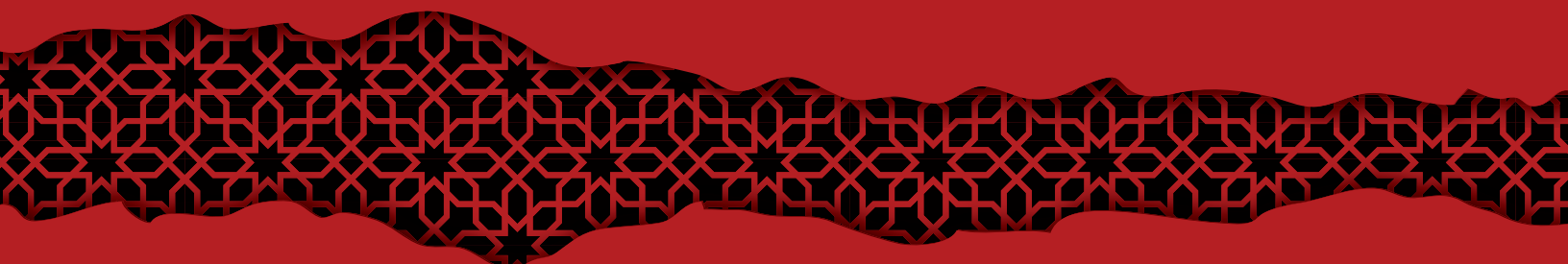




# Apart in Their Own Land

GOVERNMENT DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST SHIA IN BAHRAIN



VOLUME I

*Violence, Political Disclusion, and Attacks on the Shia Religious Establishment*



Americans for Democracy  
& Human Rights in Bahrain



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*Violence, Political Disclusion, and Attacks on the Shia Religious Establishment*

February 2015

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## FOREWORD

In Bahrain, it's not uncommon to hear talk of the government perpetuating a "Shia genocide" against its people. Such statements are either political hyperbole or grossly misinformed; although the government has committed extrajudicial killings – largely against Shia – in the past, government violence has never approached that which occurred in Rwanda or Srebrenica. Yet the fact that the Shia population in Bahrain speak in such terms denotes that the most substantial swath of the Bahraini population feels like its own country considers it the enemy.

That feeling appears to be accurate. It's been over 200 years since the majority population of Bahrain effectively ruled itself, and discriminatory policies against the Shia have largely been the hallmark of the al-Khalifa dynasty since it conquered the island nation in the late 1700s. In the 1990s, it appeared that the government might turn a new leaf when then-Emir Hamad announced a return to a constitutional monarchy. The ten years that followed were perhaps the least violent in recent Bahraini history, as the government curtailed its use of arbitrary arrest and torture against the Shia opposition. As the political situation stymied over the next decade, however, tensions rose within a Shia population promised but never receiving a substantial voice in the government. These feelings culminated in the protest movement in February 2011, which, while not exclusively manned by Shia, significantly fed off of Shia resentment.

The al-Khalifa dynasty responded to the protests by going back to its old bag of tricks. While the early 2000s were marked by government restraint in at least its security policies towards the Shia, the period after 2011 has seen anything but, and allegations commonly arise that the government has arrested and detained political leaders, tear-gassed Shia villages, and tortured Shia youth. In 2011, the government went so far as to dismiss several thousand Shia from their jobs, and even bulldozed 38 Shia religious structures, including some 30 mosques. Shia remain almost wholly outside the decision-making and legislation-authoring sections of the government, and are barely represented in government emergency sector personnel, including the government security forces and military.

"Shia genocide" is a mischaracterization of the situation in Bahrain. Shia are not killed wholesale, and there are no concentration camps in the country. However, Shia are kept separate from the political structure, and often forced to live in small villages, are routinely targeted by security forces for arbitrary detention and torture, are fired for expressing their political views, are arbitrarily rendered stateless by Bahraini courts, and have seen their places of worship destroyed as part of a government-sponsored campaign of violence and intimidation. Were the Shia considered a race instead of a religious sect, their situation would almost exactly fit the definition of apartheid promulgated by the 1976 convention on the subject; while "Shia genocide" is political hyperbole, "Shia apartheid" is closer to the truth than the Bahraini government would want to admit.

The following report conclusively shows that the government has historically and is still carrying out a systematic policy of discrimination against the Shia of Bahrain. It presents itself in two volumes; this first volume focuses on state violence against Shia actors, the disclusion of Shia from the political process, and government discriminatory acts against the Shia religious establishment itself. By carrying out acts of violence against Shia protesters, keeping Shia removed from actual political power, and directly targeting the Shia religious establishment, the government has succeeded in not only subjugating over half of its population, but also in motivating fringe elements of Shia society into violence, thereby justifying a self-authored sectarian narrative. In order for Bahrain to reverse course and restabilize, the government will need to fully re-examine its policies regarding the Shia with the aim of better inclusiveness and respect for the human rights of all of its people.

Husain Abdulla  
*Executive Director, ADHRB*

## **METHODOLOGY**

This report is the product of extensive research on the ground, accomplished by examining government records, interviewing involved actors, and personally recording events taking place in the country. Such research is significantly supplemented by a literature review taken from a wide variety of reputable sources, including well-established newspapers, magazines, and journals. When possible, the report provides a citation to a publicly-available source. In such instances where the interests of confidentiality force us to anonymize information or redact our source, the report may omit the source and indicate the need for confidentiality. Such sources may be available privately upon request.

## Introduction

In 1783, the al-Khalifa family invaded Bahrain, conquering the small island in the Persian Gulf and subjugating its historically Shia population to Sunni rule. While the island's former Persian rulers attempted on multiple occasions to re-assert their dominance over the country, the al-Khalifas successfully defended their claim, and the country would remain under unstable al-Khalifa rule for the next two decades. In 1820, the al-Khalifa government entered treaty relations with the British Empire, legitimizing their rule regionally and locally, and Bahrain has remained under the effective governance of the al-Khalifa family in some ever since.

The Bahraini Shia were subjected to virtual serfdom and exploited by al-Khalifa and tribal Sunni Arab landlords throughout the 19th century. British-backed reforms in the 1920s saw the end of serfdom, and discrimination against Shia greatly decreased over the following decades. When Britain left the Persian Gulf in 1971, Bahrain's al-Khalifa government remained in place. Since then, Bahrain has undergone several governmental changes, and over time the discrimination of Shia and polarisation of Bahrain's religious communities has increased.<sup>1</sup>

Present estimates place Bahrain's population at approximately 70% Shia<sup>2</sup> and 30% Sunni, with other religious groups dominating the marginal percentages.<sup>3</sup> The reign of the al-Khalifa family has largely been characterized by peace between these two groups but animosity between the Shia and the government; many Shia still regard the al-Khalifa family as conquerors, and resent the government's marginalization of their voice and power within society. On the other side, the al-Khalifa government has typically discriminated against the Shia in the country, oftentimes to the benefit of those citizens and residents that share their faith.

This dynamic came to a head in February 2011, when nearly half of the Bahraini population protested for a more representative government and greater respect for human rights. While the government likes to characterize the protests as Shia-led, independent observers documented a substantial Sunni presence within the uprising,<sup>4</sup> and most populations within the country were represented. That the subsequent government violence significantly targeted Shia protesters is telling; while the population of Bahrain is ready to live together, the government's discriminatory policies continue to drive them apart.

Modernly, the government discriminates against the Shia in a multitude of ways. Government security forces still single out Shia villages and protesters for acts of violence and the excessive use of force, as Shia-led protests still occur on a daily basis. As during the violence following the 2011 protests, the government also continues to utilize enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture against Shia political prisoners, most often by obtaining coerced confessions and using them as evidence to secure convictions in Bahraini courts.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 Minority Rights Group International, "World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples." Bahrain Overview. February 2012. Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://www.minorityrights.org/4096/bahrain/bahrain-overview.html>.
- 2 Religion Freedom Report, Bahrain, Accessed January 18, 2015. <http://religion-freedom-report.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/country-reports/bahrain.pdf>.
- 3 Kirkpatrick, David. "Power Struggles in Middle East Exploit Islam's Ancient Sectarian Rift." July 5, 2014. Accessed January 20, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/06/world/middleeast/power-struggles-in-middle-east-exploit-islams-ancient-sectarian-rift.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/06/world/middleeast/power-struggles-in-middle-east-exploit-islams-ancient-sectarian-rift.html?_r=0)
- 4 Aslan, Reza. "Bahrain's Fake Sectarian War." Foreign Affairs. (June 30, 2013). Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/letters-from/bahrains-fake-sectarian-war>.
- 5 Human Rights Watch, "Bahrain: Reject Confessions Linked to Torture." Bahrain: Reject Confessions Linked to Torture. June 21, 2012. Accessed January 20, 2015 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/21/bahrain-reject-confessions-linked-torture>.

The government's discrimination against the Shia additionally extends to the political sphere, where the government has engineered the system in such a way as to make it impossible for the Shia to obtain political power within the country. The King, his Cabinet, and the Shura Council account for the vast majority of legislative and executive power; Shia sit on a minority of these seats, as the government opposition states that Shia accounted for 17 of 40 seats in the 2010-2014 Shura Council and just six of 29 cabinet members.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the elected lower house of Bahraini parliament, electoral districts are drawn in such a way that a Sunni district may contain 700 people while a Shia district contains 7,000; both districts elect just one member of parliament. While the government has recently redrawn the districts, it still does not acknowledge the principle of "one person, one vote," and Shia still find it impossible to obtain a majority in the parliament.

