, but rather pressures linked to deteriorating political and economic conditions in host states.

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<sup>252</sup> United Nations News, September 2, 2025, reporting that more than 1.2 million people had returned to Syria from abroad and an estimated 1.7 million internally displaced persons had returned following the fall of Assad.



### Seventh: Israeli Violations in Syrian Territory

The instability gripping Syria in 2025 has been compounded by escalating violations of Syrian sovereignty committed by Israeli occupation forces. These attacks—which include repeated airstrikes, ground incursions, and the targeting of civilian areas—represent clear violations of the UN Charter and core rules of international humanitarian law. They also create a distinct pattern of human rights abuses separate from internal Syrian dynamics.

Since the beginning of the year, dozens of military operations have struck the governorates of Quneitra, Daraa, Rural Damascus, and Hama. These actions have resulted in civilian casualties, displacement, and widespread destruction of property and infrastructure. The violations form part of a long-running occupation policy dating back to Israel's seizure of the Golan Heights in 1967 and exploit the instability that has engulfed Syria since 2011—contravening the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

### Overview of Key Incidents and Violations in Syria (2025):

August 26, 2025	Five Syrian government soldiers were killed in an Israeli airstrike in the southern Damascus countryside.
April 2, 2025	Airstrikes on northwestern Hama followed by shelling in western Daraa resulted in the killing and wounding of 24 civilians, raising grave concerns regarding adherence to the principles of distinction and proportionality.
March 25, 2025	A ground incursion into Kuya village in western Daraa caused the deaths of six people, injured seven more, and displaced dozens of families.
February 23, 2025	The head of the occupying government publicly demanded the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the south, declaring Israel's military presence would continue.
February 15, 2025	An ambulance was intercepted, and its four-person medical crew was detained by occupation forces, violating international protections afforded to



## Conclusion

Despite the collapse of the Assad regime and the emergence of a new political reality, Syria continues to be the scene of grave and deeply entrenched human rights abuses. Multiple actors—domestic and foreign—operate in a landscape marked by fragmentation, insecurity, and the near-total absence of accountability. The uncovering of mass graves, the persistence of targeted killings, and the ongoing failure to investigate civilian deaths in armed clashes all reflect a continuing architecture of impunity that has survived the political transition and continues to undermine efforts toward justice.

Confronting this entrenched impunity is indispensable for any credible path toward stability and reconciliation. Syria requires a comprehensive, nationally grounded, and internationally supported framework for accountability and transitional justice—one that addresses the full spectrum of violations, secures truth for victims' families, and ensures that all perpetrators, regardless of affiliation, are held to account. Only through such mechanisms can Syrians begin to reclaim their rights, rebuild trust in public institutions, and lay the foundations for a society governed by the rule of law, where justice is not a distant aspiration but a lived reality for all.



## OMAN: COMPLIANCE ABROAD, REPRESSION AT HOME

### Introduction

Between late 2024 and 2025, the Sultanate of Oman pursued a dual strategy. Internationally, it sought to polish its image by acceding to global treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Domestically, however, it fortified its arsenal of restrictive legislation—most notably through the new Media Law—designed to suppress dissent. This dual approach entrenches Oman's classification as "Not Free," transforming the legal system into a mechanism for legitimizing repression and criminalizing peaceful criticism. The result is a stark gulf between the government's proclaimed human-rights commitments and the repressive reality of systematically curtailed civil and political freedoms.

### Section I. Political and Legal Framework

The political and legal framework forms the foundation upon which human-rights practices are built. It can either serve as a safeguard for rights or as a cover for violations. In Oman,





governance operates within the context of an absolute hereditary monarchy, where the Sultan exercises extensive powers.<sup>253</sup>

- Although Sultan Haitham bin Tariq delegated certain ministerial portfolios traditionally held by the Sultan—such as Defense, Finance, and Foreign Affairs—to other officials, including individuals outside the royal family,<sup>254</sup> the concentration of authority remains intact, particularly in matters of national security and high-level policy.
- Political parties are absent from the landscape. The elected Shura Council and the appointed State Council serve only advisory functions, with limited legislative authority that excludes defense, security, and foreign policy.

Within this framework, the past year witnessed major legislative developments that reveal deep contradictions in the state's approach to human rights.

## A. Key Legislative Developments and Their Impact on Rights

### 1. Accession to the ICCPR

- On 16 October 2025, Oman ratified accession to the ICCPR through Royal Decree No. 89/2025.<sup>255</sup>
- While officially celebrated, the move appears largely performative. The inclusion of an explicit clause referencing unspecified "reservations and interpretive statements" reflects a longstanding practice of hollowing out international commitments.<sup>256</sup>

<sup>253</sup> Freedom House, Oman: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/oman/freedom-world/2025>.

<sup>254</sup> The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Oman's Sultan Caps First Year by Appointing Heir and New Military Leadership," accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/omans-sultan-caps-first-year-appointing-heir-and-new-military-leadership>.

<sup>255</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman, Royal Decree No. 89/2025 Ratifying the Sultanate of Oman's Joining the 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' Adopted in New York on December 16, 1966, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.fm.gov.om/royal-decree-no-89-2025-ratifying-the-sultanate-of-omans-joining-the-international-covenant-on-civil-and-political-rights-adopted-in-new-york-on-december-16-1966/>.

<sup>256</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Oman, Royal Decree Reflects Oman's Commitment to Justice and Human Dignity, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.fm.gov.om/oman-instills-the-principles-of-justice-and-human-dignity/>.

- This pattern is evident in Oman's persistent reservations to core provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), particularly Article 9 (nationality) and Article 16 (equality in marriage and family).<sup>257</sup>
- Should similar reservations extend to fundamental ICCPR provisions—such as equality and non-discrimination (Articles 2 and 3) or freedoms of expression and religion (Articles 18 and 19)—Oman's accession would remain purely symbolic, aimed at enhancing international reputation without genuine domestic reform.

Legislative Timeline (Text vs. Practice)			
Date	Law / Event	Declared Purpose	Actual Application
10 Nov 2024	New Media Law (RD 58/2024)	Regulation of media	Heavy fines and prison up to 3 years; criminalization of criticism
7 Jan 2025	Penal Code Amendment (RD 11/2025)	Reformist (suspension of sentences)	Excludes "state security crimes," ensuring actual imprisonment of dissidents
Feb 2025	New Nationality Law	Legal modernization	Article 26 allows arbitrary nationality revocation without judicial oversight
16 Oct 2025	Accession to ICCPR	International human rights commitment	Symbolic accession with reservations that hollow out obligations

## 2. Amendment to the Penal Code (Suspension of Sentences)

- Royal Decree No. 11/2025, issued on 7 January 2025,<sup>258</sup> authorized courts to suspend prison sentences of less than three years.
- Although ostensibly reformist, the decree explicitly excludes "state security crimes, crimes undermining the state, and terrorism offenses."

<sup>257</sup> Musawah, Thematic Report on Muslim Family Law and Muslim Women's Rights in 87th CEDAW Session, May 2024, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Submission-Oman.pdf>.

<sup>258</sup> Royal Decree 11/2025 Amending Some Provisions of the Omani Penal Law, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://decree.om/2025/rd20250011/>.



- This exclusion is deliberately crafted to deny peaceful dissidents and opinion activists any benefit. Vague charges such as "undermining the prestige of the state" are systematically categorized as crimes against the state, ensuring that critics face mandatory prison terms.
- The amendment thus entrenches a "dual justice system," neutralizing any potential positive impact for government opponents.

### 3. The New Media Law (Royal Decree No. 58/2024)

- Enacted on **10 November 2024**, the Media Law represents a sharp escalation of state control,<sup>259</sup> despite being presented as a measure to enhance freedom.<sup>260</sup>
- The following table illustrates the contrast between the law's stated objectives and its actual restrictions:

Declared Objectives	Actual Restrictions and Risks to Freedom of Expression
"Balancing freedom and accountability"	Subjects all forms of media expression to absolute state control through an arbitrary licensing regime, extending even to news accounts on social media.
"Protecting morals and public order"	Weaponizes vague terms such as "disturbing public order" and "violating public morals" to criminalize legitimate criticism.
"Promoting transparency"	Prohibits publication of information on ongoing investigations or judicial proceedings, obstructing public oversight and potentially concealing corruption cases.
"Combating false news"	Imposes severe penalties, including up to three years' imprisonment and heavy fines, fostering a climate of fear and intense self-censorship among journalists and citizens.

<sup>259</sup> DLA Piper, Oman's New Media Law: A New Era of Balance Between Freedom and Accountability, November 2024, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.dlapiper.com/en/insights/publications/2024/11/omans-new-media-law-a-new-era-of-balance-between-freedom-and-accountability>.

<sup>260</sup> Lexis Middle East, Oman's New Media Law: A New Era of Balance Between Freedom and Accountability, November 18, 2024, accessed November 26, 2025, [https://www.lexismiddleeast.com/eJournal/2024-11-18\\_7](https://www.lexismiddleeast.com/eJournal/2024-11-18_7).



## B. Nature of the Judiciary and Impunity

- Although Oman's legal system formally recognizes judicial independence, its application is inconsistent, particularly in politically sensitive cases.<sup>261</sup>
- In February 2025, the Attorney General confirmed the existence of a specialized prosecutorial team tasked with monitoring social media and identifying content deemed harmful to "national fabric or achievements."<sup>262</sup>
- This development underscores the transformation of the Public Prosecution into an instrument for safeguarding "state prestige" rather than protecting citizens' rights.
- The reality aligns with the concept of "dual justice" entrenched by the Penal Code amendment, ensuring that government critics are subjected to actual imprisonment through their exclusion from suspended sentences.<sup>263</sup>

Taken together, Oman's restrictive legal framework—combining superficial international commitments with punitive domestic laws—provides the necessary cover for repressive practices. These practices will be examined in detail in the subsequent section.

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<sup>261</sup> European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR), Human Rights in Oman: Recent Developments and Ongoing Concerns, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.ecdhr.org/human-rights-in-oman-recent-developments-and-ongoing-concerns/>.

<sup>262</sup> Oman News Agency, Public Prosecution Department Settles 97.9% of Cases Filed in 2024, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://omannews.gov.om/topics/en/79/show/120819>.

<sup>263</sup> Royal Decree 11/2025 Amending Some Provisions of the Omani Penal Law, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://decree.om/2025/rd20250011/>.



### Key Cases of Repression and Prosecution

Name / Case	Date of Arrest	Charge	Sentence / Action	Significance
Talal al Salmani	8 Apr 2025	"Undermining state prestige" (solidarity with Gaza)	3 months' imprisonment (appeal upheld within 48 hours)	Judiciary used as a tool of "pre-emptive repression"
Saeed Jaddad	Apr 2024	Critical posts on platform "X"	2 years' imprisonment (suspended)	Creates a "chilling effect" enforcing self-censorship
Group of Citizens	Jun 2025	"Inciting sectarian strife"	Arrest	Criminalization of religious diversity (different Eid observance)

## Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

Although Oman's legal framework formally prohibits grave violations, documented practices during the reporting period—particularly against government critics—reveal a profound gap between law and implementation. This gap underscores a systemic crisis in the actual enforcement of legal protections.

### A. Arbitrary Arrest and Incommunicado Detention

The case of activist Talal al-Salmani serves as a central study in understanding how judicial procedures are deployed as pre-emptive instruments of repression.

- On 8 April 2025, al-Salmani was arrested after participating in a peaceful demonstration in solidarity with Gaza, during which he criticized the government's stance and condemned the security forces' handling of protesters.<sup>264</sup>

<sup>264</sup> OCHRD Oman, The Muscat Court of Appeal Sentenced Talal Al-Salmani to a Term of Three Months' Imprisonment, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://ochrdoman.org/en/talal-2/>.

- He was charged with vague offenses, including "participation in an unlawful gathering" and "publishing news that undermines the prestige of the state."
- On 14 May 2025, the Court of Appeal upheld a three-month prison sentence against him.<sup>265</sup>
- The speed of his prosecution suggests a deliberate attempt to suppress potential calls for protest linked to deteriorating living conditions. This indicates that judicial proceedings are being used proactively to stifle emerging civic movements.



## B. Fair Trial Guarantees



Al-Salmami's case highlights the absence of due-process safeguards.

<sup>265</sup> OCHRD Oman, The Arrest of Talal Al-Salmami, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://ochrdoman.org/en/the-arrest-of-talal-al-salmami/>.



- The rapid progression from arrest to initial judgment within just **48** hours points to political motives aimed at swift deterrence rather than genuine justice.
- His charges, such as "undermining the prestige of the state," fall under the category of "crimes against the state" explicitly excluded from suspended sentences under Royal Decree No. 11/2025.
- This ensured that al-Salmani faced actual imprisonment, underscoring the selective nature of the judicial system.
- The suppression of civil rights is thus closely tied to broader restrictions on freedom of expression.

### Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet

The reporting period witnessed a legislative offensive and systematic prosecutions designed to consolidate full control over the digital sphere. These measures created a pervasive chilling effect on freedom of expression, compelling citizens to engage in self-censorship.



#### A. Targeting Journalists and Human Rights Defenders

Authorities continued to pursue activists and critics on social media, reinforcing an atmosphere of fear.



- In April 2025, activist Saeed Jaddad was arrested for posts on the platform "X" criticizing the government.<sup>266</sup>
- In June 2025, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, suspended. Although the sentence was not enforced, the prosecution itself sent a clear deterrent message to civil society: criticism carries significant legal risks.
- These prosecutions rely on vague and overly broad laws, employing charges such as "undermining the prestige of the state," "defamation," or "provocative propaganda to weaken state prestige."
- Such charges violate international standards, which require restrictions on freedom of expression to be specific, necessary, and proportionate.

## B. Cybercrime Legislation

The **new Media Law (Royal Decree No. 58/2024)** represents the most restrictive legislative development during this period.

- Its declared objectives—such as "achieving balance and transparency"—serve merely as a façade for a framework designed to entrench state control.
- In practice, the law compels citizens to engage in self-censorship,<sup>267</sup> consolidating the government's grip over digital expression.

## Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association

Omani authorities pursue a policy of "selective tolerance", permitting gatherings that align with official state positions—such as pro-Palestine demonstrations—while pre-emptively and harshly suppressing any assemblies that raise domestic demands.

- The right to assembly is instrumentalized as a political tool. This was evident in the case of Talal al-Salmani: once he linked his solidarity with Gaza to criticism of the government, he was swiftly arrested and prosecuted. The outcome effectively imposed an "informal ban" on similar gatherings.

<sup>266</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Oman 2024 Human Rights Report*, July 2025, accessed November 26, 2025, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521\\_OMAN-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521_OMAN-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).

<sup>267</sup> UC Berkeley School of Law, *Persecution of Online Expression in the Gulf and Neighbouring Countries*, December 2021, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Oman.pdf>.



- Religious assembly has also faced repression. In June 2025, several citizens were arrested on charges of "inciting sectarian strife," not for advocating violence but simply for following a religious calendar different from the state's official determination of Eid al-Adha.<sup>268</sup> This incident demonstrates the use of anti-sedition laws to criminalize peaceful religious practices that deviate from the state's sanctioned line.<sup>269</sup>

Gender Discrimination in Nationality Law	
Conferring nationality to children	
Automatic and unconditional	
Conditional, subject to waiting periods (divorce/widowhood)	
Violation of equality principle	
Waiting period for children	
None	
5 years (divorced/widowed) /	
10 years (abandoned)	
Harms the child's best interests	

<sup>268</sup> Freedom House, Oman: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/oman/freedom-world/2025>.

<sup>269</sup> U.S. Department of State, Oman 2024 Human Rights Report, July 2025, accessed November 26, 2025, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521\\_OMAN-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521_OMAN-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).



## Section V. Women's Rights and the Rights of Vulnerable Groups

Human-rights challenges in Oman are most acute when examining the situation of vulnerable groups, where legal discrimination intersects with weak enforcement mechanisms, resulting in systematic violations. The most consequential legislative development was the adoption of the **new Nationality Law in February 2025**, which created a sharp contradiction with Oman's declared commitment to international standards.

The simultaneous issuance of the Nationality Law and progress toward ICCPR accession highlights a profound analytical inconsistency. While outward steps suggest alignment with global norms, the domestic law introduced provisions—particularly Article 26—that permit arbitrary deprivation of nationality without judicial oversight. This regression undermines the principle of non-discrimination, a cornerstone of the treaties Oman seeks to join.

### A. Rights of Women and Girls

- The **Personal Status Law** continues to entrench discrimination. Men retain absolute rights to divorce (Article 82), while women are restricted to seeking judicial separation under narrow conditions.<sup>270</sup>
- Custodial rights are curtailed: a woman loses custody if she marries a foreigner, a restriction not applied with equal severity to men.<sup>271</sup>
- The new Nationality Law reinforces this discrimination by preventing Omani mothers married to foreigners from conferring nationality <sup>272</sup>to their children on equal terms with fathers.

<sup>270</sup> OCHRD Oman, On Omani Women's Day: Discriminatory Laws and Deferred Reforms, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://ochrdoman.org/en/omani-women-2/>.

<sup>271</sup> Al Alawi & Co., Custody of Children under the Omani Personal Status Law No. (32/97), accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.alalawico.com/custody-of-children-under-the-omani-personal-status-law/>.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

## Comparative Analysis of Discrimination in Omani Nationality Law

Area of Discrimination	Omani Legal Provision (Summary)	Imposed Timeframe	Comparison with International Standards (Principle of Equality)
<b>Nationality for children of Omani mothers</b>	Requires a waiting period after divorce or widowhood from a foreign father.	5 years (divorced/widowed) or 10 years (abandoned/absent)	Violates women's equal right to confer nationality; undermines the child's best interests (CRC Article 7). <sup>273</sup>
<b>Revocation of nationality</b>	Permitted under Article 26 for verbal insults to the Sultan or affiliation with "harmful" entities.	Immediate, unspecified	Grants unchecked discretionary power without judicial review; contravenes UDHR Article 15 (right to nationality and protection against arbitrary deprivation). <sup>274</sup>

- Legislative gaps persist, notably the absence of a comprehensive law criminalizing domestic violence.<sup>275</sup>
- Positive reforms were introduced in the new Labor Law, including extension of maternity leave to **98** days and introduction of paternity leave.
- However, domestic workers remain highly vulnerable. The unresolved case of a Malawian domestic worker's death underscores a culture of impunity.<sup>276</sup>

<sup>273</sup> OCHRD Oman, Omani Nationality Law 17/2025, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://ochrdoman.org/en/nationality-2/>.

<sup>274</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), The Right to a Nationality, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/nationality-and-statelessness>.

<sup>275</sup> OCHRD Oman, On Omani Women's Day: Discriminatory Laws and Deferred Reforms, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://ochrdoman.org/en/omani-women-2/>.

<sup>276</sup> U.S. Department of State, Oman 2024 Human Rights Report, July 2025, accessed November 26, 2025, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521\\_OMAN-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/624521_OMAN-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf).



## B. Rights of the Child

- Despite the existence of a Child Law, studies published in **2025** identified structural weaknesses in child-protection systems,<sup>277</sup> including insufficient resources and training.
- The Public Prosecution recorded **1,325** child-related criminal cases in **2024**.
- The Social Protection Law of **2024** introduced a universal child benefit of **10** Omani rials (USD 26) per month per child. While regionally progressive, the benefit remains far below the cost of living,<sup>278</sup> limiting its practical impact.

## C. Rights of Stateless Persons (Bidun)

The new Nationality Law poses the gravest threat to stateless persons.

