

## U.S. Human Rights Report: A New Depth in Manipulation and Distortion

### News:

The U.S. State Department this week released a dumbed-down edition of its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, covering 2024, drawing sharp criticism from rights groups and former officials. *Axios* reported on Aug. 13, 2025, that Amnesty International said, “We have criticized past reports when warranted, but have never seen reports quite like this.”

### Comment:

Democracy is the mask hiding the ugly face of capitalism, but this ancient Greek term—democracy—used to seem attractive to many because of its association with human rights. However, the US uses human rights very selectively for its interests and now has turned a new corner along its long and winding road of hypocrisy.

The unprecedented bias of the latest report plays-down more than ever before the abuses for chosen U.S.-aligned actors, while concentrating scrutiny on critics and rivals, turning what is usually presented as a neutral baseline into an unmistakably direct US foreign and domestic policy instrument that elevates some violations while muting others, whereas usually the report serves as a source of ammunition from which the US can cherry pick data to target the abuses of foreign governments and actors that it wishes to extort, but this year the document itself is the weapon. Secretary of State Marco Rubio made sure of that by threatening the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and its staff in the State Department who were in the process of preparing the report and the ensuing staff cuts of up to 80% according to *Politico*; and that is in tandem with edits directed by Secretary Rubio’s office and senior political appointees to Middle East sections just before publication; and the scrapping of the traditional foreword/press briefing at launch.

The 2024 report dialed-down criticism of El Salvador: whereas the 2023 report catalogued “significant human rights issues,” the 2024 edition asserts there were “no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.” That ignores continued warnings from independent monitors about mass detentions and due-process risks under President Nayib Bukele’s emergency regime. Coverage of the Zionist entity and its genocidal campaign against the Palestinians was also the target of Rubio’s meddling and rights groups said that the Gaza discussion compressed or omitted detail on civilian harm, siege conditions, and humanitarian access that external monitors have documented extensively.

Conversely, the report is much tougher in the places that suit U.S. interests; focusing on, for example, Brazil’s Justice Alexandre de Moraes for ordering platform takedowns and detentions tied to pro-Bolsonaro networks. The report’s Brazil section, as summarized by *Axios*, says the situation “declined during the year,” citing courts’ “broad and disproportionate action” to “undermine freedom of speech and internet

freedom.” Human Rights Watch adds: “The State Department’s new human rights report is in many places an exercise of whitewashing and deception.” Why is the US State Department so worried about censorship of pro-Bolsonaro networks? Probably because former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has been called “Trump of the tropics” for his closeness to US President Trump who claimed that accusations against Bolsonaro for his role in plotting a coup in 2022 resembled his own situation in the US! Last month, Trump raised tariffs on Brazilian imports to 50% to pressurize current President Lula.

South Africa. Reuters reports that criticism of South Africa increases even as scrutiny of some U.S. partners decreases. The report, quoted by Reuters, says “South Africa took a substantially worrying step towards land expropriation of Afrikaners.” By giving South Africa more space while shrinking coverage elsewhere, the document makes an argument that aligns with U.S. diplomatic friction rather than offering balanced comparative weight. Reuters reports that criticism of South Africa increases even as scrutiny of some U.S. partners decreases. The report dwells on speech-related controversies and policing—issues the administration already highlights in public messaging. By giving South Africa more space while shrinking coverage elsewhere, the document makes an argument that aligns with U.S. diplomatic friction rather than offering balanced comparative weight.

Taken together, Brazil and South Africa illustrate the pattern that *Axios* describes: softer treatment for selected partners, harsher detail for governments at odds with Washington’s agenda. As Reuters put it, the report “softens criticism of some Trump partner nations” while dialing up scrutiny elsewhere.

These annual reports have always intersected with U.S. interests, but this year’s is just more exaggerated. They are important because since Congress mandated the series in the 1970s, the Country Reports have been embedded in U.S. foreign-policy machinery. They inform arms-transfer oversight, aid conditionality (including Leahy-Law vetting of foreign security units), and diplomacy. Under the guise of human-rights the US has done as it pleases and is getting ever bolder in its hypocrisy.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by**  
**Dr. Abdullah Robin**