Finally, the government has actively discriminated against the actual Shia religious establishment. Following the events of February 2011, government forces destroyed 38 mosques and other religious sites, all of which belonged to the Shia population.<sup>7</sup> While the government pledged to rebuild the mosques, thus far it has failed to do so, and those mosques that have been rebuilt were completed entirely with funds from the Shia population. In some cases, the government has annexed the land on which these mosques were built,<sup>8</sup> and has refused the Shia request to re-allocate the lands towards their original purpose. In other cases, the government has even gone so far as to re-demolish mosques a second time after the Shia population itself attempted to rebuild.<sup>9</sup> The government also discriminates against the Shia faith in other, less noticeable ways, oftentimes attacking Shia religious figures, failing to incorporate Shia beliefs into educational curricula, and at times dissolving Shia religious organizations.<sup>10</sup>

The net effect of the government's discriminatory policy has been to set the Shia population apart in their own land. At a time when the government accuses its population of espousing sectarianism, this report shows just the opposite: while Bahrain's Shia and Sunni populations are ready to co-exist, the government itself fans the flames of sectarianism to justify its oppression of the Shia majority.

6 Al-Wefaq. "مساواة والمواطنة أساس الديمقراطية" [Equality and Citizenship are the Foundation of Democracy]." 2013. Accessed January 30, 2015. [http://alwefaq.net/uploadfiles/files/Tameez\\_3Oct2013.pdf](http://alwefaq.net/uploadfiles/files/Tameez_3Oct2013.pdf).

7 Mabon, Simon. "The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry." *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 2 (2012): 84-97. Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/battle-bahrain-iranian-saudi-rivalry?print>.

8 Bahrain Center for Human Rights, "Bahrain: In Complete Disregard to Religious Freedom, Authorities Decide to Turn Site of demolished Historical Mosque into a Park." *Bahrain Rights*. (July 6, 2013), Accessed January 29, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6213>.

9 Bahrain Center for Human Rights, "Mosques Under Construction Re-Demolished by Authorities in Bahrain." *Bahrain Rights*. (December 9, 2012), Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/5550>.

10 Bahrain Center for Human Rights, "Bahrain: The Authorities Continue to Oppress the Shia Sect." *Bahrain Rights*. (June 2, 2014), Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://bchr.hopto.org/en/node/6904>.



## Violence Against Shia

As the Government of Bahrain continues to repress protests in the wake of the 2011 movement, it most heavily relies on violence as its primary method of censure. The vast majority of this violence targets the Bahraini Shia citizenry, either as direct retaliation against specific acts of dissent or as collective punishment against the Shia population as a whole.

Government-sponsored violence against Bahraini Shia comes in many forms, both obvious and more discrete. As this report documents, Shia experience violence in the form of police action against protests, arbitrary detention in government holding centers and prisons, government torture largely to extract false confessions, tear gas employed against villages, interference with the freedom of movement, and denial of medical care.

### Excessive Force against Peaceful Protests

Bahraini security forces consistently use excessive force when dealing with opposition protesters. Since the renewal of opposition protests in February 2011, protests have been a part of daily life for many Bahrainis, and it is not uncommon for members of the political opposition to march every night to register their discontent with the government. Although not all opposition parties are tied to religion, Shia Muslims make up a majority of protesters, and many of these protests take place in Shia towns. Security forces specifically target Shia protesters and protests.<sup>11</sup>

The government disrupts these protests through a variety of non-lethal methods, the most prominent of which is the widespread dispersal of tear gas. Tear gas, also known as ‘CS’ Gas, is any number of lachrymatory agents used as a non-lethal method of dispersing protesters. However, according to the NGO Physicians for Human Rights, the term “tear gas” is a misleading euphemism for a potentially deadly mix of chemicals. The use of tear gas is even outlawed under the Chemical Weapons Convention for use during wartime, although the document makes an exception for domestic “riot control.”<sup>12</sup> Security forces in Bahrain routinely misuse tear gas, repurposing it as a deadly weapon against the political opposition as well as the Shia Muslim community. In just the past three years, there are countless incidents where tear gas was inappropriately used to target Shia Muslims, and independent sources linked at least 39 deaths to the misuse of tear gas from 2011-2014.<sup>13</sup>

11 Aboudi, Sami. “Protesters Injured in Bahrain Clashes: Witnesses.” Reuters (January 6, 2015) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/06/us-bahrain-protests-idUSKBN0KF1UO20150106>. See also “Bahrain: Serious Injuries among Protesters Due to Continued Use of Excessive Force by Riot Police” Bahrain Center for Human Rights (September 21, 2012) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/5428>; “Bahrain: Dozens of Protestors Arrested and Injured on the 2nd Anniversary of Foreign GCC Peninsula Shield Deployment in Bahrain” Bahrain Center for Human Rights (March 15, 2013) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/5681>; “Document - Bahrain Must Ensure Accountability for Child Killed during a Protest.” Amnesty International (May 23, 2014) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE11/016/2014/en/81b2544e-5c9f-41f2-902c-aa488c4a719f/mde110162014en.html>; “Bahrain Police Fire Tear Gas, Grenades on Protesters during ‘Martyrs Day’ Rally.” RT News (December 18, 2012) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://rt.com/news/bahrain-clashes-martyrs-day-212/>; Gladstone, Rick. “Relief Group Stops Work in Bahrain After Raid.” The New York Times (August 5, 2011) Accessed January 22, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/06/world/middleeast/06bahrain.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/06/world/middleeast/06bahrain.html?_r=0); “Bahrain Forces Attack People Protesting Shia Cleric’s Arrest VOB.ORG.” Voice of Bahrain (January 6, 2015) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://english.voiceofbahrain.org/?p=2840>; “Dozens of Shia Protesters Injured in Firing by the Security Forces , While a Policeman Also Injured By a Fire.” Jafria News (July 22, 2013) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://jafrianews.com/2013/07/23/dozens-of-shia-protesters-injured-in-firing-by-the-security-forces-while-a-policeman-also-injured-by-a-fire/>.

12 “Facing Tear Gas.” Chemical Weapons Convention. Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://facingteargas.org/bp/35/chemical-weapons-convention>.

13 Ali, Ahmed. “SHIPMENT STOPPED” Bahrain Watch. January 7, 2014. Accessed January 20, 2015. <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2014/01/07/south-korea-halts-massive-tear-gas-shipment-to-bahrain/>.

In one recent example, tear gas was used to attack a Shia mosque during Muharram, the most sacred month in the Shia calendar. During this month, Shia Muslims gather to commemorate the death of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. In a video of the incident posted on the internet, women are seen coughing and gasping for air inside the mosque as men outside break windows in an attempt to rescue them. As the cameraman enters the mosque, tear gas hangs in the air in every room. On the inside of the building, one can see women who have collapsed from the smoke. In a similar incident, security forces fired tear gas into a Shia mosque in the town of Sanabis. At the time, worshippers at the mosque were attending the funeral of another protester who had been killed.<sup>14</sup>

The government additionally often uses tear gas as a form of collective punishment against Shia villages. The safe and responsible use of tear gas mandates firing tear gas at the outskirts of crowds in order to herd them away from sensitive areas, and to avoid firing tear gas at groups of people. Bahraini state practice disregards safe practice, instead firing tear gas canisters directly into crowds, oftentimes causing not just respiratory injuries related to inhalation of tear gas but also concussive injuries when tear gas canisters strike protesters. Bahraini security forces have also been known to fire tear gas canisters into enclosed spaces, such as vehicles or houses, oftentimes firing canisters at point-blank range so that they have enough kinetic force to break windows.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Bahraini security forces have also been known to blanket entire Shia villages in tear gas, actions the Bahraini Shia interpret as collective punishment against protesters.<sup>16</sup>

The excessive use of tear gas has caused several deaths related to respiratory failure. On 25 March 2011, Bahraini security forces fired tear gas directly into the home of 71-year-old Shia male Isa Mohammed Ali Abdullah. Abdullah was 71-years-old at the time, and suffered from respiratory issues. As a result of the Bahraini security forces firing tear gas into the enclosed space of his home, Abdullah breathed in a concentrated dose of tear gas. He developed respiratory issues and perished.<sup>17</sup> On another occasion on 9 November 2011, Bahraini security forces blanketed the Shia village of Bilad al-Qadeem with tear gas, endangering the lives of any persons with compromised respiratory systems in the village, including children and the elderly. On the third day of the government campaign, a five-day-old infant named Sajida Faisal Jawad and her three-year-old sister Sarah Faisal Jawad inhaled large amounts of tear gas and could not breathe. Sajida's skin turned blue, and her family took both children to the hospital, where they were both pronounced dead.<sup>18</sup>

The use of tear gas primarily leads to respiratory injuries. However, the canisters themselves can

14 Williams, Alan. "Videos of recent attacks on unarmed Shia by Bahraini security forces." *Communities Digital News*. (November 13, 2014) Accessed January 30, 2015, <http://www.commdiginews.com/world-news/middle-east/videos-of-recent-attacks-on-unarmed-shia-by-bahraini-security-forces-29320/>.

15 Bahrain Center for Human Rights. "Bahrain: Bassil al-Qattan; Extensive Use of Tear Gas by Bahrain's Authorities Claims Another Victim." Last accessed February 6, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/5585>.

16 Aboudi, Sami. "Tear Gas and Birdshot Fired at Demonstrators as Violence Erupts at Protests Rallies in Bahrain." *The Independent*, August 14, 2013, Middle East sec. Accessed January 1, 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/tear-gas-and-birdshot-fired-at-demonstrators-as-violence-erupts-at-protest-rallies-in-bahrain-8762088.html>.

17 Physicians for Human Rights, *Weaponizing Tear Gas: Bahrain's Unprecedented Use of Toxic Chemical Agents against Civilians* (August 2012), available at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/Bahrain-TearGas-Aug2012-small.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/Bahrain-TearGas-Aug2012-small.pdf) (Last Accessed 31 December 2013).