- Article 26 authorizes revocation of nationality for "verbal or physical" insults to the Sultan. Legal experts note that the deliberately vague wording enables the weaponization of citizenship as a punitive tool against critics.<sup>279</sup>
- The absence of judicial oversight over nationality revocation contravenes UDHR Article 15 and risks creating a new category of "neo-Bidun."
- Existing Bidun continue to face severe barriers to education and healthcare due to lack of official documentation.<sup>280</sup>
  - In education, Bidun children are often barred from public schools, forcing reliance on costly private institutions or exclusion altogether.
  - In healthcare, while emergency services may be partially accessible, routine and comprehensive care remains heavily restricted without identity documents.

<sup>277</sup> PubMed, Enhancing Oman's Child Protection System: Professional Perspectives from Qualitative In-Depth Interviews, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40628191/>.

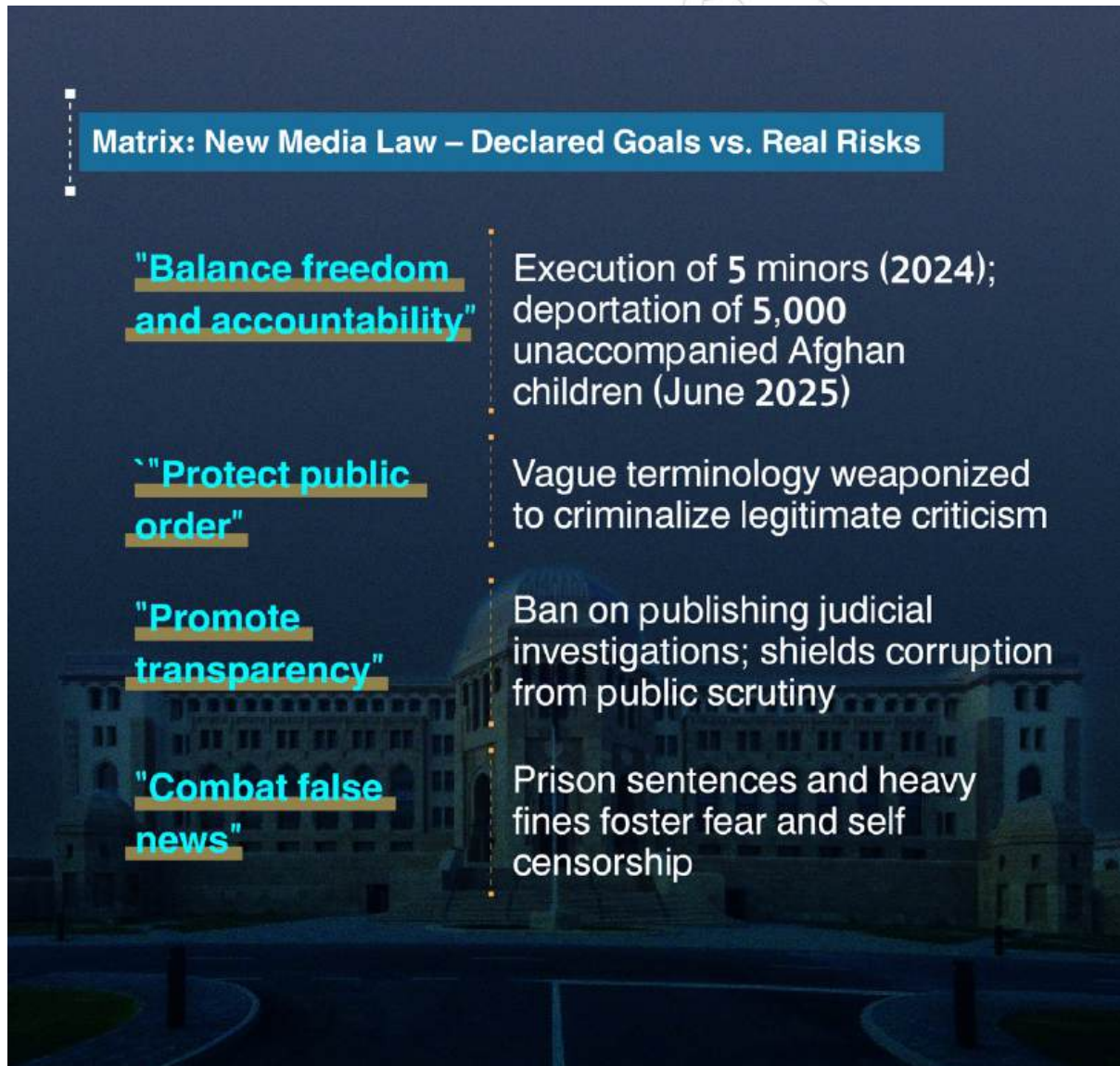
<sup>278</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), Far-Reaching Reforms in Oman Set New Benchmark for Social Protection in the Region, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/far-reaching-reforms-oman-set-new-benchmark-social-protection-region>.

<sup>279</sup> Civicus, New Law Could Weaponise Citizenship to Silence Opponents, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/new-law-could-weaponise-citizenship-to-silence-opponents/>.

<sup>280</sup> United Nations General Assembly, A/HRC/60/42, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/60/42>.



- This entrenched legal invisibility exacerbates vulnerability and perpetuates systemic human-rights violations.<sup>281</sup>



#### D. Rights of Workers and Migrant Labor

- Migrant workers remain inadequately protected under the kafala (sponsorship) system, which ties legal status to employers and fosters exploitation.

<sup>281</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), The Right to a Nationality, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/nationality-and-statelessness>.



- Common abuses include passport confiscation, wage withholding, and coercion to pay unlawful "release fees."<sup>282</sup>
- "Omanization" policies further weaken migrant workers by providing legal cover for arbitrary dismissal.
- In September 2025, the plight of 11 stranded Indian workers illustrated indicators of forced labor: withheld wages and confiscated passports.<sup>283</sup>
- Anti-trafficking efforts remain insufficient. Authorities often resort to administrative settlements rather than criminal prosecutions.
- Disturbingly, documented cases show authorities facilitating re-trafficking of victims by returning them to abusive employers.<sup>284</sup>
- More commonly, victims themselves are arrested for "absconding" rather than being identified and protected as trafficking victims.

## Conclusion

The human-rights situation in Oman in 2025 epitomizes a strategy of "dual containment." While the state sought to burnish its international image through the nominal accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it simultaneously entrenched its repressive infrastructure with a strict legislative arsenal, including the new Media Law and Nationality Law.

This contradiction reveals that the announced reforms were little more than maneuvers to legitimize repression. Human-rights commitments were hollowed out through broad "state security" exceptions, transforming the legal and judicial system from a mechanism intended

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<sup>282</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Oman, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/oman/>.

<sup>283</sup> Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, Oman: 11 Indian Migrant Workers Stranded After Their Corporate Employer Withholds Four Months' Salary, Denies Them Overtime Pay, and Confiscates Their Passports, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/oman-11-indian-migrant-workers-stranded-after-their-employers-withheld-four-months-salary-denied-them-overtime-pay-and-confiscated-their-passports/>.

<sup>284</sup> U.S. Department of State, 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Oman, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/oman/>.



to protect rights into a functional instrument for silencing dissent and criminalizing peaceful criticism under the guise of legality.

At the societal level, the current landscape consolidates an environment of "**codified fear**" that affects all segments of society:

- Activists face relentless security prosecutions.
- Women continue to endure entrenched structural legal discrimination.
- Migrant workers remain trapped within the exploitative framework of the kafala system.

Most alarming is the state's trajectory toward the **weaponization of citizenship**, wielding the threat of nationality revocation as a tool of coercion. This development endangers the existential security of individuals and underscores that Oman's human-rights crisis is not a crisis of legal texts, but a crisis of political will—one that prioritizes the "prestige of the state" over the dignity and freedoms of its people.



## PALESTINE AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: SYSTEMATIC GENOCIDE AND ANNEXATION

### Introduction

The year **2025** witnessed the continuation and intensification of grave, systematic violations of human rights in Palestine. In Gaza, the third consecutive year of mass atrocities unfolded, while in the West Bank, policies of repression and creeping annexation deepened. Together, these developments entrenched a tragic reality of killings, destruction, and forced displacement under a comprehensive system of apartheid, with near-total impunity for Israeli authorities. This climate of unaccountability has emboldened further crimes amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The present report seeks to establish a documented record of these violations, with the aim of supporting international accountability efforts and challenging the entrenched culture of impunity.

### Section I. Legal and Political Framework

A close examination of the legal and political framework employed by Israeli authorities is strategically important. It reveals the systematic nature of violations and demonstrates how law itself is instrumentalized as a tool of repression and justification for grave abuses. Israeli policies and practices, including newly enacted legislation, constitute flagrant breaches of international humanitarian law—most notably the Geneva Conventions—and international human rights law, while deliberately disregarding rulings and resolutions issued by the highest international judicial bodies.

#### **A. Prolonged Occupation and Blockade**

The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza cannot be understood without its historical context. The territory became a refuge for Palestinians displaced in **1948**, fell under direct occupation in **1967**, and since **2007** has been subjected to a suffocating blockade that has effectively transformed it into an "open-air prison." Within just **365** square kilometers, more than **2.3** million people live in one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The blockade has restricted movement, cut off access to food, medicine, and essential supplies, and created a dire humanitarian environment. Even before the outbreak of war in October **2023**,



Gaza endured repeated assaults involving internationally prohibited weapons, underscoring that the 2023–2025 war represents an escalation of a long-standing policy.

## B. Violations of International Law in the West Bank

Israel has disregarded the international legal consensus on the illegality of its occupation and annexation policies in the West Bank. Despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in July 2024 affirming the occupation's illegality, and a subsequent UN General Assembly resolution in September 2024 calling for its termination within one year, Israeli authorities continued extrajudicial killings, property destruction, and settlement expansion in open defiance of international rulings.

## C. Legislating Execution: The Death Penalty Bill

In a dangerous escalation, Israel's National Security Committee approved a draft law on November 3, 2025, introducing the death penalty for Palestinian detainees. Human rights organizations have warned that the most alarming feature of this bill is its retroactive application, contravening fundamental principles of criminal justice. Promoted by far-right elements in government, the law is framed not as deterrence but as retribution, targeting Palestinians detained after October 7, 2023, and raising the specter of mass executions.

## D. Rising International Accountability

On October 22, 2025, the International Court of Justice issued a landmark advisory opinion affirming UNRWA's mandate and rejecting Israeli claims against it, stressing Israel's obligation as the occupying power to lift restrictions and facilitate humanitarian relief.<sup>285</sup> This ruling directly linked UNRWA's mandate to the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Earlier, in January 2025, Israeli legislation sought to ban UNRWA operations in East Jerusalem, creating a direct clash between international judicial authority and domestic law.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> UNRWA, ICJ Advisory Opinion on Israel's Obligations: Key Conclusions Relating to UNRWA, 2025, <https://www.unrwa.org/icj-advisory-opinion-israel-obligations-key-conclusions-relating-unrwa>.

<sup>286</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Human Rights Council, 60th Session: Advance Unedited Version, A/HRC/60/CRP.3, 2025,



International accountability efforts have also intensified. In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military commander Mohammed Deif, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. On September 16, 2025, the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry concluded that Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in Gaza since October 2023,<sup>287</sup> citing both material acts and the specific intent evidenced in official statements. These developments place accountability at the center of future recovery and peacebuilding efforts.

## Section II. Grave Violations of the Right to Life and Civil Rights

The year 2025 marked an unprecedented assault on the fundamental right to life of Palestinian civilians. In Gaza, mass atrocities continued through indiscriminate bombardment, deliberate starvation, and destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure. In the West Bank, systematic killings, forced displacement, and destruction of livelihoods intensified, serving a broader strategy of annexation and social fragmentation.

### 1. Genocidal War in Gaza

#### Killings, Displacement, and Infrastructure Destruction

Preliminary figures indicate that since October 2023, 69,176 people have been killed in Gaza, including more than 20,000 in 2025 alone. The majority of victims are women and children. Thousands remain missing under the rubble of destroyed buildings, suggesting the toll will rise further.<sup>288</sup>

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<https://ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf>.

<sup>287</sup> "Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Conference Room Paper: Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have committed and are continuing to commit genocide against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (A/HRC/60/CRP.3), Human Rights Council, Sixtieth Session, September 16, 2025, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/commission-of-inquiry-report-genocide-in-gaza-a-hrc-60-crp-3/>."

<sup>288</sup> Based on the analysis of figures released by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza and the Shireen Observatory, up to November 8, 2025.



Among the victims was photojournalist Fatima Hassouna, killed with ten family members in an Israeli airstrike on April 16, 2025. Fatima was renowned for documenting civilian suffering



in northern Gaza, continuing her work despite losing **11** relatives in a previous strike in **2024**. Her death symbolizes the profound loss of life and future potential caused by these attacks.

Israeli forces have continued indiscriminate strikes in densely populated areas, deploying high-explosive munitions and weaponized drones without distinction between civilian and military targets. Markets, residential neighborhoods, schools, and shelters have all been turned into killing grounds. Even UNRWA schools sheltering displaced families were bombed. By October **2025**, approximately **200,000** tons of explosives had been dropped on Gaza, destroying **90%** of its infrastructure and damaging over **440,000** housing units. More than **288,000** families were left homeless,<sup>289</sup> and over two million people displaced, many multiple times. These practices constitute flagrant violations of Article **49** of the Fourth Geneva Convention and amount to crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute.

### Systematic Violence Against Women

#### Women have borne a disproportionate burden of the atrocities:

- **12,500** women killed, including more than **9,000** mothers.<sup>290</sup>
- **21,200** widowed, left to support families under impossible conditions.
- **12,000** miscarriages recorded, with **107,000** pregnant or nursing women at risk due to lack of food and care.
- Nearly one million women and girls displaced, facing loss of privacy and heightened disease exposure.
- More than **5,000** women with cancer denied life-saving treatment.

Israeli brutality extended even to unborn children, including embryos stored in the only medical center dedicated to reproductive health, with the apparent aim of denying women the ability to bear children. In addition, more than **5,000** women suffering from cancer were deprived of life-saving treatment.

### Collapse of the Health System

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<sup>289</sup> Government Media Office in Gaza, Two Years of Genocide, October **10**, **2025**.

<sup>290</sup> Previous source.



Gaza's health system has been systematically dismantled:<sup>291</sup>

- 1,701 medical personnel killed.
- 788 medical facilities targeted.
- 197 ambulances destroyed.
- 25 hospitals rendered fully or partially inoperative.

On March 2025's Eid al-Fitr morning, 14 medical staff were found executed in Rafah after days of disappearance, including Red Crescent paramedics and civil defense workers. On July 2, 2025, Dr. Marwan Sultan, director of the Indonesian Hospital, was killed with family members in an airstrike on his home.

### Starvation as a Weapon of War

Since March 2025, Israeli authorities have closed all crossings into Gaza, blocking humanitarian aid and using starvation as a weapon of war. By October 8, 2025, 460 people had died from hunger, including 154 children, while over 51,000 children suffered from malnutrition-related illnesses. The United Nations Population Fund warned that the impact of undernutrition will persist for generations,<sup>292</sup> resulting in lifelong health issues for children. Moreover, UNICEF revealed that Israel continues to withhold 938,000 units of infant formula, further exacerbating the crisis and threatening countless lives.

### Destruction of Education

The right to education has been devastated:

- More than 20,000 students killed.
- 830 teachers and 193 academics killed.
- 90% of schools destroyed.
- Over 700,000 students deprived of education for the third consecutive year.

<sup>291</sup> Press statement by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza, October 7, 2025.

<sup>292</sup> "United Nations: The impact of malnutrition among pregnant women and infants in Gaza will last for generations," Al Jazeera, October 23, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2025/10/23/الأمم-المتحدة-تأثيرات-سوء-تغذية>.



## Section II. Escalation of Repression and Creeping Annexation in the West Bank

### Escalation of Repression and Annexation in the West Bank (2025)

#### Total Deaths

**1,070** Palestinians killed.  
**235** fatalities since the  
start of **2025** (the  
assassination of Sundus  
Shalabi and her child is  
a notable example).

#### Systematic Arrests

Over **20,000** arrests  
recorded.

Official prison count:  
**9,250** detainees  
(excluding military  
camps).

#### Conditions of Detention

**79** detainees have died in  
custody (**46** from Gaza).

Systematic torture,  
starvation, and deliberate  
medical neglect reported.

#### Forced Displacement

More than **50,000**  
Palestinians displaced  
from Jenin, Tulkarm,  
and Nur Shams camp.

Infrastructure in camps  
extensively damaged.

#### Demolition of Structures

**3,679** buildings  
demolished.

Systematic destruction of  
private and public  
properties.

#### Settlement Expansion

Approval for the  
construction of **18,801**  
new settlement units.

**114** new outposts  
established following  
the Gaza War.

#### Settler Violence

**7,154** direct attacks by settlers  
(from a total of **38,359** incidents).

Livestock farms used to seize  
**786,000** dunams of land.





## A. Extrajudicial Killings

Since October 2023, Israeli escalation in the West Bank has resulted in the killing of 1,070 Palestinians, including 235 deaths in 2025 alone. One emblematic case occurred in February 2025, when soldiers shot and killed 23-year-old Sundus Shalabi, who was eight months pregnant, together with her husband, Yazan Abu Sha'la, in Nur Shams camp.<sup>293</sup> Witnesses reported that soldiers fired at the couple, then approached Sundus as she lay bleeding and shot her again. Medical teams were blocked and detained, only gaining access hours later, by which time both Sundus and her unborn child had died.

## B. Systematic Arrests and Torture

Arrest campaigns reached unprecedented levels, with more than 20,000 detentions in the West Bank, including 1,600 children, 595 women, 202 journalists, and 360 doctors. Official figures released by the Israeli Prison Service in November 2025 listed 9,250 detainees, excluding those held in military camps beyond oversight. Arrests were accompanied by violent night raids, abuse of families, property destruction, and degrading field interrogations.

## C. Forced Displacement and Camp Demolition

Beginning in January 2025, Israeli forces launched military operations in northern West Bank areas, forcibly displacing more than 50,000 Palestinians from Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nur Shams camp. UNRWA's Director of Affairs, Roland Friedrich, warned that infrastructure destruction and settler violence "pave the way for further annexation." Israeli authorities informed Palestinian counterparts that operations would be extended until January 2026.

<sup>293</sup> An Israeli incursion results in the death of a Palestinian woman and her unborn child in Nur Shams refugee camp. Anadolu Agency, February 9, 2025.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/D8/A5/D8/B3/D8/B1/D8/A7/D8/A6/D9/8A/D9/84/D8/A8/D8/A7/D9/82/D8/AA/D9/8A/D8/A9/D8/B5/D9/84/D8/A8/D8/A7/D9/86/D8/B1/D8/A8/D8/B1/D8/A8/D8/A3/3476359>.



## D. Land Seizure and Entrenchment of Apartheid

Israeli authorities employed a comprehensive system of land appropriation and apartheid entrenchment, including:

- **Demolitions:** 3,679 structures destroyed since October 2023 (OCHA data).
- **Settlement Expansion:** Approval of 22 new settlements and thousands of housing units. Planning bodies reviewed 355 schemes for 37,415 units over 38,551 dunams; 18,801 units approved, with plans deposited for another 18,614.<sup>294</sup>
- **Outposts:** 114 new settler outposts established after the Gaza war.
- **Pastoral Settlements:** Livestock farms used to seize 786,000 dunams, displacing 33 Bedouin communities (2,853 people).<sup>295</sup>
- **Settler Violence:** 38,359 attacks documented since October 2023, including 7,154 directly by settlers. These assaults destroyed 48,728 fruit trees and killed 33 Palestinians over two years.