18 Kerr, S., *Baby's Death Threatens Bahrain Reform Agenda*, *Financial Times* (12 December 2012), available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8969c42a-24b2-11e1-ac4b-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1gME82cz3> (Last Accessed: 31 December 2014)

cause deadly injury when fired from a high velocity gun.<sup>19</sup> In August 2011, 14-year-old Shia Ali Jawad al-Sheikh was struck in the head and killed by a tear gas canister fired from close range. When his father arrived at the hospital, he clearly saw the shape of a tear gas canister imprinted on the back of his son's neck. When al-Sheikh's family called for accountability, the government denied that it was responsible for the death, and even offered a reward for information leading to the arrest of those responsible. In a documentary recently released about Bahrain, al-Sheikh's father criticized this attempt to cover up the reason for his Ali's death, "they were saying there would be a reward to catch the killer. He was the first child to be killed and the first to be shown on national TV. They know who killed him. They killed him."<sup>20</sup> Al-Sheikh's father was later injured himself by a tear gas canister in November 2014, when a high-velocity canister struck him in his face, permanently dislodging his eye from its socket and causing concussive injury.<sup>21</sup> All told, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights has documented that at least 38 people – all Shia – have perished as a result of the misuse of tear gas.<sup>22</sup>

Besides tear gas, government security forces often employ ostensibly non-lethal shotguns in dispersing Shia protests. These shotguns often cause permanent injury, and their misuse can even lead to the death of protesters. Most recently, Bahraini security forces utilized shotguns to extra judicially kill 14-year-old Shia male Sayed Mahmood Sayed Mohsen Sayed Ahmed by firing buckshot at his heart at point blank range. The pellets entered through his chest and perforated his heart, causing his death. Pictures of his body show a 6-inch spread of shotgun pellets around the area of his heart. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights has documented that at least 18 people have died as a result of shotgun-related injuries since the beginning of the February 2011 protests.<sup>23</sup> All of them have been Shia.

Security forces have also used their vehicles as weapons against Shia protests. Footage from protests often shows SUVs driven by members of the security forces speeding towards protesters in the clear attempt to hit them.<sup>24</sup> This is exactly what happened to Ali Aziz Bedah, who was struck by a security vehicle while attending a protest in 2011. The vehicle surprised the protesters late at night, striking Ali and pinning him up against a wall. Fellow protesters watched in horror as the vehicle struck Ali multiple times, crushing him to death. When Ali's father inquired about who was driving the car, he learned that the driver, a member of the security forces, was not from Bahrain, and that after the incident he was deported back to his home country.<sup>25</sup> On 18 November 2011, Ali Youssef Bagdar, a 16 year old Shia youth, was fatally wounded when a security vehicle

19 Ahangar, Ab Ghani, Hakeem Zubair Ashraf, Mohd Akbar Bhat, Abdul Majeed Dar, Ifat Irshad, Gh Nabi Lone, Shyam Singh, and Mohd Lateef Wani. "Vascular Injuries Caused by Tear Gas Shells: Surgical Challenge and Outcome." *Iranian Journal of Medical Science* 36, no. 1 (2011): 14-17. Accessed January 18, 2015. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3559117/pdf/IJMS-36-14.pdf>; see also Abrar, A. Wani, Javeed Zargar, Altaf U. Ramzan, Nayil K. Malik, A. Qayoom, A.r. Kirmani, Furqan A. Nizami, and M.a. Wani. "Head Injury Caused by Tear Gas Cartridge in Teenage Population." *Pediatric Neurosurgery* 46, no. 1 (2010): 25-28. Accessed January 26, 2015. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20453560>; Altindis, Emrah, M. Ali Alpar, Emre Aksay, Jonhatan Beckwith, Christian Bokel, Robert Curl, and Robert Darnell et al. (2013), "Turkey Must End Violent Response To Protests." *Science* 341 (6143): 236-236. doi:10.1126/science.341.6143.236-a.

20 Vice News. "Bahrain: An Inconvenient Uprising." YouTube video, 30:40. (November 10, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fVF0qQU3kc>.

21 Confidential Source.

22 Bahrain Center for Human Rights, "Individuals Killed By Government's Excessive Use of Force Since 14 February 2011" (May 22, 2014) Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3864>.

23 Ibid.

24 Vice News. "Bahrain: An Inconvenient Uprising." YouTube video, 30:40. (November 10, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fVF0qQU3kc>.

25 Ibid.

ran him over as he protested near the US Navy base on the island.<sup>26</sup> The Ministry of Interior later released a statement claiming “rioters” had poured oil over the road, which led the vehicle to skid out of control. Just days after the death of Ali Youssef Bagdar, security forces killed another man when a vehicle crashed into a car outside the Shi’a village of A’ali.<sup>27</sup>

The government also uses force to interfere with the Shia freedom of movement in an effort to repress protests. After the 2011 protests, the government set up a series of security checkpoints, most of which were placed on the roads leading out into the Shia villages. Most of these checkpoints remain in place. The government has also completely cordoned off entire villages ahead of major protests. In August 2013, government security forces placed concrete barriers and barbed wire around several Shia villages, including the larger town of Bilad al-Qadeem.<sup>28</sup>

### **Excessive Force in Bahraini Prisons**

Shia Muslims in Bahrain face excessive police brutality for expressing their political discontent in public. However, once in the custody of security forces, they face even greater danger, as Bahraini security forces carry out a systematic policy of torture against members of the Shia Muslim community.<sup>29</sup> The use of torture is not limited to the top leadership of the political opposition, but is used against protesters, activists, politicians, and even doctors who come from this religious group. Some of those tortured are average Bahraini Shias arrested for taking part in protests. In November 2014, a video surfaced online showing the torture of a young Bahraini protester.<sup>30</sup> In the video, two Bahraini security officers hold the man down while another officer beats him in the face, neck, and chest. During this beating, the officer insults the man’s Shia faith.<sup>31</sup>

The use of torture by security forces is so widespread that some individuals are targeted simply due to their faith. On 15 March 2011, shortly after King Hamad of Bahrain declared a state of

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- 26 Al Jazeera, “Bahrain Teenager Killed by Police Vehicle.” Al Jazeera, (November 19, 2011), Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/11/20111119155730885124.html>.
- 27 Al-Akhbar, “Bahrain protests flare after two deaths.” Al-Akhbar, (November 23, 2011), Accessed January 30, 2015. <http://www.commdiginews.com/world-news/middle-east/videos-of-recent-attacks-on-unarmed-shia-by-bahraini-security-forces-29320/>.
- 28 Al-Akhbar, “Bahrain Cages in Villages with Barbed Wire Ahead of Rally.” Al-Akhbar, (August 13, 2013), Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/16710>.
- 29 Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. By Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, Nigel Rodley, Badria al-Awadhi, Philippe Kirsche, and Mahnoush H. Arsanjani. Manama, Bahrain. 2011. pp. 299-300
- Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain and Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, “Subservient and Unaccountable; A Shadow Report on the Bahrain Ministry of the Interior’s Ombudsman and Bahrain National Institute for Human Rights”. July 2014.
- “Shia Activists Tortured in Bahrain Jails.” Shia Rights Watch (September 19, 2012) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://shiarightswatch.org/en/middle-east/bahrain/6-shia-activists-tortured-in-bahrain-jails.html>.
- “Bahrain: 50 Shi’a Activists Sentenced amid Torture Allegations.” Amnesty International (September 30, 2013) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/bahrain-50-shi-activists-sentenced-amid-torture-allegations-2013-09-30>.
- “Capital of Torture: Bahraini Shiite Majority Demands Democratic Rule.” RT News (May 11, 2013) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://rt.com/news/thousands-march-torture-bahrain-129/>.
- “Bahrain: Police Brutality, Despite Reform Pledges.” Human Rights Watch (April 29, 2012) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/29/bahrain-police-brutality-despite-reform-pledges>.
- “UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Gives a Speech about Torture in Bahrain” Bahrain Center for Human Rights. (June 29, 2014) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6937>.
- 30 Bahrain Center for Human Rights, “France24: Video Depicts Bahrain Police Abuse - But Will Inquiry Lead Anywhere?” Bahrain Rights. (November 19, 2014), Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/7174>.
- 31 Ibid.

emergency, security forces effectively took over the administration of Salmaniya Hospital, the largest public hospital in the country. During the early morning of 2 April, officers woke up four physicians sleeping in a break room at the hospital. After asking the names of each physician, they ordered one Sunni Muslim to leave the room while the remaining Shia doctors stayed behind. The officers then began interrogating the three physicians, asking them why there was no picture of the prime minister hanging up in the break room. The physicians responded that they did not take the picture down and had no idea what had happened to it. At this, the officers started to beat the physicians, calling them “traitor doctors.” When the officers heard more physicians passing by in the hall, they brought them into the room and inquired about their religious sect. For the next hour, the officers made the Shia physicians stand next to one Sunni physician while the officers lectured them on why the Sunni was a more respectable medical worker. The officers threatened that if they even looked at the Sunni physician they would be killed, and that if they missed just one day of work they and their families would be sent to prison and tortured.<sup>32</sup>

Bahrain’s prisons and detention centers have understandably been the site of some of the worst cases of torture. ADHRB alone has documented approximately 150 allegations of torture and other abuse in Bahraini prisons in 2014.<sup>33</sup> When the Bahrain National Institute of Human Rights (NIHR), a government agency created to monitor human rights abuses, toured Dry Dock Detention Center in 2013, it found that nearly 150 prisoners were kept in 14 rooms. Interviewed inmates claim that security officers carried out regular beatings and torture, and many prisoners complained that they were targeted by prison guards explicitly because of their Shia faith.<sup>34</sup>

While these human rights agencies are permitted to inspect official prison facilities, there is evidence to suggest that many detainees are kept at makeshift ‘secret’ prisons around the country. It is in these secret locations where the worst practices of torture are carried out against members of the Shia Muslim community.<sup>35</sup> One man’s tale of his arrest reveals how torture is carried out on a mass scale against Shia prisoners. On the morning of 31 July 2013, security forces raided this individual’s home and took him to what he thought was the Central Intelligence Directorate. After observing his surroundings, he soon realized that he was not in a traditional prison. The walls were made of plywood, and guards tried to give the illusion that the building was bigger than it actually was. This individual was kept in a cell standing with his hands cuffed behind his back for five days. After being escorted to the bathroom by a guard, the prisoner observed that there was a hierarchy of punishment in this facility: “prisoners with a green Post-it on their door were not allowed to sit or sleep; a yellow Post-it meant you were allowed to sleep at night; no Post-it on the door of your cell meant you were allowed to sit.”<sup>36</sup>

32 Atkinson, Holly, and Richard Sollom. “Under the Gun: Ongoing Assaults on Bahrain’s Health System.” Physicians for Human Rights, 2012, Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/reports/under-the-gun-ongoing-assaults-on-bahraains-health-system.html>

33 Confidential sources.

34 Bahrain National Institute for Human Rights. “Annual Report of the National Institution for Human Rights 2013 – Kingdom of Bahrain” (2014), Accessed January 29, 2014. [http://en.nihr.org.bh/Media/pdf/NIHR\\_ANNUAL\\_REPORT\\_2013\\_\(ENG\).pdf](http://en.nihr.org.bh/Media/pdf/NIHR_ANNUAL_REPORT_2013_(ENG).pdf)

35 VICE News RSS, “Bahrain: An Inconvenient Uprising.” (November 10, 2014), Accessed January 20, 2015. <https://news.vice.com/video/bahrain-an-inconvenient-uprising>.

36 Hassan, Mohamed. “Prison in Bahrain: A Tale of Torture.” Global Voices. (November 11, 2014), Accessed January 1, 2015. <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2014/11/11/prison-in-bahrain-a-tale-of-torture/#>.

## Denial of Access to Medicine and Attacks on Healthcare Workers

In Bahrain's constitution, access to public healthcare is celebrated as the right of all Bahraini citizens regardless of ethnicity or religious sect.<sup>37</sup> However, Shia protesters in need of medical treatment were specifically targeted because of their injuries.

The government most alarmingly violated the Shia right to health during the February 2011 protests. According to a report by Physicians for Human Rights, Bahraini security forces prevented medics and ambulances from accessing the Pearl Roundabout during the suppression of the February 2011 uprising.<sup>38</sup> Medical professionals reported that security forces targeted ambulance personnel and their vehicles, sometimes posing as medics in order to arrest members of the opposition.<sup>39</sup> After this initial crackdown and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency on 15 March 2011, the government erected dozens of roadblocks around majority Shia areas.<sup>40</sup> Security officers questioned persons with Shia names and promptly arrested anyone with signs of injury.

Immediately following the 2011 uprising, the government imprisoned and allegedly tortured 48 medical professionals, 47 of whom were Shia,<sup>41</sup> due to their alleged involvement in protests and for providing medical assistance to protesters.<sup>42</sup> The military courts convicted some of these doctors for instigating sectarian hatred, suggesting that they provided preferential medical care to Shia.<sup>43</sup> During the state of emergency, most of the patients entering the Salmaniya Medical Complex were people injured in the protests, themselves overwhelmingly Shia. At least three medical professionals are still in prison on charges related to the 2011 events.<sup>44</sup>

A delegation from Physicians for Human Rights visited health care facilities around Bahrain and reported that medical staff and injured alike feared being arrested if they traveled to medical centers. As the director of one medical facility outside of Manama recounted to investigators, most of her 19 staff members were Shia, and they feared going to work because of the roadblocks.<sup>45</sup> Physicians for Human Rights additionally recorded numerous testimonies from injured Bahrainis who either were tortured when they attempted to receive medical treatment, or who avoided treatment because they feared arrest.<sup>46</sup>

37 Kingdom of Bahrain Constitution, Article 8(a). Accessed January 29, 2015. <http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/Bahrain.pdf>.

38 Sollom, Richard. "Do No Harm: A Call for Bahrain to End Systematic Attacks on Doctors and Patients." Physicians for Human Rights, (2011), Accessed January 21, 2015. [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/bahrain-do-no-harm-2011.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/bahrain-do-no-harm-2011.pdf).

39 Ibid.

40 Sollom, Richard. "Do No Harm: A Call for Bahrain to End Systematic Attacks on Doctors and Patients." Physicians for Human Rights, (2011), Accessed January 21, 2015. [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/bahrain-do-no-harm-2011.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/bahrain-do-no-harm-2011.pdf).

41 Atkinson, Holly and Richard Sollom. "Under the Gun: Ongoing Assaults on Bahrain's Health System." Physicians for Human Rights. p.6. (May 2012) Accessed January 20, 2015. [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/Bahrain-militarization-may-2012-under-the-gun.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/Bahrain-militarization-may-2012-under-the-gun.pdf).

42 *Bahrain: Attack on the medical profession as doctors and nurses are arrested, detained, abducted and ill-treated*, Front Line Defenders (26 May 2011), <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/15168>.

43 "I don't regret doing my duty." Dr Ali Al Ekri, Front Line Defenders, <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/19943>.

44 The three are Ibrahim Al-Demistani, Secretary General of the Bahrain Nursing Society, Dr Ali Al Ekri, a surgeon, and Hasaan Matooq, a nurse. *Bahrain – Medical professionals subjected to ill treatment in prison to set up body of Medics for Human Rights*, Gulf Center for Human Rights (11 November 2013), <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/529>.

45 Ibid.

46 Sollom, Richard. "Do No Harm: A Call for Bahrain to End Systematic Attacks on Doctors and Patients." Physicians for Human Rights, (2011), Accessed January 21, 2015. [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/bahrain-do-no-harm-2011.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/bahrain-do-no-harm-2011.pdf).

While the government no longer openly prevents Shia from obtaining medical care, government policies regarding the arrest of injured protesters force many Shia away from the hospitals. Many Shia report that government security officers continue to monitor hospitals and other health facilities throughout the country, targeting and arresting Shia that show signs of injuries sustained during police suppression of protests. As a result, Shia are often forced to seek medical care in understaffed and underequipped underground clinics.<sup>47</sup>

Prison authorities have also deprived Shia detainees of necessary medical care.<sup>48</sup> On 2 April 2011, the government announced that Hasan Jassim Mohamed Maki had died from complications of Sickle Cell Anemia. However, his family claimed that he had never shown serious symptoms of the disease, and that it is easily treatable. Other inmates at the prison reported they heard Maki's groans as he slowly suffered from lack of treatment. In October 2013, an anonymous Bahraini Shia perished from AIDS-related complications after the government allegedly denied him access to his medicine during his time in prison.<sup>49</sup> The government has also denied medical care to notable Shia leader Abdulwahab Husain, who suffers from painful and life-threatening medical conditions including injuries suffered as a result of torture. ADHRB often receives similar reports from other anonymous sources, citing that the government refuses to treat injuries such as broken ribs and concussions that resulted from torture at the hands of Bahraini security agents.

## Conclusion

In committing acts of violence against the Shia population of Bahrain, the government has displayed access and willingness to employ a wide variety of tools. From tear gassing protests and villages to torturing protesters and medics, the government conducts a targeted campaign of violence against its Shia citizenry. Sometimes, these attacks are in response to protests. However, in many other instances, Shia Muslims who had nothing to do with the protest movement were targeted simply because of their faith. Evidence of new acts of violence emerge daily, to the point where many international human rights institutions have difficulty keeping up with documentation. Being victimized by violence is quickly becoming a way of life for Bahraini Shia.

While violence very rarely seems deliberately calculated to destroy human life, government recklessness in its utilization of violence has at times caused extrajudicial death, especially against the weak and infirm. Both infants and elderly persons have died as a result of government security forces blanketing villages with tear gas, while a not insignificant number of Bahraini youth have perished as a result of security officers recklessly using force to suppress peaceful protests. Impunity is common, and in some cases prominent government officials have been quoted as remarking positively on these and similar events.<sup>50</sup>

With the Bahraini government utilizing such a wide spectrum of violence against the Shia, and with the government committing such acts of violence so frequently, a systemic government

<sup>47</sup> Confidential Source.

<sup>48</sup> Bassiouni, Mahmoud, Nigel Rodley, Badria Al-Awadhi, Philippe Kirsch, and Mahnoush Arsanjani, "Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry," Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. (December 11, 2011), Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICIREportEN.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain and Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, "Subservient and Unaccountable; A Shadow Report on the Bahrain Ministry of the Interior's Ombudsman and Bahrain National Institute for Human Rights." July 2014.

<sup>50</sup> "Bahrain: Prime Minister to Officer Acquitted on Torture Charges: "Thank You for Your Work"" Bahrain Center for Human Rights. (July 10, 2013), Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6219>.

policy of violent acts against the Shia seems an obvious conclusion. And while the government exercises its pervasive violence with a level of restraint seemingly calculated to avoid loss of life, the irresponsible exposure to violence will inevitably lead to casualties easily ascribed to government activity. These policies will need to end before the government can be seen as neutral, accountable, and legitimate.



## Political Discrimination

Held in late November 2014, Bahrain's first parliamentary elections since the 2011 uprising engendered considerable debate. Opposition leaders and government representatives did not contest the official results; in the aftermath of an opposition boycott sparked by deep-seated dissatisfaction with the nation's most recent electoral reforms, they instead disputed government estimates of voter turnout. The Ministry of Justice reported that "51.5 percent of voters" participated.<sup>51</sup> Al-Wefaq, a Shia-oriented political society and the nation's largest opposition body (formal political parties are prohibited), estimated that actual turnout hovered around 30 percent.<sup>52</sup> Perceptions of the system's intrinsic favoritism drive the debate over process. Since the 2002 reconstitution of the Council of Representatives, the National Assembly's lower elected body, the Government of Bahrain has engaged in political engineering to ensure the underrepresentation of the Bahraini Shia population in the nation's only elected body.

This report presents the scope of Bahrain's political engineering apparatus and the manner in which it is utilized to suppress the political will of the Shia majority. After outlining the Bahraini government's exclusionary structure, the report studies unfair redistricting practices, highlights the effects of demographic manipulation and legalistic coercive measures, and offers a conclusion with specific recommendations for righting these inequities.