This reality is enforced through 916 military checkpoints and a digital surveillance system known as *Red Wolf*, turning daily life into a regime of complete apartheid.<sup>296</sup>

## Section III. Assault on Human Dignity: Prisoners and the Dead

### 1. Repressive and Lethal Detention Conditions

Thousands of Palestinian detainees endure repressive, life-threatening conditions in Israeli prisons, including starvation policies, deliberate medical neglect, and physical and psychological torture. These conditions caused 79 deaths in custody, 46 from Gaza. On October 13, 2025, 1,968 prisoners were released; one, Najy Ja'frawi, described: *"No words can capture it. We spent 100 days shackled hand and foot, blindfolded, allowed to use the*

<sup>294</sup> "Resistance to the Wall and Settlements: The occupation to consider construction of 2,006 new settlement units," Palestinian Governmental Authority, November 1, 2025.

<sup>295</sup> As revealed by the Israeli organizations Peace Now and Kerem Navot; see Al Jazeera Net, 'Pastoral Settlement,' July 8, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2025/7/8/الاستيطان-الرعي>.

<sup>296</sup> "Stop Digital Apartheid in Palestine," Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/petition/stop-the-automated-apartheid-in-palestine/>, accessed November 2025.



*toilet only once every two days.*" Such practices constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, particularly Articles 27, 32, and 33.

## 2. Violation of the Dead and Withholding of Bodies

Israel continues its systematic policy of withholding the bodies of Palestinians killed. Between October and November 2025, Palestinian authorities received 315 bodies,<sup>297</sup> many showing evidence of war crimes—close-range gunshots, torture marks, organ theft, and bulldozer injuries. Only 91 were identifiable due to deliberate mutilation. Israel retains at least 479 bodies in secret "numbered cemeteries," with rights groups estimating the true figure exceeds 1,500, including at Sde Teiman camp. This practice weaponizes the dead as bargaining chips and constitutes a profound violation of human dignity.

## Section IV. Freedom of Expression and the Press

### 1. Targeted Killing of Journalists in Gaza

Israel has pursued a systematic campaign against journalists in Gaza, killing 252 since October 2023, including 59 in 2025. Journalists were targeted in homes, displacement tents, and hospitals, while foreign reporters were barred entry.<sup>298</sup> At least seven massacres against Palestinian journalists were documented since March 2025, including:

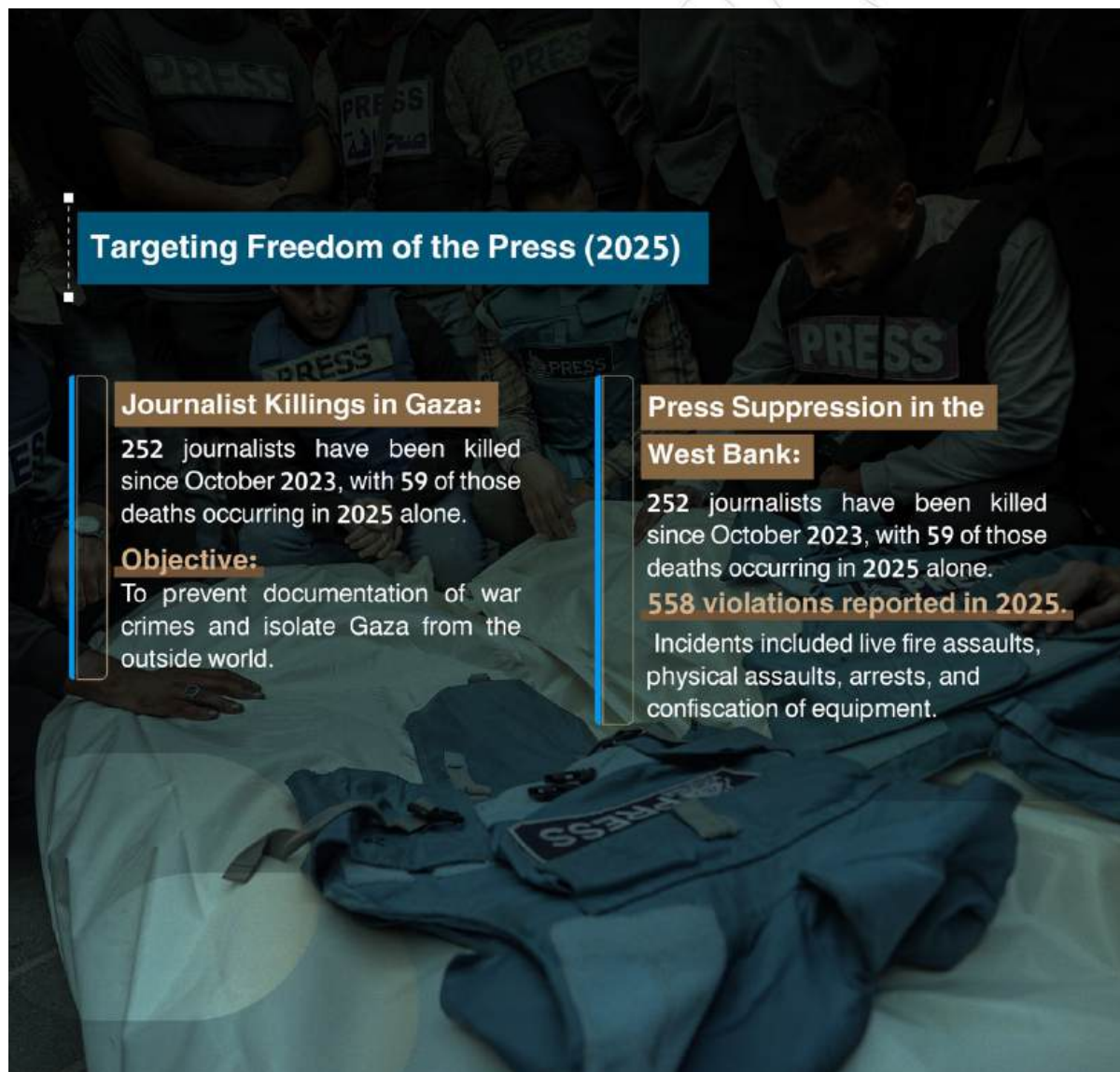
- **August 2025:** Strike on the journalists' tent at al-Shifa Hospital, killing Al Jazeera correspondent Anas al-Sharif and others. Days later, a strike on Nasser Hospital killed five journalists, including Independent Arabia's Mariam Abu Daqa.
- **May 2025:** Journalist Ahmad al-Zeinati killed with his wife and children in their tent.
- **April 2025:** Journalist Islam Maqdad killed with her infant in a strike on her home.

These attacks are part of a deliberate policy to silence reporting and sever Gaza's connection to the outside world, in violation of international humanitarian law and the First

<sup>297</sup> Statement by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza, November 10, 2025.

<sup>298</sup> Two Years of Media Genocide (Comprehensive Report), Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, October 5, 2025, <https://pjs.ps/ar/page-3425.html>.

Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, which grants journalists special protection in conflict zones.



## 2. Suppression of the Press in the West Bank

In 2025, 558 violations against journalists were recorded in the West Bank, 523 committed by Israeli forces and settlers. These included beatings, live fire, settler intimidation, arbitrary arrests, home raids, equipment confiscation, and obstruction of field coverage. Palestinian



authorities were responsible for 35 violations, including summonses, detentions, and restrictions on reporting.<sup>299</sup>

### Conclusion

The year 2025 entrenched Israel's systematic, wide-scale violations of international law in both Gaza and the West Bank. Documented practices—from deliberate killing and starvation in Gaza to creeping annexation and apartheid in the West Bank—amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The prevailing culture of impunity is the driving force behind their continuation, placing a historic responsibility on the international community to act decisively to ensure accountability and deliver justice to the Palestinian people.

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<sup>299</sup> According to the analysis of monthly reports by the Palestinian Center for Media Development, Mada.



## QATAR: LEGISLATION AND THE CHALLENGE TO SOVEREIGNTY

### Introduction

Between late **2024** and **2025**, Qatar presented a contradictory human-rights landscape. Externally, the state consolidated its role as a diplomatic powerhouse—mediating regional crises, hosting negotiations, and positioning itself as a stabilizing actor amid escalating Middle Eastern turmoil. Internally, however, the reporting period revealed troubling signs of regression. Key legislative and institutional changes narrowed civic space, weakened judicial guarantees, and entrenched executive dominance, raising serious concerns about the long-term protection of civil and political rights.

The most significant developments were amendments to the constitution in November **2024**, which eliminated political participation through elections, and the August **2025** expansion of the Cybercrime Law, which granted authorities new tools to regulate online expression and restrict public accountability. Taken together, these shifts reflect a broader recalibration of the state's social contract—one that privileges control and stability over openness and citizen engagement.

### Section 1. Political and Legal Framework

The political and legal foundation of any state determines the extent to which rights can meaningfully be protected or, conversely, restricted. Constitutional and legislative reforms shape the environment in which institutional safeguards either flourish or erode. During the reporting period, Qatar's legal framework underwent profound changes that weakened existing protections and consolidated power within the executive branch.

#### 1.1 Constitutional Amendments of November 2024

In November **2024**, Qatar approved sweeping constitutional amendments that dissolved the electoral mechanism for selecting members of the Shura Council. The amendments abolished Articles **78**, **79**, and **82** of the Constitution—<sup>300</sup> provisions that previously

<sup>300</sup> Government Communications Office, The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, December 2024, [https://www.gco.gov.qa/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/permanent\\_constitution\\_state\\_qatar\\_en.pdf](https://www.gco.gov.qa/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/permanent_constitution_state_qatar_en.pdf).

governed elections, delineated electoral districts, and granted the judiciary oversight of the electoral process.

As amended, Article 77 now stipulates explicitly that Shura Council members are appointed "by Amiri decree,"<sup>301</sup> eliminating any form of public participation in the legislative process. By centralizing the power of appointment, the reforms place full authority over the composition of the Council in the hands of the executive.

## 1.2 Challenges to Judicial Independence

Qatar's legal system blends civil law and Islamic law, with the judiciary theoretically responsible for upholding rights and checking executive power. In practice, the independence of the judiciary remains constrained.

The **2025 World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index**, which included Qatar for the first time, highlighted concerns about the judiciary's vulnerability to executive influence. Qatar's placement reflected a broader global trend of weakening judicial resistance to political pressure—particularly in systems where the executive holds substantial leverage over appointments and legal interpretation.<sup>302</sup>

## Section 2. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

Civil and political rights constitute the backbone of any society built on the rule of law. Violations in these areas rarely occur in isolation; they typically stem from structural weaknesses in legislation, oversight, and accountability systems. Qatar's record during the reporting period demonstrates how institutional gaps and unchecked executive authority expose individuals to arbitrary detention, denial of due process, and threats to life and physical integrity.

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<sup>301</sup> Council of Ministers, The Constitutional Amendments, accessed November 29, 2025, <https://cm.gov.qa/en/Pages/Constitutional-Amendments.aspx>.

<sup>302</sup> World Justice Project, WJP Rule of Law Index 2025 Global Press Release, October 2025, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/news/wjp-rule-law-index-2025-global-press-release>.



## 2.1 Arbitrary Detention and Due Process Violations

One of the most emblematic cases documented during the period involved **Tayeb Benabderrahmane**, a French-Algerian citizen. According to Opinion No. 28/2025 issued by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), Benabderrahmane was arrested in January/June 2020 and held in a secret facility. During his detention, he was denied access to legal counsel, prevented from learning the charges against him, and effectively placed outside the protection of the law.

The WGAD characterized the case as a textbook example of arbitrary detention in violation of Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Qatar is a party.<sup>303</sup>

## 2.2 The Right to Life and Physical Integrity

The right to life—underpinning all other human rights—was directly undermined by a severe breach of Qatar's sovereignty on 10 September 2025, when an Israeli military strike targeted a site in central Doha. The attack resulted in multiple fatalities, including Corporal Badr Saad Mohammed Al-Humaidi Al-Dosari, a member of Qatar's internal security force who died while on duty.<sup>304</sup>

UN experts condemned the strike as a "direct violation of Qatar's sovereignty, the right to life, and the UN Charter,"<sup>305</sup> emphasizing its unprecedented nature: a foreign military attack on a state actively engaged in diplomatic mediation. The Qatari government labeled the

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<sup>303</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Opinion No. 28/2025 of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Session 102. 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session102/a-hrc-wgad-2025-28-aev.pdf>.

<sup>304</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar. Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Says Qatar Will Not Tolerate Infringement on its Sovereignty, Describes Attack as State Terrorism. September 10, 2025. <https://mofa.gov.qa/en/qatar/latest-articles/latest-news/details/2025/09/10/prime-minister-and-minister-of-foreign-affairs-says-qatar-will-not-tolerate-infringement-on-its-sovereignty--describes-attack-as-state-terrorism>.

<sup>305</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. UN Experts Condemn Israel's Strikes in Qatar and Attacks on Peace-Making. September 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/un-experts-condemn-israels-strikes-qatar-and-attacks-peace-making>.



incident an act of "state terrorism" and announced the formation of a legal team tasked with pursuing international accountability mechanisms.<sup>306</sup>

### Section 3. Freedom of Expression, Press, and Digital Rights

Despite Qatar's international image as a media hub—home to prominent global news outlets—the state intensified legislative controls over speech and digital activity during the period under review. These measures contributed to a climate of self-censorship among journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens.

#### 3.1 Expansion of the Cybercrime Law

On 4 August 2025, Qatar enacted Law No. 11 of 2025, which introduced Article (8 bis) to the Cybercrime Law. The amendment criminalizes the publication of photos or videos of individuals in public spaces without their consent, imposing penalties of up to one year in prison and fines reaching 100,000 Qatari Riyals (approximately USD 27,470).<sup>307</sup>

The law's vague language fails to distinguish between harmful, defamatory intent and publication in the public interest—such as documenting official misconduct, workplace abuse, or violations by security personnel. As written, the law effectively criminalizes citizen journalism and public documentation, turning everyday digital activity into potential grounds for prosecution.

### Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association

A vibrant civil society is essential for public participation and collective advocacy. In Qatar, however, the regulatory environment governing associations remains highly restrictive, preventing the emergence of independent organizations capable of monitoring rights or representing marginalized groups.

The approval process for forming associations is controlled almost entirely by the executive branch. Licensing decisions are often opaque, prolonged, or denied without justification,

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<sup>306</sup>

<sup>307</sup>



effectively limiting the ability of citizens to establish advocacy groups, workers' unions, or independent professional organizations.

These structural barriers have resulted in a civil society landscape dominated by government-aligned entities, with limited space for independent voices. The absence of pluralistic associations further weakens mechanisms for accountability and inhibits participatory decision-making.

## Section 5. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups

The reporting period raises serious concerns about the durability of Qatar's previously announced reforms—and the degree to which vulnerable populations continue to face systematic discrimination and exploitation. Some developments suggest an alarming potential rollback of limited gains achieved in recent years.

### 5.1 Women's Rights

Discrimination against women remains entrenched both legally and socially, reinforced by the male guardianship system. Although Qatar has promoted certain gender-related reforms, core elements of inequality remain intact,<sup>308</sup> including:

- Mandatory male guardian approval for a woman to marry.
- Requirement for unmarried women under 25 to obtain guardian permission to travel outside the country.<sup>309</sup>

Such measures institutionalize gender inequality and limit women's capacity to exercise their fundamental freedoms.

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## 5.2 Migrant Workers' Rights

Qatar has announced a series of labor reforms in recent years. At the same time, certain practices associated with the kafala (sponsorship) system continue to be observed, which shape the experience of migrant workers and the mechanisms available for accountability.

### 5.2.1 Attempts to Reinstate Exit Controls

In June 2024, the Shura Council discussed a proposal concerning domestic workers and the requirement of employer approval before leaving the country. The proposal has been noted as potentially reintroducing elements of the previous sponsorship framework. Observers highlight that, if adopted, it would alter aspects of the 2020 labor reforms that were recognized internationally.

### 5.2.2 Wage-Related Issues and Remedies

Concerns regarding wage disputes remain present, with references to challenges in the implementation of the Wage Protection System and the Workers' Support and Insurance Fund. In addition, international organizations have pointed to the absence of a dedicated mechanism to provide compensation for workers affected during preparations for the 2022 World Cup, including cases involving fatalities.

## Section 6. Armed Conflict, Sovereignty, and International Humanitarian Law

On 10 September 2025, Qatar experienced an unprecedented breach of sovereignty when Israeli military forces carried out an attack inside the capital, Doha. The strike resulted in multiple fatalities, including Corporal Bader Al-Dosari of the Internal Security Force, who was killed while on duty.

United Nations experts condemned the incident as a flagrant violation of state sovereignty and the UN Charter. They emphasized that the attack constituted a direct assault on Qatar's role as an international mediator in efforts to end the conflict in Gaza, undermining the credibility of diplomatic initiatives led from Doha.

The Qatari authorities characterized the strike as an act of "state terrorism" and announced the establishment of a legal team tasked with pursuing accountability through international mechanisms, with the stated objective of ensuring that those responsible do not evade justice.<sup>310</sup>

The attack must also be viewed within the broader context of international tolerance for Israeli violations in the occupied Palestinian territories. Years of documented war crimes, coupled with global reluctance to impose accountability, have contributed to an environment in which even mediator states are not shielded from assault. The absence of consequences risks normalizing military actions that undermine diplomacy and fuel regional instability.

### Conclusion

Qatar's expanding diplomatic influence places a heightened responsibility on the state to align its domestic human-rights framework with its international commitments. While regional pressures and security concerns shape the country's priorities, sustainable national development cannot be achieved without addressing the deep institutional gaps widened by recent legislative changes—particularly those affecting digital rights, freedom of expression, and participatory governance.

Strengthening the rule of law, restoring avenues for public involvement, and ensuring judicial independence are essential steps to rebuilding public trust. Likewise, meaningful reforms to protect women, migrant workers, and vulnerable communities are critical to ensuring that Qatar's modernization is inclusive and rights-based.

At the sovereign level, the September 2025 attack poses a defining moral and legal test for the international community. Supporting Qatar's efforts to pursue accountability is not merely a matter of national rights—it is vital for safeguarding international norms that prevent the world from slipping into an era where diplomacy can be met with force and mediators become targets.