### The Government's Exclusionary Structure

The Bahraini government is divided into three branches: the executive branch, as represented by the king and his appointed Council of Ministers, the judiciary branch, as appointed by the king, and the legislative branch, itself formed of the appointed Shura Council and the elected Council of Representatives. King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa maintains significant executive authority, which he exercises in part through his political appointments in all three branches.<sup>53</sup> He appoints all members of the Cabinet,<sup>54</sup> the executive body which includes the office of the Prime Minister, his deputies, and the heads of all government ministries (including Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defense and Justice). As a result, executive branch is governed significantly by the royal family; as of 2013, members of the al-Khalifa dynasty held fourteen of thirty-five Cabinet positions,<sup>55</sup> while Shia persons held just six Cabinet-level positions.<sup>56</sup> The king also maintains the exclusive right to appoint judges and judicial officers. As a result, Shia accounted for just 12% of the judiciary in 2013.<sup>57</sup>

The king additionally chooses all 40 members of the National Assembly's more powerful upper house, the Shura (or Consultative) Council; in 2013, a Shia occupied 17 out of the 40 seats.<sup>58</sup> The

51 Associated Press, "Bahrain opposition blasts electoral turnout figures," *The Washington Post*, (November 23, 2014) accessed November 25, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/bahrain-opposition-blasts-electoral-turnout-figure/2014/11/23/095cf766-731f-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/bahrain-opposition-blasts-electoral-turnout-figure/2014/11/23/095cf766-731f-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a_story.html).

52 "Polls close in boycotted Bahrain elections," Al Jazeera, (November 23, 2014) accessed November 25, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2014/11/polls-close-boycotted-bahrain-elections-20141122202857153287.html>.

53 "Bahrain," *Freedom House*, 2012, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/bahrain-0#VH8z8THF8UA>.

54 Ibid.

55 "Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members: Bahrain," Central Intelligence Agency Library (April 23, 2013) accessed December 3, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-1/BA.html>.

56 Al-Wefaq. "مساواة والمواطنة أساس الديمقراطية" [Equality and Citizenship are the Foundation of Democracy]. 2013. Accessed January 30, 2015. [http://alwefaq.net/uploadfiles/files/Tameez\\_3Oct2013.pdf](http://alwefaq.net/uploadfiles/files/Tameez_3Oct2013.pdf).

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

Council of Representatives, consisting of members serving four year terms, is the only elected governing body.<sup>59</sup> Thus, as a result of the king's extensive influence, the upper echelons of the government are effectively dominated by Sunni appointees.

There is no formal separation of powers within the Sunni-dominated government. The king reserves the right to set law via Royal Decree, a power outside any formal check and not requiring the approval of the elected legislature. The Cabinet, despite forming part of the executive branch, also possesses legislative powers and drafts most laws.<sup>60</sup> The Representative and Shura Councils can propose legislation, but the Shura Council must approve any legislation drafted by the Council of Representatives before it is submitted to the king,<sup>61</sup> providing the appointed body with veto power over electoral action.

### **Asymmetric Districting**

During the 2006 and 2010 parliamentary elections, Bahrain's opposition societies chose to engage in the electoral process. As a result, turnout for these elections was high.<sup>62</sup> However, although al-Wefaq won a strong plurality of voters in the 2010 elections, the political society only garnered eighteen of forty seats in the Council of Representatives.<sup>63</sup> This was largely due to the problems created by Bahrain's asymmetric districting program.

The international community often conflates the Bahraini government's unbalanced redistricting scheme with commonplace gerrymandering, considered an unfortunate ill afflicting many democratic societies.<sup>64</sup> What occurs in Bahrain, however, is not analogous to the redistricting which takes place within a republican system. Successive parties do not cyclically redraw proportional electoral constituencies. Rather, the governing elite centered around the royal family asymmetrically set and reset electoral rules with every election. Non-proportional districts unequally weight votes and the "winner-take-all" format constrains the power of political parties, resulting in a discriminatory electoral process.

Since 2002, non-proportional voting districts have constituted the largest obstacles to the realization of fair elections in Bahrain. Traditionally, the government has separated the districts into five larger governorates which represent geographically contiguous zones of the island: Capital, Muharraq, Northern, Southern, and Central. These governorates are imbalanced along sectarian lines, hemming many of the nation's Shia, who predominately populate the island's northern-third, into high-density districts in the Capital and Northern Governorates. Meanwhile, Sunni voters have mostly comprised lower-density constituencies in the Southern and Muharraq Governorates. Central has been more evenly split.

Historically, variation between the districts' population levels has been stark. During the

59 "Bahrain," Freedom House, (2012), accessed January 20, 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/bahrain-0#.VH8z8THF8UA>.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 "Voter Turnout Data for Bahrain," International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=BH>.

63 Fahad Desmukh, "Gerrymandering in Bahrain: Twenty-one persons, one vote," Bahrain Watch, February 11, 2013, accessed November 28, 2014, <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2013/02/11/gerrymandering-in-bahrain-twenty-one-persons-one-vote/>.

64 Implementation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry Report, House of Representatives, 112 Cong. (2012) (Statement of Rep. Dan Burton).

2006 election cycle, the Joint Committee of Monitoring Elections, comprised of the Bahrain Transparency Society and the Bahrain Human Rights Society, reported that the 1<sup>st</sup> District of the Northern Governorate (Northern 1) held 15,499 eligible voters, the vast majority of which were Shia. The smallest constituency, the 5<sup>th</sup> District of the Southern Governorate (Southern 5), contained 1,175, most of whom were Sunni.<sup>65</sup> The disparity widened four years later. During the 2010 election cycle, Northern 1 and Northern 9 held over 16,000 eligible voters each. The smallest constituency, Southern 6, contained some 750 voters; constituents in Southern 6 enjoyed a voting power over 20 times stronger than constituents in Northern 1.<sup>66</sup>

The “winner-take-all” election format, which allocates one parliamentary representative per district, amplifies Sunni voices at the expense of Shia voters. In 2010 the Sunni-heavy Southern Governorate, while only holding 6.8 percent of total voters, contained six districts. The Shia-heavy Northern Governorate, containing 31.9 percent of voters, had three more districts, translating into only three more representatives out of forty for a population nearly five times larger.<sup>67</sup>

The combined manipulations undermine the principle of “one man, one vote.” As the Joint Committee of Monitoring Elections wrote in its 2007 report, “the ballot of a voter in the 5<sup>th</sup> District of the Southern Governorate equals 13.15 votes in the 1<sup>st</sup> District of the Northern Governorate.”<sup>68</sup> The voting power ratio between the largest and smallest district increased to 1:21.1 in 2010. That someone in a southern district is nearly guaranteed to be Sunni, while a voter from the northern district is likely Shia, indicates a conscious government effort to lessen the value of the Shia vote.

The two engineering methods effectively contain what Shia political expression the system permits. After winning districts containing a total of 181,238 eligible voters in 2010, versus districts totaling 137,430 voters for all other parties and individual candidates combined, al-Wefaq gained 18 seats out of 40.<sup>69</sup> If Bahrain instituted a winner-take-all system with districts of equal size, a party representing 56 percent of all eligible voters could expect an outcome akin to a twenty-two or twenty-three seat majority. Furthermore, these unequal, sect-based districts shrink the electoral map for contending parties. In 2010, al-Wefaq contested only thirty-one of a possible forty seats,<sup>70</sup> judging the remaining nine as uncontestable.

In 2014, the King promulgated a set of modest electoral reforms whose implementation did not seriously challenge the position of pro-government representatives. The Central Governorate was abolished, and the Southern subsumed much of its population.<sup>71</sup> The average district size increased from 7,967 to 8,743 voters, there were more districts per governorate, and the 16,000 person mega-districts were eliminated.<sup>72</sup> These modifications, however, stopped well short of

65 “REPORT ABOUT Parliamentary and Municipal Elections HELD ON 25<sup>th</sup> November and 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2006,” The Joint Committee of Monitoring Elections, (February 2007) accessed November 26, 2014, <https://www.ndi.org/files/Bahrain-2006-elections-report.pdf>, 8.

66 “Electoral Map 2010,” al-Wasat, accessed November 26, 2014, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/elections/2010/>.

67 “Bahrain,” Freedom House, (2012), accessed January 20, 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/bahrain-0#.VH8z8THF8UA>.

68 “Report about Parliamentary and Municipal Elections,” Joint Committee, 8.

69 Fahad Desmukh, “Gerrymandering in Bahrain: Twenty-one persons, one vote,” *Bahrain Watch*, (February 11, 2013) accessed November 28, 2014, <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2013/02/11/gerrymandering-in-bahrain-twenty-one-persons-one-vote/>.

70 “Bahrain Majlis Al-Nuwab (Council of Representatives): Last Elections,” *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, accessed November 28, 2014, [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2371\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2371_E.htm).

71 “Electoral Map,” Directorate of Election and Referendum, accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.vote.bh/En/ElectoralMap?cms=iQRpheuphYtI6pyXUGiNqChNlcwVZKE>.

72 “Districts Gerrymandering analysis for 2010,” al-Wefaq, accessed November 28, 2014.

righting the population imbalances between areas traditionally loyal to the government and those more supportive of the Shia opposition. The electoral quarantining of the opposition continued. The Capital and Northern Governorates contained seventeen total districts thought loyal to opposition parties; the Muharraq and Southern Governorates contained one between them.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the former two governorates included a total of 209,816 voters spread across twenty-two districts, while the latter two—covering areas with sizable Sunni majorities—accounted for 139,897 voters spread across eighteen districts.<sup>74</sup> In the Shia-dominated Northern Governorate, nine of twelve districts exceeded the national average in terms of population size, four by more than 2,000 voters. In the Southern, only one of ten exceeded the 8,743 average, and that by only 45 persons.<sup>75</sup> These numbers demonstrate that, in aggregate, the value of a Sunni vote continues to outstrip that of a Shia by a significant margin.

Beyond containing Shia political aspirations, this asymmetric districting process carries other hidden costs for the Shia community. Representatives of majority-Shia districts must attempt to provide services for their oversized and underserved constituencies. Human rights violations and housing and employment discrimination disproportionately affect Bahraini Shia, leaving them in need of pressing assistance.<sup>76</sup> These deprivations contribute to an “out of control” number of constituent meetings, and politicians in the opposition must sacrifice the basic work of governing in order to respond adequately to the citizens they represent.<sup>77</sup> Shia politicians must work harder than their Sunni counterparts even as the system ensures that they yield less.

The sectarian electoral format also imposes costs on Bahrainis attempting to transcend these intra-societal divisions. The government-enforced Sunni-Shia binary disadvantages smaller political societies, such as the National Democratic Action Society (Waad), the largest secular party in Bahrain. Despite advancing nearly all its candidates to the second round of voting in both the 2006<sup>78</sup> and 2010<sup>79</sup> elections, Waad did not gain a single seat. The only formal political societies to win seats in 2006 in 2010 had religious orientations: al-Wefaq, the Sunni-Islamist al-Menbar, and the Salafi al-Asalah. Independent candidates loyal to the ruling elite filled the remainder of the parliament. Thus, government-backed candidates and Islamists shut out Waad in the south and in Muharraq while the popularity of al-Wefaq precluded them from gaining a foothold in the north.

### **Demographic Manipulation, Legalistic Coercion, and State Violence**

While the government can cite minor modifications to asymmetric redistricting as efforts at reform, it makes no attempt to defend other actions which tip the electoral scales in its favor. A dual campaign of re-engineering the demographic makeup of Bahraini society while suppressing opposition politicians and activists further elevates the political power of the Sunni minority at the expense of the Shia majority.

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73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom*, (2014)

77 Ebrahim Matar, Matar. Personal interview. 24 July 2014.

78 “Parliamentary and municipal elections in Bahrain 2006: Islamic Sunnis are leading the second elections in Bahrain,” International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, (December 13, 2006) accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.constitutionnet.org/files/No.%2014%20Parliamentary%20and%20municipal%20elections%20in%20Bahrain%202006.pdf>.

79 “The results of parliamentary and municipal elections in 2010,” Al Wasat, (2010), accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/elections/results/>.

In the last decade, Bahrain has begun supplementing its Sunni population with foreign-born Sunni citizens. As a matter of policy, Bahrain recruits Sunni foreigners to serve in their military and police forces.<sup>80</sup> These foreign nationals are then offered a “fast track” to citizenship.<sup>81</sup> These Sunnis come from cultures seen as amenable to the ruling Al Khalifa family, primarily Sunni Bedouin tribes in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Jordan, and Baluchistan, although many also originate in Pakistan<sup>82</sup> While Bahrain does not publish official numbers, estimates of these naturalized Sunni citizens meet or exceed 50,000,<sup>83</sup> amounting to around an 8% portion of an island whose citizenry hovers around 600,000. Pakistani expatriates alone account for between 25,000 – 30,000 naturalized Bahrainis.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, the government has continued to deny citizenship to hundreds of eligible persons on account of their membership in a Shia sect. The nationality law stipulates that the government must provide citizenship rights to any GCC nationals with three years of residence in Bahrain. These numbers climb to 15 years for Arabs and 25 years for non-Arabs to obtain Bahraini citizenship. A 2008 study estimated that 2000 stateless families resided in Bahrain, many of whom were Shia families that qualified for citizenship under the Bahraini law.<sup>85</sup> While an updated figure is not available, new stories regarding such families continue to emerge in the local media.<sup>86</sup> Further, the government has periodically revoked the citizenships of prominent political activists and youth, many of whom are Shia.<sup>87</sup> While denaturalization efforts have not proceeded at nearly the same pace as the government’s broader naturalization campaign, the combined practices of naturalizing Sunni expatriates, ignoring Shia families eligible for citizenship, and denaturalizing Shia leaders and youth have all had the effect of lessening the impact of the Shia population in their homeland.

Short-term coercive measures supplement long-term demographic manipulation as a means of securing the political space for the ruling Sunni elite. These measures often adopt arbitrary legal justifications. Opposition societies and candidates largely representing the Shia population are subject to constantly changing rules which expand or contract their effective space of action. As societies threatened to boycott the 2014 elections, the government countered by publicly considering penalties for eligible citizens who did not vote, including preventing non-voters

80 Shirin Sadeghi, “Intricacies of Bahrain’s Shia-Sunni divide,” *Al Jazeera*, (September 2, 2011) accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/08/2011829104128700299.html>.

81 Aryn Baker, “What Lies Beneath: Bahrain’s ‘New Citizens’ Fuel Unrest,” *Time*, (March 11, 2011), accessed December 1, 2014, <http://world.time.com/2011/03/11/what-lies-beneath-bahrain-s-new-citizens-fuel-unrest/>.

82 Omar al-Shehabi, “Demography and Bahrain’s Unrest,” *Sada*, (March 16, 2011) accessed December 1, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/03/16/demography-and-bahrain-s-unrest/gbpy>.

83 Ibid.

84 Unnikrishnan, Raji. “University Soon for Pakistani Expats.” *Gulf Daily News*. (December 13, 2014). Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=391874>.

85 Grewal, Sandeep. “AHN: More Than 2,000 Families Waiting To Become Bahrain Citizens.” Bahrain Center for Human Rights. (May 13, 2008), Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2158>.

86 البهرينية الوسط صحيفة "البحرينية الجنسية على تحصل ولم قرن نصف من أكثر عاشت". سهيلة صفر آل. August 31, 2014. Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4376/news/read/916339/1.html>. [Al Safar, Suhaila. “I lived more than half a century and did not get Bahraini citizenship.” *Middle Bahraini Newspaper*

الجواز امتلاكه لعدم ترحيله من تخوفها بُدي خوري محمود أم 3 من أكثر وتوقيفه الجواز امتلاكه لعدم ترحيله من تخوفها بُدي خوري محمود أم. محمود خوري. Accessed January 22, 2015. [http://www.alwasatnews.com/mobile/news-911442.html#comment\\_form](http://www.alwasatnews.com/mobile/news-911442.html#comment_form). [Khoury, Mahmoud. “Um Mahmoud Khoury shows fear of deportation for her son not having a passport more than three months after he was arrested,” *Middle Bahraini Newspaper*

البحرينية الوسط صحيفة "البراء ومشاركات رسائل كشول". January 14, 2010. Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.alwasatnews.com/2687/news/read/360465/1.html>. [Viral messages and posts by readers,” *Middle Bahraini Newspaper*

87 “Bahrain revokes 31 opposition activists’ citizenship,” *BBC*, (November 7, 2012), accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20235542>.

from acquiring a government job.<sup>88</sup> According to Matar Ebrahim Matar, a former al-Wefaq representative, government officials also openly considered removing non-voters from voting rolls and instituting a cumbersome re-registration process in order to depress future Shia voter numbers while simultaneously inflating the voter turnout rate, which the government judges off of eligible registered voters and not off of the general citizenry.<sup>89</sup> Such measures would inordinately punish the many Shia that boycotted elections out of frustration.

As calls for a boycott gained momentum, the government responded by suspending al-Wefaq for three months and threatening to proscribe the same punishment to Waad.<sup>90</sup> The Ministry of Justice suspended the Shia society in October for “irregularities,” a lack of transparency, and for holding “illegal” assemblies.<sup>91</sup> In July 2014, authorities interrogated al-Wefaq leaders Shaikh Ali Salman and Khalil al-Marzooq after the two freely met with Tom Malinowski, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Authorities eventually charged them with violating the 2005 Law for Political Societies.<sup>92</sup> In both cases, government officials levied punishments against opposition members who attempted to act outside of the government-determined political space.

On 27 December 2014, the Bahraini government arrested al-Wefaq Secretary-General Shaikh Ali Salman on charges of inciting hatred against the government and advocating for the violent overthrow of the government. The arrest came two days after Shaikh Salman was re-elected to al-Wefaq’s top position during a meeting of the organization that had been banned by the government. International human rights organizations condemned Shaikh Salman’s detention, and some political analysts speculated that the move may be designed to increase extremist violence in the country so as to further justify political crackdowns.

For politically active citizens who choose to abandon the government’s carefully-managed channels of expression, authorities respond with outright violence. In the run-up to the most recent elections, one Shia opposition group organized an alternative referendum in which Bahrainis could vote “yes” or “no” on “choosing a new political regime in Bahrain under the supervision of the United Nations.”<sup>93</sup> In November 2014, the government arrested thirteen women alleged to be the referendum’s organizers, subjected them to torture, and prevented them from accessing legal counsel.<sup>94</sup> For the government, state violence is a ready option when intimidation and de-legitimization fail.

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88 Mohammed Al A’Ali, “Penalties plan for not voting,” *Gulf Daily News*, (November 21, 2014) accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=390418>.

89 Matar Ebrahim, Matar, Comments made at Bahrain Working Group (October 2014).

90 Farishta Saeed, “Bahraini opposition group suspended for three months,” Reuters, (October 20, 2014) accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/29/us-bahrain-wefaq-idUSKBN0IH1CV20141029>.

91 Al Monitor, “Bahrain wields judiciary against civil society,” (October 30, 2014) accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/10/bahrain-alfafaq-political-opposition.html#>; “Bahrain: Court issues order to suspend the largest political group in Bahrain,” *Bahrain Center for Human Rights*, (November 3, 2014) accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/7155>.

92 Bahrain Center for Human Rights, “Bahrain: Ministry of Justice Files Lawsuit to Suspend Al-Wefaq, the Largest Political Party in Bahrain” (July 21, 2014) accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6971>.

93 “Bahrain opposition activists set up alternative vote ahead of elections,” *Middle East Eye*, (November 21, 2014), accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/bahrain-opposition-activists-set-poll-self-determination-ahead-elections-136064934>.

94 Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, “Bahrain: Women Targeted in Mass Arrests Over ‘Popular Referendum,’” (November 14, 2014) accessed December 3, 2014, <http://adhrb.org/2014/11/bahrain-women-targeted-in-mass-arrests-over-popular-referendum/>.