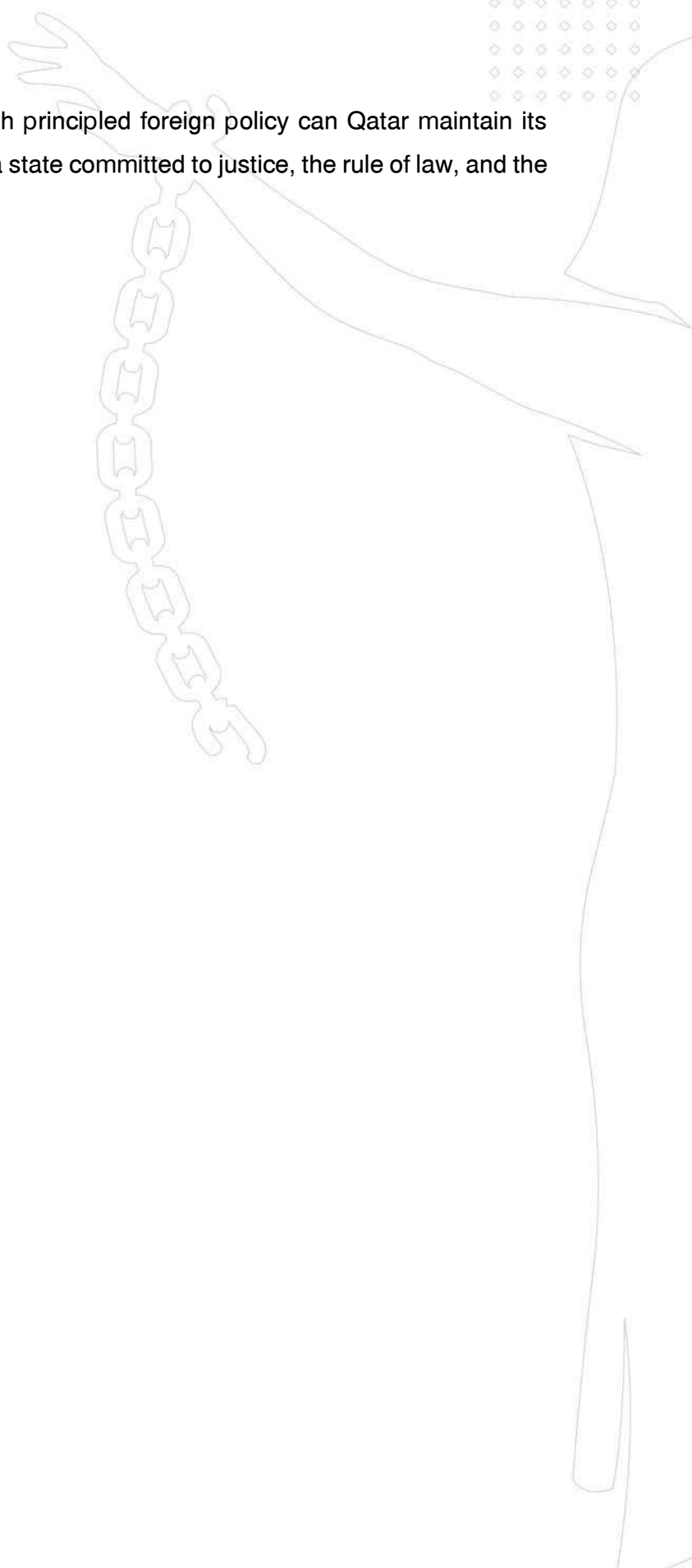
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<sup>310</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar. Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Says Qatar Will Not Tolerate Infringement on its Sovereignty, Describes Attack as State Terrorism. September 10, 2025.

<https://mofa.gov.qa/en/qatar/latest-articles/latest-news/details/2025/09/10/prime-minister-and-minister-of-foreign-affairs-says-qatar-will-not-tolerate-infringement-on-its-sovereignty--describes-attack-as-state-terrorism>.



Only by integrating domestic reform with principled foreign policy can Qatar maintain its standing as both a global mediator and a state committed to justice, the rule of law, and the protection of human dignity.





## LEBANON: JUSTICE ON HOLD

### Introduction

Lebanon's human-rights situation in **2025** was defined by the continued impact of the ongoing Israeli aggression in the south, which caused significant civilian harm, large-scale displacement, and extensive damage to infrastructure, all amid a state unable to provide adequate protection or uphold basic rights. Political stagnation and entrenched sectarian power structures limited the new government's ability to enact meaningful reforms, leaving critical issues—judicial independence, prison conditions, freedom of expression, and gender equality—either stalled or worsening. Journalists and activists faced mounting surveillance, intimidation, and arbitrary detention by state and non-state actors, while the prolonged socioeconomic collapse deprived communities of essential services and exacerbated poverty. Refugees and detainees, particularly Syrians, confronted heightened discrimination, unsafe conditions, and increasing pressure for involuntary return, as women and girls continued to endure discriminatory laws, escalating gender-based violence, and rising child marriage in marginalized areas

### Section 1. Background and Context

Lebanon's human-rights situation in **2025** is inseparable from years of compounding crises: the post-**2019** economic collapse, the unaddressed aftermath of the **2020** Beirut port explosion, persistent political paralysis, and escalating regional conflict. Israeli military operations along the southern border since late **2023** introduced a new phase of instability that strained national security and institutional capacity. Although a new government was formed in early **2025**, structural dysfunction endured. Sectarian competition, entrenched patronage networks, and resistance to reform continued to shape governance, leaving judicial and security institutions vulnerable to political and non-state influence. The socioeconomic crisis further hollowed public services, while currency volatility deepened poverty and public frustration. Lebanon—home to roughly six million people—continued to host around **1.5 million** Syrian refugees, one of the world's highest per-capita ratios. This convergence of pressures created conditions in which vulnerable groups faced heightened risks to their rights, safety, and dignity.



## Section 2. Political and Legal Framework

### 2.1 Structural Weakness and Governance Paralysis

Lebanon's constitutional system, built on power-sharing arrangements among religious communities, struggled to provide effective governance throughout 2025. While the formation of a new government broke months of political deadlock, this did not translate into meaningful reform. Instead, deeply rooted factional dynamics continued to impede legislative progress on nearly all major human-rights issues.

The disconnect between formal policymaking and human-rights obligations was particularly evident in stalled reforms related to prison conditions, judicial independence, transitional justice, and social protection systems. Political actors frequently invoked national security concerns or the ongoing conflict in the south as justifications for delaying structural reforms, even in areas unrelated to the conflict.

### 2.2 Resistance to Judicial Reform

Judicial independence remained one of the most pressing and unresolved governance challenges. Despite the Cabinet's approval of a long-awaited draft law on judicial independence in May 2025, political factions in Parliament delayed its review through November 2025. The draft law—which aimed to strengthen the independence of higher judicial councils and protect judges from political interference—faced opposition from parties unwilling to relinquish control over appointments, promotions, and disciplinary processes.

This obstruction perpetuated a judicial system susceptible to political manipulation,<sup>311</sup> undermining accountability and discouraging judges from pursuing cases involving corruption, abuse of power, or violations by security agencies. The delay also maintained a climate of fear among journalists and activists, who remained vulnerable to arbitrary lawsuits, defamation prosecutions, and orders to appear before security agencies.

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<sup>311</sup> L'Orient-Le Jour, "Le gouvernement approuve le projet de loi sur l'indépendance de la justice," 2025, <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1458486/le-gouvernement-approuve-le-projet-de-loi-sur-lindependance-de-la-justice.html>.

The absence of an independent judiciary contributed directly to Lebanon's failure to address long-standing human-rights violations and left victims of torture, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearance without meaningful avenues for redress.



### Section 3. Detention, Prisons, and Procedural Justice

#### 3.1 Chronic Overcrowding and Pre-Trial Detention

Lebanon's prison crisis deepened further in 2025. Overcrowding reached critical levels, with approximately 8,300 detainees held in facilities designed for far fewer. Although available data suggested that roughly 2,000 of these individuals were pre-trial detainees, human-rights groups estimated that the true percentage of those held without trial could exceed 80%, due to backlogged courts, slow investigations, and inconsistent reporting.

Many detainees remained in legal limbo for years—sometimes decades—without formal charges or judicial rulings. This prolonged detention effectively constituted punishment without trial, in violation of international standards requiring that pre-trial detention be an exceptional measure, not the norm.



### 3.2 Treatment of Syrian Detainees

The situation of Syrian detainees remained especially alarming. An estimated 2,351 Syrians were held in Lebanese prisons in 2025, many detained for political reasons linked to past opposition to the former Syrian regime or participation in armed groups opposed to Hezbollah during the Syrian conflict.

Their legal status often fell into a grey zone, as Lebanese authorities failed to provide clear pathways toward resolution—either through prosecution, release, or repatriation in line with international safeguards.

#### Key incidents in 2025 included:

- **Roumieh Prison Hunger Strike (February 2025):**  
Dozens of Syrian detainees launched an open-ended hunger strike demanding improved conditions and voluntary repatriation after political changes in Syria. Authorities responded with minimal engagement, and no structural improvements were recorded.
- **Death of Osama Al-Jaour (August 2025):**  
After ten years of detention in Roumieh Prison, Al-Jaour died amid allegations of medical neglect and abuse. His family described a pattern of starvation, untreated illness, and systemic humiliation. The case sparked widespread outrage but resulted in no formal investigation, highlighting the absence of accountability for deaths in custody.<sup>312</sup>

### 3.3 The Collapse of the General Amnesty Project

A proposed general amnesty law—intended to relieve overcrowding and resolve thousands of long-term cases—remained stalled throughout 2025. Political factions used the draft legislation as a bargaining tool, each seeking to exclude categories of detainees tied to its own constituencies or opponents.

<sup>312</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), "Lebanon: Press Release, August 18, 2025," 2025, <https://wjwc.org/ar/press-releases-ar/2025-08-18-07-14-59>.



## Israeli Aggression and Humanitarian Impact

### Internally displaced (due to fighting)

**~1.4 million**

Largest wave in recent history

### Civilian deaths (since Oct 2023)

**4,000+**

### Civilian deaths after ceasefire

**≥105 Lebanese**

### Airspace violations

**6,200+**

By Israeli forces

### Ground incursions

**~2,200**

Military activities inside Lebanon

### Housing destruction

**~100,000 units**

Damaged or uninhabitable

### Syrian refugees in Lebanon

**~1.5 million**

Ongoing pressure on fragile systems



**This instrumentalization of detainees' lives for political gain:**

- prolonged suffering for prisoners and their families
- exacerbated overcrowding
- reinforced public perceptions of a politicized and discriminatory justice system

Failure to enact the amnesty reflected a broader institutional refusal to address structural injustices in Lebanon's detention regime.

**Section 4. Conflict-Related Violations and the Right to Life**

In 2025, Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon represented the gravest threat to civilian life and security. Occurring against the backdrop of a war that began in October 2023—claiming over 4,000 lives, injuring more than 17,000, and destroying around 100,000 homes—these assaults deepened an already severe humanitarian crisis amid Lebanon's near-total economic and service collapse.

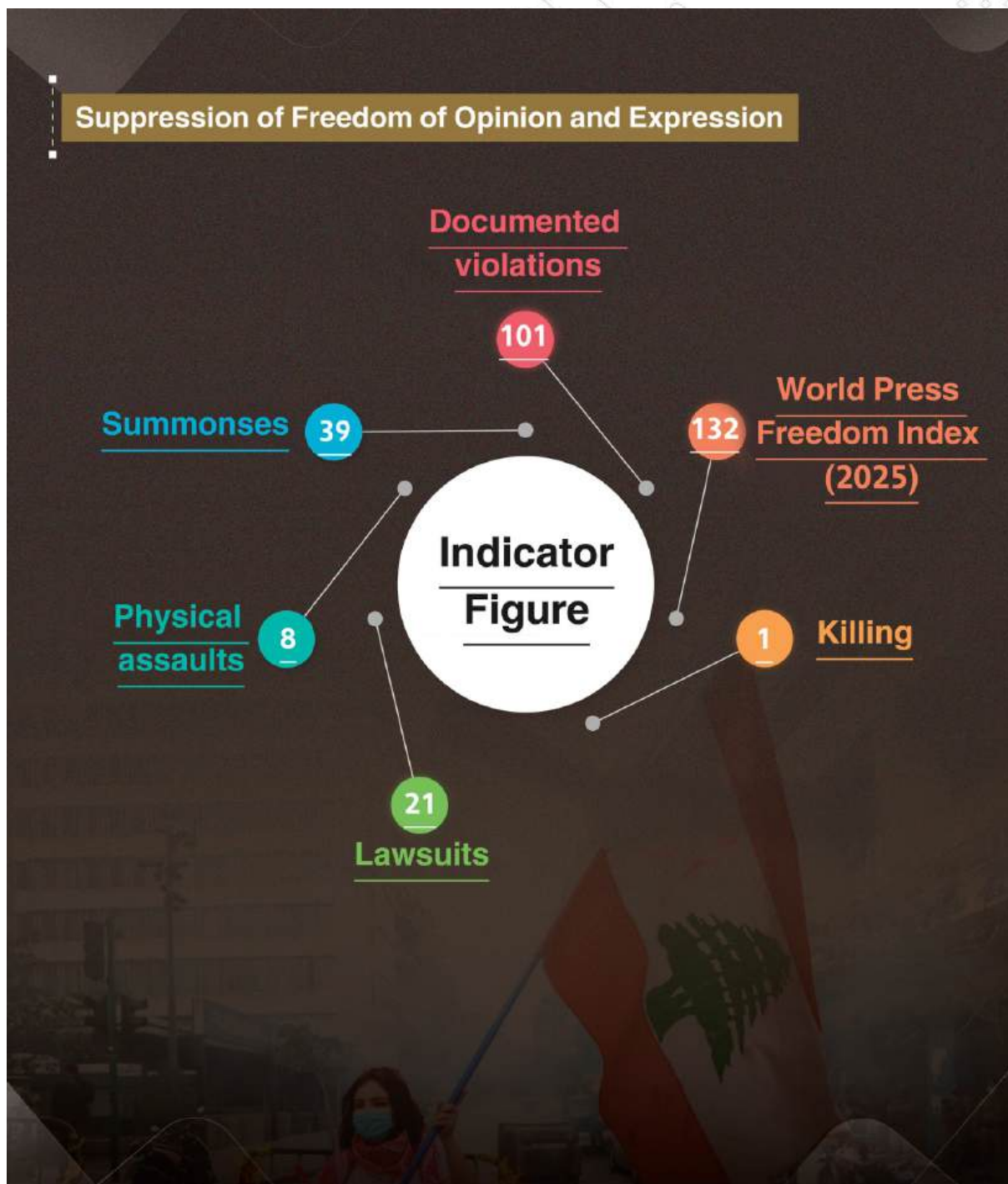
**4.1 Israel's Systematic Violations of International Humanitarian Law**

The Israeli attacks on Lebanese territory continued to inflict severe civilian harm throughout 2025, despite a ceasefire agreement signed in November 2024. UNIFIL documented:

- more than 6,200 aerial violations, including drone intrusions and fighter-jet overflights
- nearly 2,200 ground incursions north of the Blue Line

These acts constituted repeated violations of Lebanese sovereignty and breaches of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention's prohibitions on targeting civilians and destroying civilian objects without military necessity.

The UN Human Rights Office recorded at least 105 Lebanese civilian deaths after the ceasefire came into effect—contrast this with *zero* recorded Israeli civilian deaths from Lebanese fire during the same period, reinforcing concerns over disproportionate use of force.



#### 4.2 Direct Targeting of Civilians

Several documented incidents during 2025 illustrate patterns of indiscriminate or deliberate attacks:



- **Bint Jbeil Massacre (21 September 2025)**

An Israeli airstrike killed five civilians, including three children. Among the victims was an entire family holding dual Lebanese-American citizenship,<sup>313</sup> raising diplomatic concerns but resulting in no meaningful accountability.

- **Killing of Hassan Atwi and his Wife (6 October 2025)**

A blind Lebanese man, Hassan Atwi, and his wife, Zainab Raslan, were killed when a drone struck their vehicle on the Zibdin–Nabatieh road. The absence of military activity in the area at the time led rights groups to describe the attack as evidence of reckless or deliberate targeting.

#### 4.3 Massive Displacement and Humanitarian Breakdown

Israeli military operations forced approximately 1.4 million people—nearly one quarter of Lebanon's population—to flee their homes, mostly from southern villages near the border. Entire towns suffered catastrophic damage; for instance, 75% of homes in Houla were rendered uninhabitable.

##### Key humanitarian impacts included:

- disruption of education for tens of thousands of children
- extensive destruction of agricultural land, a vital source of income
- prolonged displacement due to Israel's continued gunfire targeting returnees
- collapse of local governance structures unable to maintain basic services

The crisis compounded pre-existing economic hardship and disproportionately affected female-headed households, refugees, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

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<sup>313</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), "Lebanon: Israeli occupation missiles continue to target civilians despite ceasefire agreement," 2025, <https://wjwc.org/ar/newsar/2025-10-07-18-45-51>.



#### 4.4 Rising Hostility Toward Refugees

Lebanon's hosting of about 1.5 million Syrian refugees became increasingly politicized. Parliament issued non-binding recommendations urging the government to end the "illegal presence" of Syrians, while senior officials publicly pressed the UN to support large-scale returns.

Such rhetoric heightened xenophobia, triggering:

- increased evictions
- arbitrary arrests
- mobility restrictions
- violence against Syrian workers and families

These developments threatened to normalize forced returns to Syria in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

### Section 5. Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom

#### 5.1 Shrinking Civic Space

Lebanon's media environment deteriorated sharply in 2025. Although the country improved slightly in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index—from 140 to 132—it remained well below pre-war standings, signaling deeper structural threats.

Human-rights groups documented at least 101 violations against media practitioners during the first ten months of 2025, including killings (1), physical assaults (8), intimidation (23), legal harassment (21), and censorship (3).

#### 5.2 Types of Violations Documented

##### Killings and Violent Attacks

- In January, Israeli forces fired on a group of Lebanese journalists reporting on civilian returns to border towns.



- In March, Hezbollah fighters launched an anti-tank missile at five Syrian journalists near the Lebanon-Syria border.
- In August, journalist Mohammed Hamza Shahadi was killed in an Israeli airstrike targeting his car.

### Judicial Harassment

Authorities weaponized Lebanon's Cybercrime Law to intimidate journalists. Outlets such as Daraj and Megaphone faced politically motivated lawsuits accusing them of undermining the financial system or destabilizing the national currency<sup>314</sup>—charges used to silence investigative reporting on corruption and governance failures.

### Arbitrary Arrests and Detention

- In July, two journalists were detained by municipal police in Meiss El Jabal and handed to the army.
- That same month, the General Security Directorate detained journalist Hajar Knio at Beirut Airport for nine hours without justification.

### Censorship and Obstruction

- A television episode hosted by Walid Abboud on Lebanon TV (Télé Liban) was banned from broadcast.
- A court order prohibited airing a drama series about the life of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.
- Correspondent Nawal Berry was prevented from reporting in Maroun El Ras due to local interference.

### Threat Campaigns

Prominent journalist Dima Sadek faced widespread online threats and incitement rooted in political polarization. MTV correspondent Antoine Saadeh was similarly threatened while on duty.

<sup>314</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), "Lebanon: News Report, May 31, 2025," 2025, <https://wjwc.org/ar/newsar/2025-05-31-06-37-20>.

These incidents formed a pattern of coercion aimed at restricting investigative journalism, suppressing dissent, and consolidating impunity for political and security actors.

## Section 6. Freedom of Assembly and Association

Legislative pressures on civic space intensified between late 2024 and 2025. Rather than expanding freedoms, political actors advanced legal reforms that risk criminalizing civil-society activity.

Amendments to the new media bill in September 2025 imposed sweeping restrictions, including a ban on reporting details about complainants during ongoing judicial proceedings.<sup>315</sup> Rights groups condemned this as a "systematic gagging measure" tailored to shield political and financial elites from scrutiny—especially in cases linked to corruption, public-fund mismanagement, and the Beirut port explosion.

The proposed law also threatened the operational independence of NGOs by expanding penalties for unregistered associations and expanding ministries' oversight powers.

## Section 7. Women's Rights and Gender-Based Violence

### 7.1 Legal Discrimination

Lebanon's legal framework continued to entrench gender inequality throughout 2025. Key discriminatory features included:

- the nationality law, which still prevented Lebanese women from passing citizenship to their children or foreign spouses;
- 15 separate religious personal-status courts, each enforcing patriarchal laws governing marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance;<sup>316</sup>
- stalled progress on protective legislation, including the 2024 draft law on gender-based violence that showed no movement in Parliament.