## **Conclusion**

Through a combination of asymmetric districting, demographic manipulation and legalistic coercive measures, the Bahraini government maintains an electoral system which allows for limited participation while forestalling the election of a representative parliament which could veto laws produced by the executive branch. The unrepresentative nature of the current government marginalizes the society's majority Shia population even as it further concentrates power in the hands of the Sunni ruling family and their supporters. Bahrain, however, need not continue along a path of heightened sectarian tension. By instituting a series of obvious, fair, and common-sense reforms, the government can liberalize the political space while maintaining internal stability and respecting the popular will.

## Religious Discrimination

For several years after obtaining independence from the British, it appeared as if the Sunni dominated government of Bahrain was willing to accept the Shia community into the political order. Sheikh Abdul Amir al-Jamri and Sheikh Isa Qassim, both prominent Shia clerics, served in parliament as representatives of the Shia Islamic “religious bloc.” However, the parliament and constitution were suspended in 1975 when the legislature rejected a security law which would have granted security forces indiscriminate powers. For the rest of Emir Isa bin Salman’s reign, Bahrain was effectively ruled by decree. This political regression, and the crackdowns which followed, led to an exodus of Shia religious figures from Bahrain.

When King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa acceded to the Bahraini throne in 1999, observers hoped that his reign would bring about an era of political liberalization. At the beginning of reign, King Hamad put forward the National Action Charter, which would return Bahrain to the constitutional monarchy stipulated in the 1973 constitution. In a public referendum, over 98% of Bahraini voters chose to ratify this document. In response to Hamad’s conciliatory approach, many exiled Shia clerics chose to return. In 2001, many of these clerics joined together to form the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, a Shia Islamic coalition which has since become the single largest political society in Bahrain. Thus, the Shia religious establishment became intrinsically tied with the community’s political representatives.

In the time since the Shia clergymen returned to Bahrain, the government has significantly regressed on many of its previous moves towards political unity. As the political structure of the country shifts towards further alienating the Shia, the Shia opposition has responded with increasingly stronger rhetoric and increasingly numerous protests against the government. The government has responded in kind with a specific targeting of the Shia religious establishment, violently targeting Shia religious leaders, legally dissolving Shia religious organizations, and physically destroying Shia religious structures.

### Violence against Shia Clergy and Religious Members

In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 protest movement, Bahraini authorities targeted influential leaders of the political opposition in addition to average citizens-protesters. The most famous of these political prisoners are the “Bahrain 13,” a group of unaligned opposition leaders who were arrested immediately after the government assaulted the pro-democracy demonstrations. Six members of the Bahrain 13 are widely considered to be outstanding members of the Bahrain Shia clergy by the Shia community, including Hassan Mushaima, Abdulwahab Hussein, Abduljalil al-Miqdad, Mohammed Habib (al-Miqdad), Saeed Mirza al-Nouri, and Abdullah Isa al-Mahroos. Their stories generally follow the same theme: shortly after the government moved on the Pearl Roundabout in March 2011, the government arrested the members of the Bahrain 13, including the six clergymen named above. The government tortured several of the clergymen before eventually convicting them of crimes related to the freedoms of expression and association. Their sentences ranged from several years to life in prison.<sup>95</sup>

During the February 2011 protests, other members of the Shia religious establishment not associated with the Bahrain 13 were also targeted. Sheikh Maytham al-Salman is a Shia cleric who leads the Bahrain Interfaith Center, an organization that promotes religious tolerance in Bahrain.

<sup>95</sup> “Bahrain 13.” Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy. Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://birdbh.org/bahrain-13/>.



Although he was not involved in the protest movement, he was arrested on 18 March 2011 and detained for six months. Prison authorities claimed that he was detained for attending an illegal rally. Additionally, the government tried cleric Aqeel Ahmed al-Mafoodh in absentia for activities related to his media coverage of the February 2011 uprising. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison.<sup>96</sup>

Since the February 2011 protests, other religious leaders have found themselves victimized by government persecution. In April 2014, Sheikh Hussein Najati, who is considered the most senior Shia cleric in Bahrain, was interrogated and informed that his Bahraini citizenship had been revoked. Police officers gave Najati 48 hours to leave the country for Iraq. In December of the same year, government security forces arrested Shaikh Ali Salman, a Bahraini cleric and the leader of Bahrain's largest opposition movement, on account of political statements he made earlier in the year. He potentially faces up to 15 years in prison. Since 2011, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights has identified at least 31 Bahraini Shia clerics persecuted on account of their political statements or religious affiliation, including Shaikhs Salman and Najati. More than half of them remain in prison.

### **The Destruction of Mosques and Other Religious Sites**

Government violence against the Shia establishment has not stopped at the clergy. The government has also directly targeted the physical structures of the Shia religion. In retaliation against the protest movement of February 2011, which the government characterized as predominately populated by Bahraini Shia, security forces bulldozed and demolished 38 Shia mosques and religious structures around Bahrain. Many of these buildings were culturally as well as religiously significant. While the government has promised to rebuild a number of these mosques, progress on their rebuilding has been stagnant, with the Shia community itself rebuilding the only mosques that have been completed.

The first such demolition occurred on 30 March, when *Masjid Kowaikebat* in the town of Tubli was burned, along with the sacred objects contained in the building. The second and arguably most important mosque to be demolished was the *al-Barbaghi* mosque, which stood along the causeway between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Built in 1549, *al-Barbaghi* stood as a symbol of Shia Islam's role in Bahrain's history and predated the arrival of the al-Khalifa family to Bahrain by more than 200 years. The mosque also held the tomb of Ameer Mohammed al-Barbaghi, a historically important Shia religious scholar. *Al-Barbaghi's* location along the route from Saudi Arabia to Bahrain is significant, because some Bahrainis have suggested that the destruction of Shia mosques was encouraged by Saudi officials who wanted to erase Shia heritage from the most visible locations.

Indeed, the location of a mosque seemed to be an important factor in deciding whether or not it would be targeted. The Shia majority area of al-Barboura has been the site of historical clashes between the al-Khalifa family and Shia discontents. During the period from March 30<sup>th</sup> to April 27<sup>th</sup>, 10 mosques were destroyed in the al-Barboura area, in what opposition activists contend was a symbolic act of revenge against the Shia community. Other mosques were apparently destroyed due to their location in publicly-exposed areas. *Masjid al-Alawaiyat* was one such mosque, being publicly visible on the route to the country's only public hospital.

<sup>96</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, "Updates: Harsh Sentences to 21 Prominent Oppositional Leaders and Human Rights Defenders. ( July 5, 2011). Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/4029>.

Between 30 March and 27 April 2011, the government destroyed a total of 38 mosques, shrines, and other religious places. These included:

Imam al-Baqer Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Imam Ali Mosque in Sadad
Abu Thar al-Ghafari Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Al-Barbagi Mosque in A'ali
Shaikh Yousif Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Ain Rastan Mosque in A'ali
Imam al-Hadi Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Imam Hasan al-Askari Mosque in Hamad Town
Imam al-Sadeq Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Watiya Shrine & Mosque in Mahooz
Salman al-Farsi Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Al-Alawyeen Mosque in Manama
Imam al-Hasan Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Al-Marawhna in Zinj
Mo'emen Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Kuwaikbat Shrine & Mosque in Kawra
Imam al-Jawad Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Shaikh Abed in Sitra
Al-Douweira Mosque in Nuwaidrat	Imam al-Jawad Mosque in Hamad Town
Imam Ali Mosque in Zayed Town	Imam al-Sajad in Lozy
Al-Zahraa Mosque in Zayed Town	Al-Baqei Mosque in Lozy
Al-Rasool al-Adham Mosque in Karzakan	Al-Imam Shrine in Dur Kulaib
Al-Watiya Mosque in Maqaba	Imam al-Sadeq Mosque in Salmabad
Fadak al-Zahraa Mosque in Hamad Town	Imam Husain Mosque in Salmabad
Abu Taleb Mosque in Hamad Town	Imam al-Hadi Mosque in Hamad Town
Um al-Baneen Mosque in Hamad Town	Abu Thar Mosque in Karbabad
Salman al-Muhamadi Mosque in Hamad Town	Al-Abeed al-Saleh Mosque in Burhama
Jame'a Shaikh Moosa in Hejr	Bin Shamlan Mosque in Burhama

Since the destruction of these mosques, the Government of Bahrain has restricted access to many of the sites where they originally stood. Security forces erected a fence around the site of the Barbaghi mosque and prosecuted individuals who attempted to pray at the location. On 31 December 2013, religious scholar and member of the Islamic Scholars (Olamma) Council Fadhel al-Zaki was interrogated by police officers on charges of “participating in a gathering that was not notified about” after leading prayers at the site. Similarly, TV director Yasser Nasser was arrested on December 30<sup>th</sup> 2013, because he did not have “a permit to perform prayers in the site.”

Following the expiration of the national period of emergency in June 2011,<sup>97</sup> the Bahraini government created the Bahrain Independent Commission on Inquiry (BICI) in order to investigate government wrongdoing following the February 2011 protests. The BICI found that the government had illegally destroyed 28 mosques and 2 other religious sites, although

<sup>97</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, New York, (December 16, 1966), United Nations Treaty Series, available from <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2011/CN.430.2011-Eng.pdf>.

conceded that the government may have destroyed further structures that the BICI members had been unable to access. While the government accepted the BICI findings and committed to rebuilding the demolished structures,<sup>98</sup> progress has been stagnant. In the three years since accepting the findings of the BICI, the government claims to have officially rebuilt only four of the mosques, although interlocutors report that these mosques were instead recompleted by the Shia community after receiving permission from the government. In some cases, however, the government has opted to relocate the mosques and repurpose the original land. On the site of the *Abu Dharr* mosque, which was more than three centuries old at the time of its destruction, Bahraini authorities constructed a children's playground.