<sup>315</sup> International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Civic Freedom Monitor: Lebanon, 2025, <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/lebanon>.

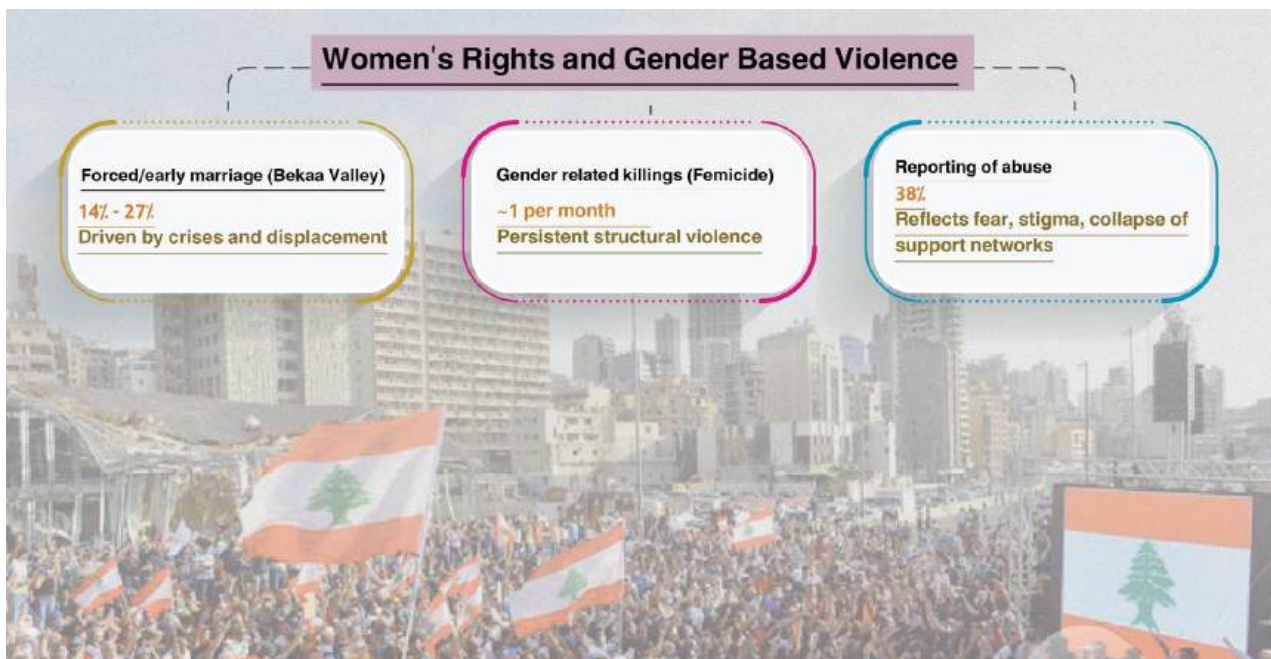
<sup>316</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Lebanon Country Chapter, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/lebanon>.

This legal landscape entrenched systemic violations of women's rights and prevented survivors of abuse from accessing justice.

## 7.2 Violence Against Women and Harmful Practices

Armed conflict, displacement, and economic desperation fueled a marked rise in gender-based violence:

- **Child marriage surged**, especially in the Bekaa region, where documented rates increased from 14% to approximately 27%. Families facing severe poverty increasingly viewed early marriage as a survival strategy, exposing girls to lifelong harm.
- **Femicide remained alarmingly consistent**, averaging nearly one woman killed per month.
- Reports of domestic violence increased, but **formal complaints dropped by 38%**, reflecting:<sup>317</sup>
  - fear of retaliation
  - loss of community protection networks
  - limited access to shelters
  - absence of safe reporting mechanisms for displaced women



<sup>317</sup> CARE France, "Liban: Femme, vivre dans l'ombre des violences," 2025, <https://www.carefrance.org/actualites/liban-femme-vivre-dans-ombre-des-violences/>.



Women also experienced a sharp increase in **online harassment**,<sup>318</sup> including threats, stalking, and dissemination of private information—forms of digital violence made more severe by the absence of adequate legal protections.

## Section 8. Legal Standards and State Obligations

Lebanon is party to multiple international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention Against Torture (CAT), CEDAW (with reservations), and the Geneva Conventions. Despite these obligations, 2025 demonstrated repeated failures to:

- prevent arbitrary detention
- protect civilians from indiscriminate attacks
- uphold freedom of expression
- ensure equality before the law
- prosecute torture and deaths in custody
- safeguard refugees against refoulement

These shortcomings constitute violations of both treaty obligations and customary international law.

## Conclusion

Lebanon in 2025 illustrated a state under severe stress—caught between external aggression and internal dysfunction. Civilians bore the brunt of an escalating regional conflict, while a broken political system and a compromised judiciary failed to uphold even the most basic rights.

The cumulative picture is one of systemic erosion:

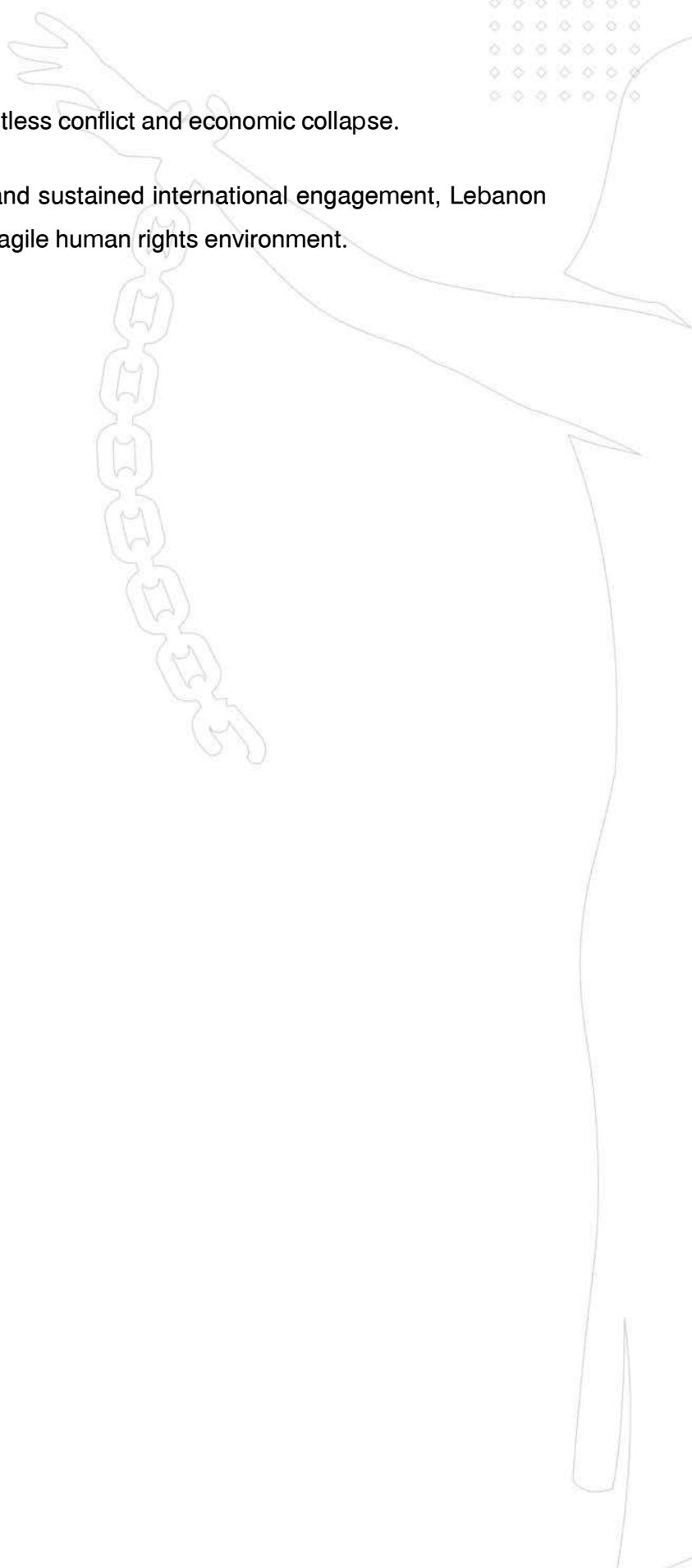
- a justice system unable or unwilling to deliver fairness,
- a media landscape under threat,
- women facing intensified discrimination and violence,
- refugees trapped between hostility and insecurity,

<sup>318</sup> UN Women, Lebanon Country Results, 2025, <https://open.unwomen.org/en/country-results/LB>.



- and a population navigating relentless conflict and economic collapse.

Without structural reform, political will, and sustained international engagement, Lebanon risks further deterioration of its already fragile human rights environment.





## LIBYA: IMPUNITY RUNS DEEP

### Introduction

Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) presents this detailed assessment of the human rights situation in Libya for the period spanning late 2024 to late 2025. Fourteen years after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, Libya continues to endure a protracted crisis driven by armed conflict, institutional collapse, and political division. The country remains deeply fractured between rival authorities in the east and west, each maintained by competing security formations and backed by external actors whose interventions have intensified violence and prolonged instability.

Within this environment, state institutions—especially the justice sector—have deteriorated to the point of near paralysis. Armed groups operate with unchecked authority, often acting as de facto law enforcement while committing serious and widespread abuses. The absence of accountability mechanisms has entrenched impunity, leaving civilians, journalists, activists, and migrants vulnerable to systematic violations.

This WJWC report reconstructs the developments that shaped Libya's human rights landscape during the reporting period, with particular attention to violations against journalists, restrictions on civic space, abuses against migrants, and the deterioration of women's rights. The findings herein highlight the urgent need for unified legal frameworks, independent oversight, and international support to safeguard fundamental freedoms and restore the rule of law.



## Section 1. The Political and Legal Framework

Libya's political and legal landscape remains defined by fragmentation. Two competing authorities—the eastern-based administration backed by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) under Khalifa Haftar, and the western-based Government of National Unity—continue to operate in isolation, each sustained by distinct military alliances and foreign patrons. External interference, particularly from the United Arab Emirates and Egypt on one side and Turkey and Qatar on the other, has exacerbated armed confrontation and entrenched political division.

The collapse of Libya's political and legal architecture is not merely a symptom of ongoing conflict; it is the foundational cause enabling systematic violations to occur and persist without meaningful accountability. This institutional breakdown sustains the cycle of violence, erodes the rule of law, and undermines any prospects for lasting stability.

A UN Panel of Experts report issued in April 2025 confirmed that military support provided to Haftar's forces—especially by the UAE—directly contributed to indiscriminate attacks on civilian-populated areas, in clear violation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 2510. This external backing has had lasting consequences on civilian safety and further



entrenched impunity, shaping the trajectory of Libya's conflict and obstructing pathways toward peace.

#### • Disintegration of the Justice System and Institutional Collapse

Libya's criminal justice system has nearly collapsed under the weight of ongoing conflict, leaving courts unable to function consistently and law enforcement bodies stripped of independence. Judges face routine intimidation by armed groups, while prosecutors and defense lawyers are frequently blocked from carrying out their duties or accessing detainees. Armed groups have usurped the state's monopoly over justice, acting as de facto police, prosecutors, and judges, thereby dismantling the accountability framework.

Impunity has become the norm rather than the exception. Torture, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial killings occur without legal consequence, with no serious investigations opened since 2019. Legislation shielding militias from accountability for crimes under international law further entrenches this culture of immunity. Severe due-process deficiencies persist, as lawyers are often denied access to clients or case files, while judges and prosecutors face continuous harassment by armed groups.<sup>319</sup>

Reflecting repressive legacies, the Libyan Penal Code still authorizes the death penalty in roughly 30 articles, including for acts related to freedom of expression and association. As of September 2025, 105 individuals remain under sentence of death, despite no executions since 2010.<sup>320</sup> This institutional void has created an "ideal environment for impunity," extinguishing prospects for transitional justice and fueling grave violations against civilians.

<sup>319</sup> Amnesty International, Libya: Human Rights Violations Amid Conflict (London: Amnesty International, April 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/MDE1991692025ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>320</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025: Libya (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/libya>.



## Section 2. Civil Rights and the Right to Life

The entrenched impunity resulting from institutional collapse is not merely the background to ongoing events; it is the driving force that has turned the lives of civilians, migrants, and activists into an open arena for systematic violence. Rival armed groups across the country operate entirely beyond judicial scrutiny or legal oversight.

During the reporting period, Haftar's forces tightened their iron grip over Benghazi, Ajdabiya, Sirte, and Marj through repressive practices that included arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and systematic torture. Leaked videos from Qarnada Prison in January 2025<sup>321</sup> whose authenticity was confirmed by the UN mission—provided irrefutable evidence of brutal torture inflicted on detainees.<sup>322</sup> Additionally, seven civilians were killed in

<sup>321</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, "ليبيا: انتهاكات جسيمة لحقوق الإنسان بسجن قرنادة", Tawakkol Karman Foundation, September 2025, <https://tawakkolkarman.net/ar/org-ar/-5286/2-منظمة-صحفيات-بلاقيود-اخبار-المؤسسة>.  
[ليبيا-انتهاكات-جسيمة-لحقوق-الإنسان-بسجن-قرنادة](https://tawakkolkarman.net/ar/org-ar/-5286/2-منظمة-صحفيات-بلاقيود-اخبار-المؤسسة).

<sup>322</sup> "Libya Human Rights Abuses – Qarnada Prison," YouTube video, 5:00, posted by [channel name if available], January 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98BNpiq\\_Pzk&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98BNpiq_Pzk&t=5s).



the southern region of Kufra during a military campaign conducted by these forces under the pretext of combating "smuggling," without any official investigation.

In Tripoli and surrounding areas, the "Special Deterrence Force for Combating Terrorism and Organized Crime"—one of the most powerful and Salafi-leaning armed groups in the capital—exercises unchecked authority outside any legal framework. The force is implicated in arbitrarily detaining hundreds of individuals, including journalists and activists, based on vague and overly broad accusations such as "blasphemy" or "insulting the military institution." The death of detainee Sharaf al-Din Hamdan inside Mitiga Detention Center in August 2025—documented by Women Journalists Without Chains—after eleven years of detention without trial stands as a tragic reflection of the cruelty and absence of justice.<sup>323</sup> The case triggered widespread outrage that compelled the Presidential Council to suspend the force's operations—a rare indication of consequences arising from such violations.



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323



### • Systematic Abuses Against Migrants

Migrants and asylum seekers remain among the most vulnerable populations in Libya, facing escalating violations that signal a deepening humanitarian crisis. Documentation by Women Journalists Without Chains paints a grim picture of systematic abuse across detention facilities and conflict zones.<sup>324</sup>

- a) Dozens of migrants died under degrading conditions in detention centers in Shahat, Qarnada, and Zawiya during the first half of 2025.
- b) Mass graves containing at least 83 migrant bodies were uncovered near Jalu and Ajdabiya, offering stark evidence of lethal neglect and violence.
- c) Human trafficking networks—often operating with the complicity of armed groups—continue to perpetrate forced labor, extortion, and sexual violence. Migrant women, in particular, suffer targeted sexual abuse inside militia-controlled detention facilities, underscoring the gendered dimension of these crimes.

These abuses constitute clear violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Armed groups affiliated with both eastern and western authorities act with full impunity, while journalists attempting to expose these crimes face harassment and intimidation. The persistence of such violations reflects not only the collapse of state authority but also the absence of any meaningful accountability, leaving migrants trapped in conditions that amount to systematic persecution.

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324



### Section 3. Freedom of Expression, Opinion, and the Press

The environment for journalists and media workers in Libya remains extremely dangerous. WJWC observes that violations against the press are not incidental—they are strategic tools used by authorities and armed groups to control narratives, silence dissent, and obstruct exposure of wrongdoing.

During the reporting period, at least 17 journalists faced attacks, including arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, digital surveillance, and judicial harassment.

Authorities continue to enforce oppressive laws—particularly Publications Law No. 76 (1972)—to restrict reporting and criminalize criticism.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) describes Libya as a place where journalists operate "between the surveillance of security agencies and the fear of militias," reflecting pervasive threats across both eastern and western regions.



## Right to Life and Violations Against Civilians and Migrants

### East (Haftar aligned forces)

Arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, systematic torture

Video leaks from Qarnada Prison (January 2025) confirm brutal torture practices

### East (Haftar aligned forces)

Extrajudicial killings

Seven civilians killed in Kufra during a military campaign with no official investigation

### West (Special Deterrence Force)

Arbitrary detention outside judicial oversight, vague charges such as "contempt of religion"

Death of detainee Sharaf al Din Hamdan inside Mitiga Prison (August 2025) after 11 years without trial

### Migrants

Killings, human trafficking, extortion, systematic sexual violence in detention centers

Dozens of deaths recorded in detention facilities during the first half of 2025

### Migrants

Mass graves

Discovery of 83 migrant bodies in mass graves near Jalu and Ajdabiya

## Representative Cases Documented by WJWC

- **Saleh al-Zarwali** (Al-Gheema): Arrested in May 2024 and referred to a military court on unfounded terrorism charges.



- **Ikram Rajab** (Al-Mustaqbal): Subjected to repeated detention and ill-treatment in Benghazi for reporting on corruption.<sup>325</sup>
- **Mohammed al-Srit**: Forcibly disappeared in Benghazi for three weeks.
- **Ayad Abdel-Jalil**: Arbitrarily detained in Tawergha for criticizing a local official.
- **Ahmed al-Senussi** (Sada): Arrested in Tripoli and placed on a travel ban for publishing corruption-related documents.
- **Kheirallah Ibrahim**: Threatened and surveilled, later forced to flee the country.
- **Islam al-Atrush**: Equipment seized by armed groups during field reporting in Tripoli.

These cases reflect a broader pattern of repression aimed at dismantling independent journalism and deterring investigative reporting. WJWC emphasizes that without meaningful media protections, Libya's prospects for accountability and transparency will continue to deteriorate.



<sup>325</sup> Reporters Without Borders (RSF), "ليبيا: هرسة واعتقالات، الصحافة تواجه اختناقاً متزايداً", RSF, September 2025, <https://rsf.org/ar/l-اختناق-تواجه-الصحافة-واعتقالات-هرسة-ليبيا>.



#### Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association

With armed groups dominating public space, the right to peaceful assembly and association has become practically impossible to exercise. Arbitrary arrests targeting "human-rights activists" by entities such as the Special Deterrence Force are not aimed solely at punishing specific individuals—they send a collective message of intimidation to deter any form of independent civic organization.

Internal security agencies in both Tripoli and Benghazi continued arbitrarily arresting and detaining activists and journalists with impunity, often under the pretext of "protecting Libyan values,"<sup>326</sup> thereby tightening an already restrictive civic space. Despite the launch of a roadmap in February 2025 to develop a rights-based legal framework for civil society in cooperation with the United Nations, the civil society law proposed by civic groups in 2021 has yet to be passed.<sup>327</sup> This legislative failure stems from the complexities of political division and the absence of a unified legal framework, enabling each local authority to justify targeting associations based on conflicting legal interpretations.

Such a strategy has severe implications extending beyond rights suppression: it paralyzes civil society and prevents the emergence of grassroots alternatives to militia rule, locking the country into ongoing conflict and obstructing any pathway toward peace-building or democratic transition. This repressive environment imposes compounded challenges on specific groups—most notably women.

<sup>326</sup> Amnesty International, *Libya: Human Rights Violations Amid Conflict* (London: Amnesty International, April 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/MDE1991692025ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>327</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025: Libya* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/libya>.



## Section 5. Women's Rights

Women in Libya continue to suffer disproportionately from the country's political instability, legal discrimination, and militarized social environment. Female journalists, in particular, face heightened risks of harassment, intimidation, digital abuse, and detention.

The case of journalist Ikram Rajab—subjected to repeated imprisonment and mistreatment for her reporting—offers a concrete example of the dangers faced by women who challenge the red lines imposed by de facto authorities. In another context, documented evidence of "systematic rape" against migrant women in certain detention centers highlights the use of sexual violence as a weapon amid total lawlessness and the dominance of armed force.



### Suppression of Media Freedoms, Civic Space, and Women's Rights

- Freedom of the Press**
  - Direct targeting and arbitrary detention of journalists
  - 17 journalists assaulted or arbitrarily detained
- Repressive Legislation**
  - Use of outdated laws to prosecute journalists
  - Application of Press Law No. 76 of 1972
- Freedom of Assembly and Association**
  - Arbitrary arrests of activists under the pretext of "protecting values"
  - Civil society law proposed in 2021 remains unpassed due to governmental division
- Women's Rights (Legislative Regression)**
  - Establishment of morality control bodies imposing restrictions on movement and personal freedoms
  - Creation of "Department of Moral Protection" (October 2024), proposing mandatory hijab and guardian approval for travel
- Political Exclusion of Women**
  - Systematic marginalization from negotiation and decision making forums
  - Women excluded from the Joint Military Committee (5+5) and the Joint Electoral Laws Committee (6+6)

- **Harassment and Targeting of Women in Public Life**

The repeated targeting of journalist **Ikram Rajab**, including episodes of mistreatment and detention, reflects a broader trend identified by WJWC: women who challenge corruption, authoritarianism, or militia influence become immediate targets. Online

harassment, smear campaigns, and threats of violence are increasingly used to silence women's voices in media and civil society. In detention centers—especially those holding migrants—women face systematic sexual violence. These acts constitute grave violations of international law and reveal the extreme vulnerability of women living under militia-controlled environments.

### **Regressive Legislative Proposals**

In October 2024, the Government of National Unity announced the establishment of a "Morality Protection Directorate" within the Ministry of Interior.<sup>328</sup> Subsequent statements by the acting minister indicated an alarming intention to:

- a) impose mandatory hijab,
- b) restrict women's travel without guardian approval, and
- c) deploy a morality police force across western Libya.

These proposals violate core principles of personal liberty and represent an attempt to legislate away fundamental rights under the guise of "moral protection."<sup>329</sup> They also serve as a political tactic designed to divert attention from the structural failures of the unelected government.<sup>330</sup>

Libyan women also continue to face entrenched discrimination in family law, citizenship, and political participation. Children of Libyan women married to non-Libyans are denied equal citizenship rights, and women remain largely excluded from key national negotiation mechanisms, including the 5+5 Military Committee and the 6+6 Committee on electoral laws.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>328</sup> Amnesty International, "Libya: Impunity Fuels Protracted Human Rights Crisis—Submission to the UPR Working Group, November 2025" (London: Amnesty International, April 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/MDE1991692025ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>329</sup> Hanan Salah, "Libyan Minister's 'Morality' Measures Would Violate Women's Rights," Human Rights Watch, November 13, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/13/libyan-ministers-morality-measures-would-violate-womens-rights>.

<sup>330</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, "Libya's Morality Police: Political Theater in the Face of Crises," March 11, 2022, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/libyas-morality-police-political-theater-in-the-face-of-crises/>.

<sup>331</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Libya—Women's Participation in Peace Processes: Case Study," accessed November 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/libya-4>.



Despite isolated gains—such as the election of a woman mayor in Zliten<sup>332</sup>—these developments remain insufficient against the backdrop of widespread institutional discrimination.

### Conclusion

Libya's human rights situation in 2025 reflects a systemic pattern: impunity is not accidental but foundational, enabling armed groups and security bodies to perpetrate abuses without restraint. The fragmentation of governance, collapse of the justice system, and intensification of foreign interference have all contributed to the deterioration of civil liberties and the proliferation of violations targeting civilians, migrants, women, activists, and journalists.

For Women Journalists Without Chains, this period highlights especially grave concerns over press freedom, the targeting of women in the public sphere, and the deliberate use of "morality" narratives to suppress civic space.

WJWC urges Libyan authorities—alongside regional and international partners—to prioritize unifying legal frameworks, protecting journalists, empowering civil society, and guaranteeing women's participation in all decision-making processes. Without these measures, the cycle of impunity will continue to undermine any prospects for justice, stability, or democratic transition in Libya.

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<sup>332</sup> UN Women, "Libya—Country Results (Transparency Portal), Strategic Note 2023–2025," accessed November 2025, <https://open.unwomen.org/en/country-results/LY>.



## EGYPT: JUSTICE HELD CAPTIVE

### Introduction

Egypt enters 2025 entrenched in one of the most acute human-rights crises in the Middle East, marked by a sustained campaign of repression against political opponents, human-rights defenders, journalists, and ordinary citizens. Despite highly publicized initiatives such as the "National Human Rights Strategy" and the "National Dialogue," the state's security and intelligence services continue to expand their capacity for arbitrary arrest, information blackout, and the suppression of independent media. These initiatives have offered little more than cosmetic reform; they function primarily as diplomatic instruments designed to soften the government's international image while core repressive practices remain firmly intact. This report offers a detailed account of systematic violations across key areas, beginning with the political and legal framework that enables and entrenches state repression.

### Section I. Political and Legal Framework

Understanding the architecture of repression in Egypt requires analyzing the underlying structures that govern political authority. The military establishment and its extensive security apparatus dominate state institutions, forming the backbone of a system that corrodes the rule of law and consolidates a comprehensive machinery of control.

Since 2013, the Egyptian military has reasserted decisive authority over state institutions, gradually constructing what is, in essence, a militarized political order masked by a civilian façade. Although the presidency is formally presented as a civilian leadership, effective decision-making remains firmly in the hands of the armed forces and intelligence agencies. Their influence extends deeply into the economy, media landscape, judiciary, and local administration.

By framing their actions in terms of "state protection" and "maintaining stability," the authorities have passed laws that shield the military from accountability while granting it direct authority over civilian affairs. This extensive economic and institutional reach has created powerful incentives to silence dissent, as any genuine political challenge is



perceived as a threat to the military's entrenched economic interests. The outcome has been a sweeping militarization of public life, one that has marginalized capable civilian leadership and effectively closed off any credible democratic avenues.



The judiciary has increasingly functioned as an instrument of political control, serving to validate repression rather than uphold its role as an independent arbiter of justice. Its autonomy has been deeply undermined, and it is now regularly used to pursue political vendettas against dissidents and human-rights defenders. A number of entrenched practices illustrate this decline:

- **Military trials for civilians:** In the early months of 2025, at least 28 civilians—including journalists and labor organizers—were subjected to proceedings before military



courts. One notable example occurred in April 2025, when 12 activists from Mahalla al-Kubra were referred to military prosecution on charges of "inciting protests," despite the non-violent character of their activities.

- **"Recycling" of detainees:** Authorities continue to practice what has come to be known as the "recycling" of detainees. Individuals ordered released by the courts are immediately charged in new cases, a tactic that effectively nullifies judicial decisions and turns pre-trial detention into an open-ended form of punishment.

The political-legal apparatus functions not as a distant or theoretical construct, but as a mechanism that manifests in routine abuses undermining the basic rights and liberties of Egyptian citizens.

## Section II. Core Violations of Civil Rights and the Right to Life

The continued weakening of legal safeguards has contributed to a marked rise in serious violations, most notably widespread arbitrary detention, the institutionalized use of torture, and persistent patterns of medical neglect within detention facilities—practices that have resulted in preventable loss of life and underscore the systemic nature of the deterioration.

### Arbitrary Detention and Political Arrests

Arbitrary arrest continues to function as a primary mechanism of political and social control. Since late 2024, security agencies have expanded the use of detention against individuals expressing dissent online or participating in nonviolent public assemblies. Monitoring by Women Journalists Without Chains, drawing on the findings of independent rights organizations, indicates that Egypt currently detains no fewer than 60,000 individuals on politically motivated grounds—<sup>333</sup>a figure that underscores both the magnitude and the sustained nature of the repression.

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<sup>333</sup> Women Journalists Without Chains, Prisons Without Keys (report), accessed November 20, 2025, <https://wjwc.org/ar/reports-ar/60>.



## Civil Rights and Detention (Systematic Arrests)

<b>Political prisoners</b>	No fewer than <b>60,000</b> political detainees are held in Egyptian prisons.
<b>Torture</b>	Torture is routine; prolonged solitary confinement is used as a systematic tool to degrade political prisoners.
<b>Deadly medical neglect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o 12 deaths in custody recorded as of August 2025</li><li>o 50 deaths documented in 2024</li><li>o 75% of all deaths resulted from treatable illnesses, confirming deliberate medical neglect</li></ul>
<b>Badr 3 Prison</b>	A key site of lethal neglect, including the death of Hisham Al-Haddad in February 2025.

Several individual cases continue to illustrate the entrenched nature of this system:

- **Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh**, leader of the *Strong Egypt Party*, has been detained since 2018 and suffers from chronic illnesses without access to adequate medical care.
- **Mohamed al-Qassas** was re-detained in new cases after a court ordered his release, exemplifying the practice of "recycling" detainees.



- **Alaa Abdel Fattah**, one of the country's most recognized activists, surpasses nine years in custody. Although officially released under a 2025 presidential pardon, he remains subjected to a travel ban.<sup>334</sup>

### Systematic Torture and Ill-Treatment

Torture has effectively become embedded in the functioning of the detention system. Evidence compiled by Women Journalists Without Chains in its report "Prisons Without Keys" demonstrates the systematic use of prolonged solitary confinement as a tool aimed at degrading and psychologically destabilizing political detainees. Complementary findings from Amnesty International document a broad array of physical and psychological abuse—including electric shocks, severe beatings, sexual violence, and extended sleep deprivation—illustrating the institutional character and consistency of these practices across facilities.<sup>335</sup>

### Deadly Medical Negligence in Prisons

Conditions in Egyptian prisons have deteriorated to alarming levels. Deliberate medical neglect has emerged as a persistent cause of death, transforming detention facilities into lethal environments. Data compiled by the Egyptian Justice Committee and corroborated by other rights groups, including *Women Journalists Without Chains*, reveal:<sup>336</sup>

- **12 deaths** recorded in custody up to August 2025.
- **50 deaths** documented in 2024.
- 75% of all deaths resulted from treatable medical conditions, as reported by El-Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence—indicating willful denial of medical care, refusal to transfer patients to hospitals, and obstruction of medication.

<sup>334</sup> BBC Arabic, "مصر: تقرير حقوقي يتحدث عن انتهاكات في السجون" [Egypt: Rights Report Speaks of Prison Abuses], accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/c0lkly94w0ko>.

<sup>335</sup> Amnesty International, "Egypt: Prison Conditions and Human Rights Abuses" (report), accessed November 20, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/26tjrjlu>.

<sup>336</sup> Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, "سجون مصر 2024: أكثر من 50 وفاة لسجناء سياسيين" [Egypt's Prisons 2024: More Than 50 Deaths of Political Prisoners], accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/-2024-سجون-مصر>.  
[أكثر-من-50-وفاة-لسجناء-سياسيين](https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/-2024-سجون-مصر).



Badr 3 Prison—promoted by authorities as a "modern rehabilitation facility"—has instead emerged as a stark embodiment of this neglect. It mirrors, and in some respects exceeds, the severity of the notorious Scorpion Prison. Documented abuses include denial of family visits, electricity cuts inside cells, and intrusive surveillance cameras that violate privacy.

The deaths of Hisham Al-Haddad in February 2025 from kidney failure after being denied medication, and Mohammed Abdel Meguid in August 2024 following a hunger strike, offer chilling evidence of the prison's deadly conditions.

### Section III. Freedom of Expression, Opinion, and the Media

The state's tightening control over the information environment—particularly the media—remains central to its broader strategy for regulating public discourse. Through the consolidation of narrative authority and the exclusion of competing viewpoints, authorities have significantly constrained opportunities for open debate and independent scrutiny.

Egypt's deteriorating performance in global assessments reflects these dynamics. In the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, the country ranked 170th worldwide, a decline that mirrors sustained restrictions on journalistic activity.<sup>337</sup> Throughout the year, more than 22 journalists remained in detention in connection with their professional work or public expression, illustrating the continued criminalization of independent reporting.<sup>338</sup>

Control over the media sector was further reinforced through the United Media Services Company, an entity overseen by the General Intelligence Service that now dominates more than 80 percent of broadcast, print, and digital outlets. This consolidated ownership structure has produced an effectively uniform media space, characterized by messaging

<sup>337</sup> CNN Arabic, "مؤشر حرية الصحافة 2025: إنفوغرافيك" [Freedom of Press Index 2025: Infographic], May 4, 2025, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2025/05/04/freedom-of-press-index-2025-infographic>.

<sup>338</sup> International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) – Arabic, "تقرير حول مؤشر حرية الصحافة لعام 2025" [Report on the Press Freedom Index 2025], accessed November 20, 2025, [https://www.ifj-arabic.org/أخبار/التفاصيل?tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bnews%5D=23197&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5BoverwriteDemand%5D%5Bcategories%5D=20&cHash=824dcf971c208dc8a35bc1a73aaedc6](https://www.ifj-arabic.org/أخبار/التفاصيل?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=23197&tx_news_pi1%5BoverwriteDemand%5D%5Bcategories%5D=20&cHash=824dcf971c208dc8a35bc1a73aaedc6).



aligned with state priorities and the progressive disappearance of independent or critical voices.

These constraints are not limited to formal media institutions. Ordinary citizens, civic groups, and community-level actors face expanding restrictions on expression and peaceful assembly, closing off what had been the few remaining channels for civic participation and public engagement.

#### Section IV. Restrictions on Peaceful Assembly and Civil Society

Repression in Egypt extends well beyond individual cases and is structured to disable any form of collective action or civic organization. Authorities appear acutely aware that societal influence emerges through coordination and mobilization; consequently, they work to ensure that no independent group is positioned to contest state decisions or shape public policy.

The response to peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins has increasingly incorporated the use of military courts, signaling a shift in which even labor unions and professional associations—traditionally concerned with workplace and socioeconomic issues—are reclassified as potential security risks. The referral of workers, journalists, and other civic actors to military trials reflects an intentional strategy aimed at deterring the emergence of autonomous social movements.

In parallel, sustained pressure on independent media outlets and human-rights defenders illustrates a broader attempt to constrict the operational space of civil society. The cumulative impact of restrictive laws, financial constraints, and intrusive security oversight has rendered independent human-rights work exceedingly difficult, limiting the ability of organizations to monitor violations or provide support to affected communities.

This comprehensive repression acquires an even more punitive dimension when applied to women, who face heightened vulnerability within an environment where civic freedoms are already severely constrained.



## Section V. Women's Rights

Women—particularly activists, journalists, and political opponents—are subjected to an intensified pattern of repression that targets both their civic engagement and their bodily integrity. The treatment of female detainees provides a stark indicator of the severity of Egypt's human-rights environment and the extent to which gender is instrumentalized as a tool of coercion.

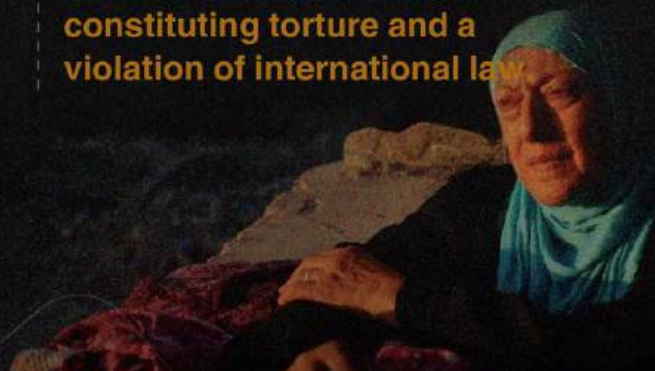


## Civil Rights and Detention (Systematic Arrests)

- **Global ranking**  
Egypt ranks 170th worldwide in the 2025 Press Freedom Index.
- **Detained journalists**  
More than 22 journalists remain in custody during 2025.
- **Media monopoly**  
The intelligence-linked United Media Services controls over 80% of national media, producing near-total suppression of independent journalism.

## Women's Rights (Dual Layer of Repression)

- **Targeted abuse**  
Female detainees face violations aimed at punishing both their activism and their personal dignity.
- **Forced virginity tests**  
Documented in facilities such as Qanater Women's Prison, constituting torture and a violation of international law.





Conditions in facilities such as Qanater Women's Prison reflect the breadth of violations repeatedly reported by detainees and their families. Documented abuses include:

- Threats of sexual violence, including rape;
- Forced virginity examinations during or following interrogation;
- Denial of essential medical treatment and restrictions on family visitation;
- Routine verbal degradation and physical assault.

Forced virginity testing, in particular, constitutes a form of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment under international law. Human Rights Watch and other monitors have affirmed that the practice directly contravenes Egypt's obligations under the Convention Against Torture, ratified in 1986, placing clear legal responsibility on state authorities.

The cumulative nature of these violations—layered onto the wider patterns of arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and suppression of dissent outlined in this report—underscores that such abuses persist within an environment of entrenched impunity. Their continuation is further enabled by sustained international support for Egyptian security institutions, which has diluted external pressure for accountability and reform.

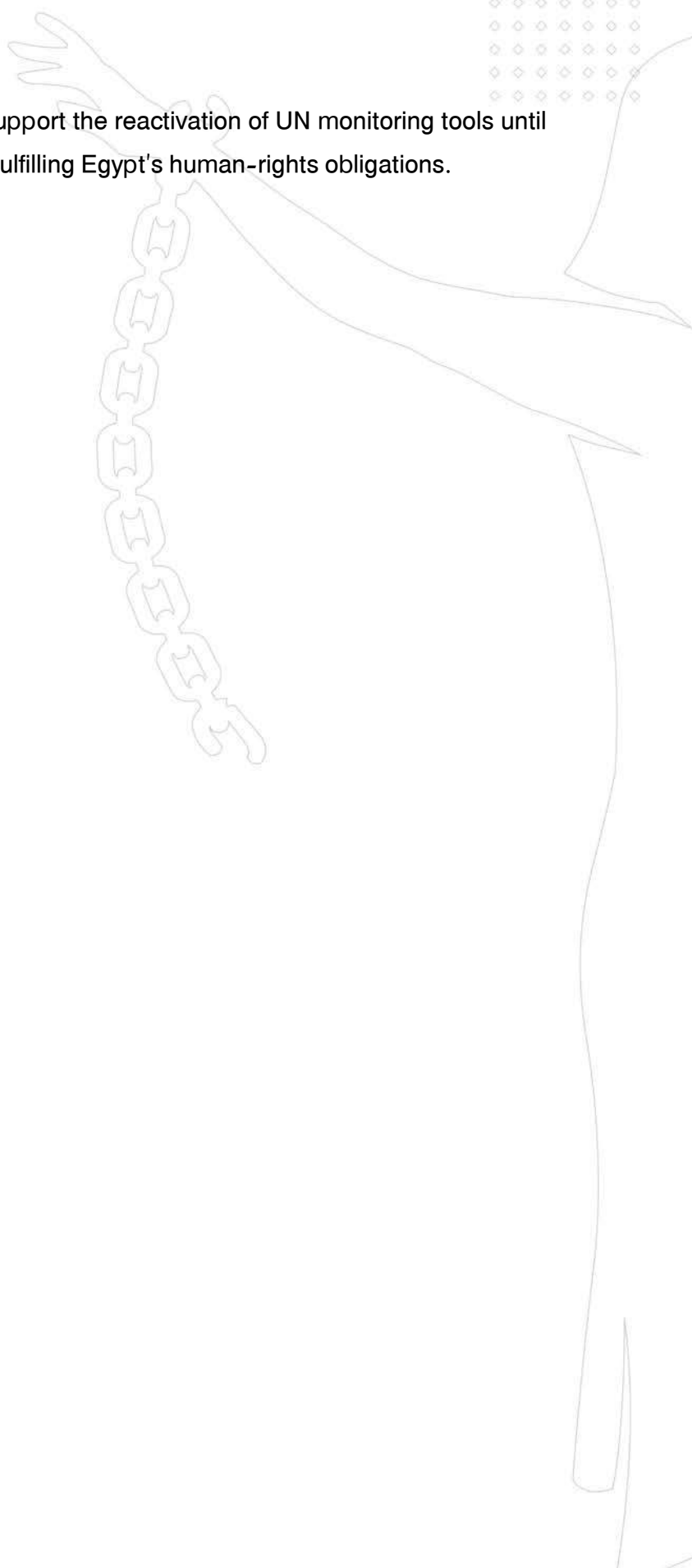
## Conclusion

The human-rights situation in Egypt in 2025 reflects the consolidation of a governance model in which repression is systemic and accountability effectively absent. The judiciary's alignment with executive authority has rendered it structurally incapable of providing redress, allowing serious violations to persist without consequence. This dynamic is reinforced by muted international criticism and the continuation of military, security, and economic partnerships with key allies—including the United States and the European Union—whose policies have, in practice, insulated Egyptian authorities from meaningful external pressure.

Against this backdrop, Women Journalists Without Chains reiterates its call on Egyptian authorities to halt all forms of politically motivated repression, release individuals detained in violation of international standards, and establish credible mechanisms to investigate and prosecute abuses. The organization further urges the international community to condition



or suspend security assistance and to support the reactivation of UN monitoring tools until demonstrable progress is made toward fulfilling Egypt's human-rights obligations.





## MAURITANIA: LIBERTY IN CHAINS

### Introduction

The human rights landscape in Mauritania between late 2024 and late 2025 was defined by stark and deeply embedded contradictions. Despite moments of political visibility—most notably the high-profile prosecution of former president Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz—the country exhibited a broader and more troubling dynamic: a state that delivers selective accountability in cases of political corruption while simultaneously shielding grave human rights abuses from scrutiny. Against the backdrop of a growing strategic partnership with the European Union, Mauritania consolidated a security-first policy orientation that prioritized border control, migration enforcement, and economic reform over the protection of fundamental rights.

**This assessment examines the structural and political drivers of the human rights crisis across five interconnected domains:**

1. The political and legal environment;
2. Civil and personal rights, including the right to life;
3. Freedom of expression and digital rights;
4. Freedom of assembly and associational life;
5. Women's rights.

The report concludes by analyzing the systemic patterns that continue to undermine rights protections and entrench impunity.

### Section I. The Political and Legal Environment

Understanding Mauritania's human rights trajectory requires a sober analysis of the political and legal context that shapes state behavior. The period under review reflects a dual pattern: energetic legislative activity in economic areas, and near-total paralysis on the country's most pressing human rights challenges.



- **Economic Reform as the Government's Dominant Priority**

Mauritania entered **2025** with an assertive economic reform agenda. In January, parliament passed an expansive legislative package—among it a revised Investment Code and a new Public Enterprises Act—aimed at improving the business climate and strengthening financial governance. These reforms were promoted as essential to positioning Mauritania as a stable investment hub and a reliable partner for European institutions.

Yet while the legislative machinery moved swiftly on economic matters, essential social and human rights reforms were left to stagnate. Nowhere is this clearer than in the long-delayed law on combating violence against women, which has remained frozen since its initial submission in **2016**.

No meaningful progress was made in **2025**, underscoring the political resistance within influential conservative institutions to reforms seen as challenging entrenched gender norms and traditional social hierarchies. The consequence is a governance architecture that privileges macro-economic indicators and international partnerships at the expense of long-standing structural inequalities and rights-based reforms.

### **Selective Accountability: Anti-Corruption Trials vs. Persistent Impunity**

One of the year's most high-profile developments was the May **2025** judgment by the Court of Appeal, which increased the sentence of former president Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz to **15 years** in prison for charges including illicit enrichment and money laundering.<sup>339</sup> The decision was upheld by the Supreme Court in November,<sup>340</sup> marking a rare instance of sustained judicial action in a case involving political elites.

However, the trial's significance was diluted by widespread public skepticism. Many Mauritians, as well as legal observers, noted that while the judiciary displayed remarkable resolve in prosecuting political corruption, it remained conspicuously silent regarding grave

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<sup>339</sup> Civicus Monitor, "Mauritania: Journalists and Rights Defenders Face Arrests and Convictions," accessed November 23, 2025, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/journalists-and-rights-defenders-face-arrests-and-convictions/>.

<sup>340</sup> Africanews, "Mauritanie : la Cour suprême confirme la condamnation de l'ex-président," accessed November 23, 2025, <https://fr.africanews>.



violations affecting vulnerable groups—particularly migrants, detainees, and survivors of slavery-related abuses.



This dissonance reinforces perceptions that the justice system is mobilized selectively:<sup>341</sup> forcefully in corruption cases that align with political interests, and immobile in matters that would challenge the security establishment or the country's entrenched social hierarchy. The persistence of impunity, especially in cases involving violations of the right to life and dignity, continues to be one of the most damaging structural failures of the Mauritanian state.

- **Anti-Slavery Legislation: A Legal Framework Undermined by Systemic Non-Enforcement**

<sup>341</sup> Civicus Monitor. "Mauritania: Journalists and Rights Defenders Face Arrests and Convictions." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://monitor.civus.org/explore/journalists-and-rights-defenders-face-arrests-and-convictions/>.



Mauritania technically maintains one of the most comprehensive anti-slavery frameworks in the region. However, the gap between law and implementation remains immense and politically revealing. Haratine communities continue to face profound barriers to justice<sup>342</sup>—including social stigmatization, family pressure, costs of legal action, and fear of retaliation.

The lack of enforcement reflects more than administrative weakness; it indicates a political reluctance to dismantle the traditional social power structures that continue to benefit influential groups. As a result, the legal protections against slavery often exist only on paper, while survivors find themselves navigating an intimidating and hostile justice system.

The state's resistance to meaningful enforcement became especially visible in the escalating repression of anti-slavery advocates.<sup>343</sup> The arrest of prominent activist **Warda Ahmed Souleimane**<sup>344</sup> on October 31, 2025, symbolizes a broader pattern of retaliation against those who challenge the systemic perpetuation of slavery-related abuses.

<sup>342</sup> Rapide Info. "Banjul 2025 : L'impact des injustices historiques sur les droits des CDWD au Maghreb et en Mauritanie." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://rapideinfo.mr/injustices-historiques-droits-cdwd-maghreb-mauritanie-banjul-2025/>.

<sup>343</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). "Mauritania: Wave of Repression Targets Anti-Slavery Activists and Haratin Community." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://unpo.org/mauritania-wave-of-repression-targets-anti-slavery-activists-and-haratin-community/>.

<sup>344</sup> Front Line Defenders. "Mauritania: Arrest and Detention of Anti-Slavery Activist and Woman Human Rights Defender Warda Ahmed Souleimane." November 6, 2025. [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua-warda\\_ahmed\\_souleimane-mauritanie-051125\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua-warda_ahmed_souleimane-mauritanie-051125_final_0.pdf).



## Section II. Civil and Personal Rights: Erosion of the Right to Life, Safety, and Human Dignity



- **The Right to Life and Personal Security Under Pressure:**

The right to life and personal security is the cornerstone of any human rights framework. Yet in Mauritania, state policies during the reporting period—particularly migration enforcement and detention practices—directly endangered this foundational protection. Migrants, detainees, human rights defenders, and activists faced conditions that exposed them to violence, degrading treatment, and even mortal danger.

- **The Migration Crisis: Security-Driven Violence Enabled by European Funding**

### **Mauritania's Emergence as a Key Migration Corridor:**

In recent years, Mauritania has become a primary transit point for people attempting to reach Europe. This geostrategic importance culminated in March 2024, when the country signed a major partnership agreement with the European Union to strengthen border control and "migration management."

**Massive EU Financial Support—and Its Human Rights Costs:** More than €100 million in European funding was allocated to reinforce the capacities of Mauritanian police, gendarmes, and coastguards. Rather than strengthening rights protections, this influx of resources coincided with a surge in widescale abuses.

In March 2025, authorities launched an extensive crackdown targeting migrants across several regions.<sup>345</sup> By August, human rights organizations had documented a wide range of violations—including torture, sexual violence, and mass deportations of tens of thousands of people—conducted without due process, individual assessment, or any legal justification.<sup>346</sup> Many were dumped at remote border zones with Mali and Senegal, often without food, water, or medical care.

These actions effectively rendered the EU a **de facto enabler** of systematic abuses, having provided the financial and logistical support to security agencies operating with no meaningful oversight or accountability.

- **Arbitrary Detention and Inhuman Conditions**

**Detention as a Tool of Political Control:** Prolonged detention without charge continued to serve as an instrument for silencing activists, journalists, and peaceful demonstrators. Reports documented patterns of physical abuse, denial of legal counsel, and extended pre-trial detention that violated international standards of fair trial rights.

**The AI-Ksar Detention Center: A Symbol of Systemic Abuse:** In July 2025, the government announced the temporary closure of the AI-Ksar detention center for migrants following revelations of severe overcrowding, food shortages, unsanitary conditions, and widespread mistreatment.<sup>347</sup> Although presented as an administrative measure, the closure functioned as an implicit acknowledgment of systemic violations that the authorities had long denied.

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<sup>345</sup> Civicus Monitor. "Mauritania: Journalists and Rights Defenders Face Arrests and Convictions." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/journalists-and-rights-defenders-face-arrests-and-convictions/>.

<sup>346</sup> European Parliament. "Human Rights Violations in Mauritania | E-003728/2025." Accessed November 23, 2025. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003728\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003728_EN.html).

<sup>347</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Mauritania: Years of Migration Control Abuses." August 27, 2025. Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/08/27/mauritania-years-migration-control-abuses>.



**Life-Threatening Detention Practices:** One of the most disturbing incidents occurred on October 28, 2025,<sup>348</sup> when urgent appeals were issued to save the life of a detained doctor whose health had deteriorated dangerously due to the conditions of his confinement. Cases like this highlight the extent to which detention in Mauritania can pose a direct threat to life, not merely to liberty.

**Entrenched Impunity:** Despite limited procedural gestures, no meaningful accountability followed. Officials implicated in abuses retained their positions, reinforcing a culture of impunity within security institutions that directly undermines any claim of rule-of-law commitment.



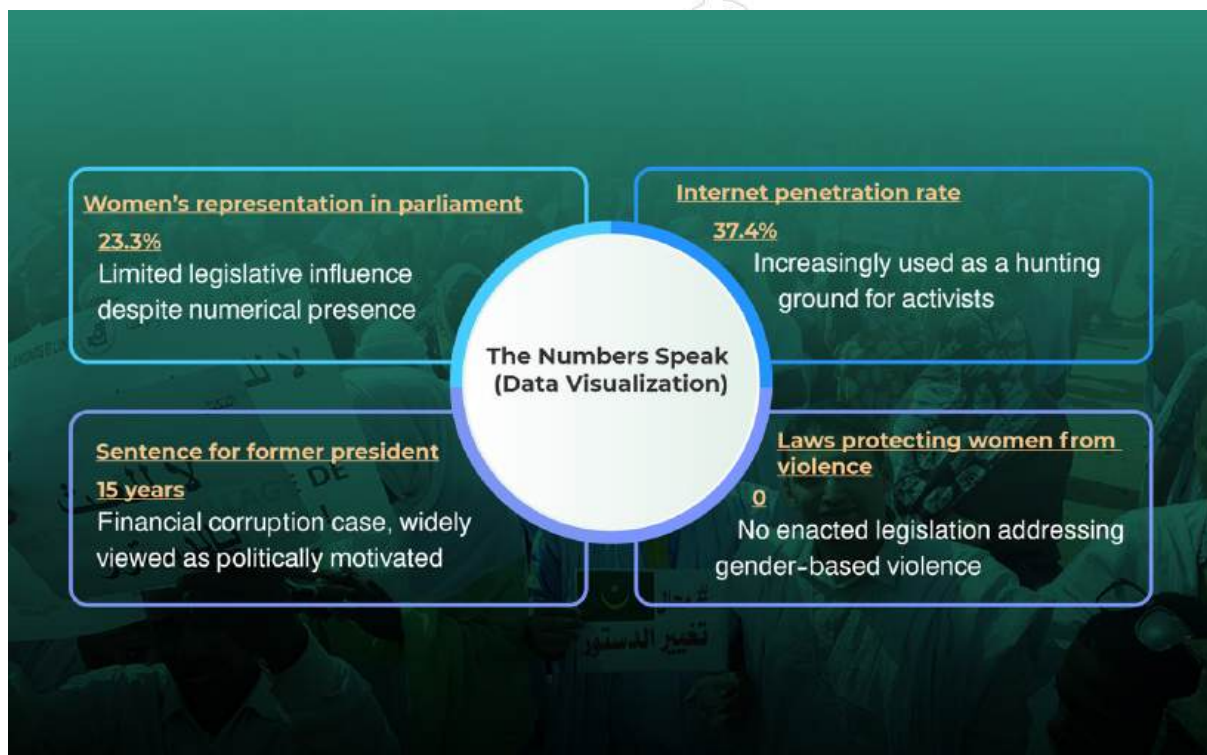
<sup>348</sup> Amnesty International Belgique. "Un médecin en danger de mort en détention après sa condamnation." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://www.amnesty.be/veux-agir/agir-individus/reseau-actions-urgentes/article/medecin-danger-mort-detention-condamnation>.

**Figure 1: Warda Ahmed Souleimane, prominent Mauritanian activist against slavery.**

### Section III. Freedom of Expression and the Digital Space: Expanding Tools of Repression

- **A Climate of Persistent Restriction**

Throughout the reporting period, the state tightened control over the public sphere through both legal and technological mechanisms. Freedom of expression remained vulnerable to arbitrary arrest, digital surveillance, and selective enforcement of vaguely worded legislation.



- **Targeting Journalists and Weaponizing the Cybercrime Law**

**Restrictions on Media and Public Commentary:** Journalists continued to face arbitrary arrests and intimidation under defamation laws and overly broad cybercrime provisions. These restrictions form part of a larger effort to deter public criticism and restrict political discourse.

**The September 2025 Incident: Direct Interference with Media Activities:** On September 2, 2025, two journalists from *Akhbar Info* were arrested while covering a peaceful protest by



gas distributors in Nouakchott. They were detained for three hours and forced to delete their photographs—an explicit violation of press freedom.<sup>349</sup>

**Cybercrime Units as Tools for Silencing Activism:** On October 31, 2025, activist **Warda Ahmed Souleimane** was arrested by the cybercrime unit after posting a Facebook call for peaceful mobilization against discrimination.<sup>350</sup> Her case illustrates how digital expression is reframed as a "cybercrime," providing authorities with a pretext to apply punitive measures that have no relation to genuine online harm.

The strategic deployment of cybercrime laws creates a false veneer of legality around repression, enabling the state to criminalize speech that challenges institutional discrimination or exposes abuses.

- The Digital Sphere: Lifeline for Civil Society, Target for State Control

**Rising Digital Participation:** By early 2025, internet penetration had reached 37.4%, with social media usage at 29.9%. Digital platforms have become essential tools for civil society mobilization, public education, and documentation of abuses.<sup>351</sup>

**State Reaction: Restriction, Surveillance, and Selective Criminalization:** Authorities responded by expanding surveillance, tightening control over online discourse, and selectively prosecuting individuals engaged in digital activism. Although no large-scale shutdowns were recorded during the reporting period, the government had already demonstrated its willingness to use connectivity restrictions as a political tool, as seen during the 22-day mobile internet shutdown following the 2024 elections.

**From Online Expression to Collective Mobilization:** As Women Journalists Without Chains observes, the crackdown on individual online expression often precedes broader actions

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<sup>349</sup> Civicus Monitor. "Mauritania: Journalists and Rights Defenders Face Arrests and Convictions." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/journalists-and-rights-defenders-face-arrests-and-convictions/>.

<sup>350</sup> Front Line Defenders. "Mauritania: Arrest and Detention of Anti-Slavery Activist and Woman Human Rights Defender Warda Ahmed Souleimane." November 6, 2025. [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua-warda\\_ahmed\\_souleimane-mauritania-051125\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua-warda_ahmed_souleimane-mauritania-051125_final_0.pdf).

<sup>351</sup> DataReportal. "Digital 2025: Mauritania — Global Digital Insights." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-mauritania>.



against collective organization. The digital sphere, which has become a crucial refuge for civil society and anti-discrimination movements, is increasingly at risk of state domination.



#### Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Associational Life: A System Under Siege

- **Legal Foundations Undermined by Systematic Restriction**

Freedom of assembly and association—key pillars of civic life—continued to be systematically constrained. Authorities maintained a pattern of denying permits, dispersing peaceful gatherings, and prosecuting activists involved in mobilizing communities around sensitive issues such as slavery, discrimination, and economic justice.

- **Coordinated Repression of Anti-Slavery Activists**

**A Targeted Campaign Against the Haratine Rights Movement:** In May 2025, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) expressed deep concern about the escalating crackdown on anti-slavery activists, particularly those belonging to the

Haratine community.<sup>352</sup> The scale and coordination of this repression underscore the state's determination to suppress movements that challenge entrenched social hierarchies.

**The Case of Warda Ahmed Souleimane:** Her arrest days after participating in an international forum on discrimination in Banjul demonstrates how the state seeks to punish activists not only for their local organizing but also for attempting to internationalize the issue of systemic discrimination.

**Intersecting Tools of Repression:** Her case also illustrates the multi-layered nature of state control: the combined use of cybercrime legislation, arbitrary detention, and international retaliation forms a cohesive strategy to paralyze the most influential civil society movements in Mauritania.

- **Suppression of Peaceful Assemblies**

**A Security-Driven Approach to Public Demonstrations:** The authorities continued to apply a strict security lens to peaceful gatherings, resulting in arbitrary arrests of protestors and observers alike.

**Journalists Targeted During Economic Protests:** The September 2025 arrest of journalists covering a peaceful economic demonstration in Nouakchott highlights the widening scope of the crackdown. The repression extends far beyond political activism, encompassing any form of collective expression that the authorities deem inconvenient or destabilizing.

**Disproportionate Impact on Women:** Women activists face the dual burden of gender-based discrimination and state repression. Their participation in public life is often met with heightened surveillance, harassment, and intimidation.

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<sup>352</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). "Mauritania: Wave of Repression Targets Anti-Slavery Activists and Haratin Community." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://unpo.org/mauritania-wave-of-repression-targets-anti-slavery-activists-and-haratin-community/>.



## Section V. Women's Rights: Between Symbolic Gains and Structural Neglect

- **The Broader Landscape**

Women in Mauritania continue to navigate a deeply contradictory environment. While representation in political institutions has improved numerically, the persistence of gender-based violence, discriminatory social norms, and legislative stagnation undermines any substantive progress.

- **Gender-Based Violence and the Paralysis of Political Will**

**Disturbing Prevalence Rates:** Approximately 19% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have experienced physical or emotional violence.<sup>353</sup> Female genital mutilation continues to affect more than 63% of women—a staggering figure that underscores the depth of systemic harm.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> UNFPA Mauritanie. "Violence basée sur le genre." Accessed November 23, 2025.

<https://mauritania.unfpa.org/fr/topics/violence-basee-sur-le-genre>.

<sup>354</sup> *ibid.*



**Eight Years of Legislative Deadlock:** The legal framework meant to protect women remains incomplete. The long-awaited bill on violence against women and girls has been stalled since 2016,<sup>355</sup> reflecting entrenched political opposition and institutional unwillingness to confront harmful social norms.

The absence of a comprehensive legal framework leaves survivors without meaningful avenues for protection or justice.<sup>356</sup>

### 3. Political Representation: Quantitative Gains Without Substantive Influence

**Numerical Improvement Without Policy Impact:** Women held 23.3% of parliamentary seats (41 MPs), a notable quantitative milestone.<sup>357</sup> Yet this representation has not translated into the political leverage necessary to advance essential gender-based legislation or challenge discriminatory norms.

**International Support Amid Domestic Resistance:** Programs such as the EU-funded PRODROFEM initiative (2025–2027), designed to strengthen women's and minors' rights,<sup>358</sup> provide essential support. Nevertheless, such programs cannot compensate for the systemic political resistance that continues to block meaningful protections.

**Digital Harassment and Organized Smear Campaigns:** Journalists and human rights defenders faced organized smear campaigns and digital extortion. The absence of gender-sensitive police protocols exacerbates their vulnerability and entrenches an environment of intimidation.

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<sup>355</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Mauritania | Country Page | World." Accessed November 23, 2025.

<https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/north-africa/mauritania>.

<sup>356</sup> UNFPA Mauritania. "Violence basée sur le genre." Accessed November 23, 2025.

<https://mauritania.unfpa.org/fr/topics/violence-basee-sur-le-genre>.

<sup>357</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline. "Mauritania | National Assembly | Data on Women." Accessed November 23, 2025. <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/MR/MR-LC01/data-on-women/>.

<sup>358</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS). "Promotion et Protection des Droits des Femmes et des Mineurs en conflit avec la loi." Accessed November 23, 2025. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/promotion-et-protection-des-droits-des-femmes-et-des-mineurs-en-conflit-avec-la-loi\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/promotion-et-protection-des-droits-des-femmes-et-des-mineurs-en-conflit-avec-la-loi_en).



## **Conclusion:**

### **Structural Contradictions and Entrenched Impunity**

Mauritania's human rights landscape during the reporting period reveals a system marked by profound structural contradictions:

### **Selective Accountability**

Despite progress in prosecuting political corruption, systemic human rights abuses—especially those involving security institutions—remain shielded from justice.

### **European Support and Its Consequences**

Substantial EU funding empowered security agencies without imposing meaningful oversight mechanisms, contributing directly to mass deportations and severe abuses against migrants.

### **The Law as an Instrument of Repression**

Cybercrime laws and other punitive legislation were selectively deployed to criminalize dissent and suppress activists, creating an illusion of legality around practices that fundamentally violate human rights.

### **Continued Paralysis on Women's Rights**

The persistent failure to enact protective legislation for women renders political representation largely symbolic and leaves survivors without legal recourse.

### **Retaliation Against Anti-Slavery Activists**

Ultimately, the period between 2024 and 2025 was characterized by a widening gap between official commitments and lived realities. The state's prioritization of security and economic partnerships over fundamental rights continues to entrench systemic discrimination, weaken civic space, and undermine the rule of law. Without meaningful structural reform, independent oversight, and genuine political will, Mauritania's human rights crisis will remain entrenched—and risks deepening further in the years ahead.



## Table of Contents

A. Introduction .....	2
B. Executive Summary .....	4
C. Methodology .....	10
<b>JORDAN: STIFLING THE PUBLIC SPHERE, SILENCING CRITICAL VOICES.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Introduction .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Section I. Political and Legal Framework .....	12
Section II. Civil Rights, Arbitrary Arrests, and Torture .....	13
Section III. Freedom of Expression, the Press, and Digital Space .....	16
Section IV. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association .....	18
Section V. Women's Rights and the Targeting of Human Rights Defenders .....	19
Conclusion .....	19
Infographic.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1. Legal and Political Instruments of Repression .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2. Core Violation: Freedom of Peaceful Assembly.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. Freedom of Expression, Media, and Access to Information.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4. Targeting of Women Human Rights Defenders .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>UAE: CROSS-BORDER REPRESSION AND INTERNATIONAL LAW'S DOUBLE STANDARDS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Introduction .....	20
Section 1. Political and legal framework.....	20
Section 2. Fundamental Civil Rights .....	23
Section 3. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Media, and the Internet.....	25
Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	27
Section 5. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups .....	28
Section 6. Armed Conflicts and International Humanitarian Law .....	30



Section 7. Environment, Climate, and Human Rights .....	33
Conclusion .....	34
Infographic .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>BAHRAIN: THE LONG ARM OF SECURITY .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Introduction .....	36
Section I. The Political and Legal Framework: Legislating Repression .....	36
Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life .....	40
Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet .....	42
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association .....	44
Section V. The Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups .....	45
Conclusion .....	47
Infographic .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>ALGERIA: THE MACHINERY OF REPRESSION — HOW THE STATE INSTITUTIONALIZES CONTROL .....</b>	<b>48</b>
Introduction .....	48
Section I. Political and Legal Framework .....	48
Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life .....	50
Section III. Freedom of Expression and the Internet .....	53
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association .....	56
Section V. Women's Rights .....	59
Conclusion .....	61
Infographic .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>SAUDI ARABIA: THE GILDED CAGE .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Introduction .....	63
Section 1. Political and Legal Framework .....	63
1.1 Governance system .....	63



<b>1.2 Transnational repression .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>1.3 Judiciary and legislation .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>1.4 Legal reforms and selective modernization.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Section 2. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>2.1 Extrajudicial killings and the death penalty .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>2.2 Political executions and juvenile offenders.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>2.3 Targeting journalists: the case of Turki al-Jasser .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>2.4 Arbitrary detention and travel bans .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>2.5 Torture and deaths in custody.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>2.6 Fair trial rights and exceptional laws.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Section 3. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>3.1 Institutionalized censorship: new media regulations and the closure of digital space .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>3.2 Digital surveillance and spyware.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>4.1 Forced development and suppression of protests.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Section 5. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>5.1 Women's rights and gender-based violence .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>5.2 Children's rights .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>5.3 Migrant workers' rights.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>5.4 Refugees and asylum seekers.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>5.5 Forced displacement in the name of development .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Section 6. Armed Conflicts and International Humanitarian Law .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Section 7. Environment, Climate, and Human Rights .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>7.1 Business and human rights.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>7.2 NEOM's pledges vs. documented violations.....</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>



Conclusion .....	79
Infographic.....	79
<b>SUDAN: OUTSOURCING ATROCITY — WAR CRIMES BY PROXY .....</b>	<b>80</b>
Introduction .....	80
Section I. The Political and Legal Framework .....	81
Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....	83
a. RSF Operations .....	85
b. SAF Violations .....	85
c. Detention and extrajudicial practices .....	86
Section III. Freedom of Expression and Internet Shutdowns .....	91
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Protection of Civil Society .....	93
Section V. Women's Rights and Gender-Based Violence.....	94
Conclusion .....	97
Recommended Actions.....	98
<b>IRAQ: CALM AS A TOOL OF OPPRESSION .....</b>	<b>100</b>
Introduction .....	100
Section 1. Political and Legal Framework .....	100
1.1 Structural weaknesses and elite dominance.....	101
1.2 Parliamentary Elections and Associated Violations.....	102
1.3 Judicial independence and rule of law .....	103
1.4 Legal framework and human rights implications .....	105
Section 2. Civil Rights and The Right to Life .....	106
2.1 Extrajudicial killings and arbitrary judicial executions .....	107
2.2 Political assassinations .....	108
2.3 Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance .....	109
2.4 Torture, ill-treatment, and prison conditions .....	109



Section 3. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Media, and the Internet .....	111
3.1 Targeting journalists and human rights defenders .....	111
3.2 Cybercrime laws and digital censorship .....	112
Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association .....	113
5.1 Personal Status Law Amendment: A Major Setback for Women's Rights .....	117
5.2 Gender-Based Violence and Political Participation .....	118
5.3 Rights of Children, Migrant Workers, and Internally Displaced Persons .....	118
Conclusion .....	119
Infographic: .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. Crackdown on Journalists and Digital Space .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4. Targeting Vulnerable Groups and Civic Activists .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5. Legal Tools of Repression in 2025 .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>KUWAIT: LAWLESS AND STATELESS .....</b>	<b>120</b>
Introduction .....	120
Section I. Political and Legal Context .....	120
Section II. Political and Civil Rights .....	124
Section III. Freedom of Expression, Media, and Digital Rights .....	127
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association .....	129
Section V. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups .....	132
Conclusion .....	138
Infographic .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>MOROCCO: SILENT REPRESSION, GEN Z AWAKENING .....</b>	<b>140</b>
Introduction .....	140
Section I. Political and Legal Framework .....	141
1. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code .....	142
2. Legal Framework for the Right to Strike .....	143



<b>3. Restrictions on Anti-Corruption Mechanisms .....</b>	<b>143</b>
Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....	144
<b>1. Excessive Use of Force Against Mass Protests .....</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>2. Systematic Violations.....</b>	<b>147</b>
Section III. Freedom of Expression, Media, and the Internet .....	148
<b>1. Judicial Harassment of Journalists and Activists.....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>2. The "Pardon Followed by Defamation" Pattern.....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>3. Internet Freedom and Transnational Repression .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	152
<b>1. Restrictions on Peaceful Demonstrations .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>2. Targeting Opponents of Normalization with Israel .....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>3. Restrictions on Civil Society and Legal Reforms.....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>4. Restrictions on Access to Western Sahara.....</b>	<b>154</b>
Section V. Women's Rights.....	155
<b>1. Reforms to the Family Code and Economic Empowerment .....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>2. Deficiencies in Women's Health Care .....</b>	<b>157</b>
Conclusion .....	158
Infographic: .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b><i>1. Political and Legal Framework – Institutional Repression</i></b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b><i>2. Violent Response to Protests – September 2025 ("Gen Z 212" Movement)</i></b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b><i>3. Freedom of Expression and Digital Media .....</i></b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>YEMEN: LAWLESS AND UNACCOUNTABLE .....</b>	<b>159</b>
Introduction .....	159
Section I. Political and Legal Framework .....	162
Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....	164



Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet.....	171
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	173
A. Suppression of Peaceful Assemblies .....	173
Section V. Women's Rights and Vulnerable Groups .....	175
Section VI. Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law .....	176
Conclusion .....	177
<b>IRAN: A PARANOID REGIME WITH A BIGGER CUDGEL.....</b>	<b>179</b>
Introduction .....	179
Section I – Political and Legal Framework .....	179
1. Political System: Structures of Domination and Repression .....	179
2. Judiciary: Instrument of Repression, Not Justice .....	180
Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....	181
1. Escalation of the Death Penalty: State-Sanctioned Killing.....	182
2. Arbitrary Arrest and Enforced Disappearance .....	184
3. Torture, Ill-Treatment, and Dire Prison Conditions .....	186
4. Systematic Impunity .....	188
Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet.....	189
<b>Suppression of Press Freedom and the Arts .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Digital Repression and Internet Control .....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Transnational Repression.....</b>	<b>191</b>
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	192
Use of Lethal Force as State Policy .....	192
Strangulation of Civil Society .....	192
Section V. Women's Rights and Vulnerable Groups .....	194
A. Women and Girls: Institutionalized Gender Apartheid .....	195
B. Children's Rights .....	198



C. Workers, Refugees, and Minorities.....	198
Section VI. Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law .....	199
Conclusion .....	200
Infographic.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1. Shocking Numbers .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2. Impact of the June 2025 War (Turning Point).....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. Death Penalty as a Political Weapon .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4. Women's Rights: Gender Apartheid .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5. Strangling Civil Society and Freedom of Expression ....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6. Violations Against Vulnerable Groups and Minorities....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>TUNISIA: NASCENT AUTHORITARIANISM, OLD TOOLS .....</b>	<b>201</b>
Introduction .....	201
Section I. Political and Judicial Framework .....	201
Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression and The Press.....	206
Section Iv. Freedom of Assembly and Association .....	207
Section V. Women's Rights.....	209
Section VI. Rights of Migrants and Asylum-Seekers.....	211
Conclusion .....	211
<b>SYRIA: A LEGACY OF HORROR.....</b>	<b>213</b>
Introduction .....	213
Section I Grave Violations of Civil Rights and the Right to Life .....	214
Section II. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Media .....	218
Section III. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	223
Section IV. Women's Rights.....	223
Conclusion .....	227
<b>OMAN: COMPLIANCE ABROAD, REPRESSION AT HOME.....</b>	<b>228</b>



Introduction .....	228
Section I. Political and Legal Framework .....	228
<b>A. Key Legislative Developments and Their Impact on Rights</b> .....	229
<b>B. Nature of the Judiciary and Impunity</b> .....	232
Section II. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....	233
<b>A. Arbitrary Arrest and Incommunicado Detention</b> .....	233
<b>B. Fair Trial Guarantees</b> .....	234
Section III. Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Internet.....	235
<b>A. Targeting Journalists and Human Rights Defenders</b> .....	235
<b>B. Cybercrime Legislation</b> .....	236
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	236
Section V. Women's Rights and the Rights of Vulnerable Groups .....	238
<b>A. Rights of Women and Girls</b> .....	238
<b>B. Rights of the Child</b> .....	240
<b>C. Rights of Stateless Persons (Bidun)</b> .....	240
<b>D. Rights of Workers and Migrant Labor</b> .....	241
Conclusion .....	242
Infographic.....	243
1. <i>Overall Situation (2024–2025)</i> .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2. <i>Legislative Timeline (Text vs. Practice)</i> .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. <i>Key Cases of Repression and Prosecution</i> .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4. <i>By the Numbers: Social Rights and Vulnerable Groups</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5. <i>Gender Discrimination in Nationality Law</i> .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6. <i>Matrix: New Media Law – Declared Goals vs. Real Risks</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>PALESTINE AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: SYSTEMATIC GENOCIDE AND ANNEXATION</b> .....	244



Introduction .....	244
Section I. Legal and Political Framework .....	244
A. Prolonged Occupation and Blockade.....	244
B. Violations of International Law in the West Bank .....	245
C. Legislating Execution: The Death Penalty Bill .....	245
D. Rising International Accountability .....	245
Section II. Grave Violations of the Right to Life and Civil Rights .....	246
1. Genocidal War in Gaza .....	246
Section II. Escalation of Repression and Creeping Annexation in the West Bank....	250
A. Extrajudicial Killings .....	251
B. Systematic Arrests and Torture .....	251
C. Forced Displacement and Camp Demolition.....	251
D. Land Seizure and Entrenchment of Apartheid.....	252
Section III. Assault on Human Dignity: Prisoners and the Dead .....	252
1. Repressive and Lethal Detention Conditions .....	252
2. Violation of the Dead and Withholding of Bodies .....	253
Section IV. Freedom of Expression and the Press .....	253
1. Targeted Killing of Journalists in Gaza .....	253
2. Suppression of the Press in the West Bank .....	254
Conclusion .....	255
1. Severe Violations in Gaza (Ongoing Genocide) .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2. Escalation of Repression and Annexation in the West Bank (2025)Error! Bookmark not defined.	
3. Targeting Freedom of the Press (2025) .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
QATAR: LEGISLATION AND THE CHALLENGE TO SOVEREIGNTY .....	256
Introduction .....	256



Section 1. Political and Legal Framework .....	256
Section 2. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....	257
Section 3. Freedom of Expression, Press, and Digital Rights .....	259
Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	259
Section 5. Rights of Women and Vulnerable Groups .....	260
Section 6. Armed Conflict, Sovereignty, and International Humanitarian Law .....	261
Conclusion .....	262
<b>LEBANON: JUSTICE ON HOLD .....</b>	<b>256</b>
Introduction .....	264
Section 1. Background and Context.....	264
Section 2. Political and Legal Framework .....	265
Section 3. Detention, Prisons, and Procedural Justice.....	266
Section 4. Conflict-Related Violations and the Right to Life.....	269
Section 5. Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom.....	272
Section 6. Freedom of Assembly and Association.....	274
Section 7. Women's Rights and Gender-Based Violence.....	274
Section 8. Legal Standards and State Obligations.....	276
Conclusion .....	276
Infographic.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>LIBYA: IMPUNITY RUNS DEEP .....</b>	<b>278</b>
Introduction .....	278
Section 1. The Political and Legal Framework .....	279
• <b>Disintegration of the Justice System and Institutional Collapse.....</b>	<b>280</b>
Section 2. Civil Rights and the Right to Life.....	281
• <b>Systematic Abuses Against Migrants .....</b>	<b>283</b>
Section 3. Freedom of Expression, Opinion, and the Press.....	284



<b>Representative Cases Documented by WJWC</b> .....	<b>285</b>
Section 4. Freedom of Assembly and Association .....	<b>287</b>
Section 5. Women's Rights .....	<b>288</b>
□ <b>Harassment and Targeting of Women in Public Life</b> .....	<b>289</b>
Conclusion .....	<b>291</b>
Infographic Summary .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>1. Right to Life and Violations Against Civilians and Migrants</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>2. Suppression of Media Freedoms, Civic Space, and Women's Rights</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>EGYPT: JUSTICE HELD CAPTIVE</b> .....	<b>292</b>
Introduction .....	<b>292</b>
Section I. Political and Legal Framework .....	<b>292</b>
Section II. Core Violations of Civil Rights and the Right to Life .....	<b>294</b>
<b>Arbitrary Detention and Political Arrests</b> .....	<b>294</b>
<b>Systematic Torture and III-Treatment</b> .....	<b>296</b>
<b>Deadly Medical Negligence in Prisons</b> .....	<b>296</b>
Section III. Freedom of Expression, Opinion, and the Media .....	<b>297</b>
Section IV. Restrictions on Peaceful Assembly and Civil Society .....	<b>298</b>
Section V. Women's Rights .....	<b>299</b>
Conclusion .....	<b>301</b>
Infographic .....	<b>302</b>
<b>1. Political and Judicial Framework (Legalized Repression)</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>2. Civil Rights and Detention (Systematic Arrests)</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>3. Freedom of Expression and the Media</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>4. Women's Rights (Dual Layer of Repression)</b> .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>



<b>MAURITANIA: LIBERTY IN CHAINS .....</b>	<b>303</b>
Introduction .....	303
Section I. The Political and Legal Environment .....	303
Section II. Civil and Personal Rights: Erosion of the Right to Life, Safety, and Human Dignity.....	307
Section III. Freedom of Expression and the Digital Space: Expanding Tools of Repression .....	310
Section IV. Freedom of Assembly and Associational Life: A System Under Siege ..	312
Section V. Women's Rights: Between Symbolic Gains and Structural Neglect.....	314
Conclusion: Structural Contradictions and Entrenched Impunity .....	316
Infographic.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>