Since February 2011, the government has continued to target Shia religious structures. On 1 December 2012, the government demolished four mosques in the process of reconstruction. At least three of the mosques had attained the proper building permits, while the final mosque had been under construction with permission from the municipality as well as the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.<sup>99</sup> The United States Department of State reported in 2012 that the government had additionally halted the construction on several new Shia mosques throughout the year, and that Shia makeshift structures for religious worship were routinely destroyed by security forces.<sup>100</sup>

**UPDATE:** According to a report released by the Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO) in March 2015, a total of 24 mosques have been rebuilt. 16 mosques were rebuilt by the government, while 8 were rebuilt using funds obtained from Bahraini people without government input. The government has rebuilt an additional three mosques, but relocated them away from their historic locations, including the important al-Barbagi mosque. The BHRO report states that a total of 11 mosques have not been rebuilt.<sup>101</sup>

## Legal Actions

Since 2011, the Government of Bahrain has targeted Shia religious groups with lawsuits designed to curtail their religious and political activities, in some cases dissolving them entirely.

Following the February 2011 protests, the government targeted the Shia-aligned Islamic Action Society (AMAL) for dissolution, filing a lawsuit against both it and the al-Wefaq Islamic Society for their roles in the protest movement. In April of that year, a Bahraini court ordered the dissolution of both AMAL and al-Wefaq. Due to international pressure, an appellate court ultimately vacated the decision. However, many members of AMAL were arrested for participating in the protests, and some allege that they were tortured in government custody. Further, the government raided AMAL's headquarters in March 2011, with members of the Bahraini security force either vandalizing or stealing equipment in the building. The government would again target AMAL the following year, when, On 3 June 2012, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs filed a lawsuit to dissolve AMAL for "grave breaches of the provisions of Bahrain's constitution and law." Seven days later, a Bahraini court ordered AMAL's final dissolution.<sup>102</sup>

98 Al-Monitor, "Sectarian Tensions Rise in Bahrain Amid Mosque Attacks" ( July 23, 2013). Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/07/bahrain-sectarian-crisis-mosque-attacks.html#>.

99 "Mosques Under Construction Re-Demolished by Authorities in Bahrain." Bahrain Center for Human Rights. (December 9, 2012), Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/5550>.

100 USDOS Human Rights Report 2012

101 For more information, please see annex 1.

102 Rafique, Mohammed. "Court Dissolves the Islamic Action Society." Twenty Four Seven News, (July 10, 2012), Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://www.twentyfoursevennews.com/bahrain-news/court-dissolves-the-islamic-action-society/>.

The government continued to target Shia religious societies when it filed a suit against the Islamic “Olamaa” Scholars Council, the largest organization of Shia clerics and religious leaders in Bahrain.<sup>103</sup> The government determined that the Olamaa had failed to obtain the necessary legal permits and accused its members of exploiting the organization for political ends, moving for its dissolution. On 29 January 2014, a Bahraini court sided with the government, ordering the liquidation of the Olamaa’s assets and the closure of its headquarters.<sup>104</sup>

## Education and School Curricula

The Government of Bahrain further discriminates against the Shia religious establishment in its education system. The Maliki school of Sunni jurisprudence forms the basis of all K-12 and university curricula taught at public and private schools, while the popular Shia Jafaari tradition espoused by the majority of the Bahraini population remains absent from all educational texts in the country.<sup>105</sup> There are many significant differences between Shia and Sunni beliefs, including details regarding worship practices and prayers, pilgrimage, marital issues, and conducting business. However, pupils in public or private schools, including pupils belonging to Shia families, are not informed of the existence of many Shia traditions, and are instead obligated to receive their education solely on the basis of Sunni traditions. As a result, Shia children and youth are raised by the Bahraini education system to believe in traditions and practices oftentimes outside of the traditional Shia faith, and in many cases the Shia faith within Bahrain has been surreptitiously altered to incorporate Sunni beliefs.

Beyond replacing Shia traditions with Sunni practice, the educational system often directly demeans Shia beliefs. Some educational materials directly denounce Shia followers as infidels; others are less obvious, instead stating that many Shia beliefs are themselves blasphemous.<sup>106</sup> For example, as part of their educational curriculum, Bahraini high school students learn that Muslims may only direct petitions to Allah, and that petitioning persons outside of Allah is an act of blasphemy. This interpretation conflicts with Shia practice, which states that Muslims may direct their petitions towards highly respected figures, such as the Prophet Mohammed or Issa. Shia Muslims believe that these persons maintain great rank within their religion, and may assist in petitioning Allah towards the resolution of a request. The government curriculum also teaches that other Shia practices, such as placing one’s forehead on a piece of soil, praying at mosques that are built around graves of highly respected figures, or participating in a temporary marriage or “Mutah,” constitute acts of blasphemy against Islam.<sup>107</sup>

In an effort to end the discrimination against Shia in the education system, in 2005 the House of Representatives considered a motion to teach five sects of Islam, including four Sunni sects and the single Shia sect, at all schools within the country. The predominately Sunni parliament

103 Freedom House, “Bahrain.” 2014. Accessed January 22, 2015. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/bahrain-0#.VKQj-SvF-8o>.

104 Fayad, Kamal. “Bahraini Cour Dissolves Islamic Scholars Councils.” Al-Monitor, (January 30, 2014), Accessed January 18, 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/01/bahrain-court-decision-resolve-islamic-council.html>.

105 Embassy of the United States Manama, Bahrain, “International Religious Freedom Report”. 2013. Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/policy/religious-freedom-report.html>.

106 <http://www.moe.gov.bh/e-content/6/33/index.html#/27/>

107 سلمان, نسلم. “البحرينية الوسط صحيفة”. *المضيعة والوطنية التربوية والأهداف الإسلامية التربوية مناهج*. (December 25, 2014) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4492/news/read/947330/1.html>. [Sulaman Salam, “Islamic Education and Curriculum Goals and Nationalism Curricula,” *Bahrain Middle East Newspaper*]

voted against the motion.<sup>108</sup> In 2007, the Islamic “Olamaa” Scholars Council, the largest Shia religious foundation in the country, conducted a study on the violations and weaknesses in state curricula and submitted a report to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs,<sup>109</sup> seeking sweeping changes to the curricula in order to provide students with education pertaining to the five sects of Islam referenced in the prior parliamentary motion. The request did not prompt any government action. The Islamic Scholars Council continued to coordinate public efforts to teach the Jaafari traditions until January 2014, when a Bahraini court dissolved the Council for exercising unmonitored political activities.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

Open discrimination against the Shia faith in Bahrain is nothing new. Since the island nation obtained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1971, the government has targeted the Shia establishment with political violence, most notably by detaining, torturing, and exiling prominent Shia clerics throughout the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the degree to which the Shia religion experiences discrimination in Bahrain today is unprecedented. While the violence and detention continue, with many prominent Shia clerics now the subject of political detention instead of exile, the destruction of 38 mosques and religious sites following the February 2011 protests openly displayed the Bahraini government’s animosity towards its Shia citizens. As of today, only four of these mosques have been rebuilt, and the government has even further demolished attempts to rebuild four others. The violence against Shia religious leaders, combined with the destruction of mosques, the universal teaching of Sunni doctrine, and the dissolution of Shia religious societies paints a clear picture of systemic government discrimination against the Shia religious establishment.

108 Bahrain Ministry of Education. “Religious 101.” Last accessed February 6, 2015. <http://www.moe.gov.bh/e-content/6/33/index.html#/27/>.

109 “البحرينية الوسط صحيفة ”. تغييرها ينتظر و «الوزارة» لـ «الدين» مقررات بشأن ملاحظاته رفع العلماني: الغريفي” (September 2, 2006) Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.alwasatnews.com/1457/news/read/648265/1.html>. [“Griffey: Secular raises his remarks on the decisions of «religion» in the «Ministry» and waits for change. “*Bahrain Middle East Newspaper*]

110 “الوسطي, حسين.” “الاستئناف» تؤيد حل المجلس العلماني.” (June 16, 2014), Accessed January 26, 2015. <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4301/news/read/896126/1.html>. [Al-Wasati, Hussein “Appeal: Court Rules to Dissolve Secular Islamic Council,” *Al Wasat Newspaper*]

## Conclusion


The Government of Bahrain often claims that the country is experiencing sectarian tension in the form of a Shia population violently struggling against its Sunni neighbors. It's true that Bahrain is currently marked by political violence. As documented by multiple independent observers, a minority of Bahraini youth growing increasingly frustrated with the government often employ weapons of convenience such as Molotov cocktails and burning tires in demonstrations against security personnel and government institutions. The government points to this violence as evidence of sectarianism within Bahrain's population. This is a mischaracterization of Bahrain's minority violent opposition. Shia-led sectarian violence would target Sunni institutions, such as Sunni mosques or Sunni neighborhoods. Bahraini violence has not targeted these areas, instead choosing to attack government institutions. The violence in Bahrain is political, not sectarian, and is largely reacting to the government's own use of force and other discriminatory policies against the Shia majority population. In this, the government is half-right; sectarianism exists in Bahrain. However, Bahrain's brand of sectarianism is not espoused by the general population, but is instead a one-sided narrative promulgated by a government utilizing sectarian rhetoric to justify the oppression of its majority Shia population. As a result, the Shia population in Bahrain is increasingly forced to live apart from their Sunni neighbors.

As the February 2011 protests showed that the people of Bahrain, both Shia and Sunni, are capable of living in harmony with each other. Immediately afterwards, the subsequent violence primarily targeting Shia protesters, activists, and villages displayed the government's animosity towards its majority population. In the time since the uprising, the government has continued its discriminatory policies against the Shia while actively favoring Sunni citizens, even going so far as to artificially alter the demographics of the country to better balance the scales in the favor of Sunni citizens. These are not the actions of an impartial government, but rather one actively engaging in a sectarian agenda.

The government most obviously promotes sectarianism through state-sponsored violence against the Shia. The vast majority of government non-lethal force is discharged against Shia, either at protests against government power or as collective punishment against entire villages. These ostensibly non-lethal methods have even been used to extra judicially kill Shia citizens, at times suffocating them in their own homes and at others causing internal injuries with shotgun blasts. The government also uses force against Shia in prisons, with Shia accounting for the vast majority of torture victims. Many Shia political leaders are in prison on terrorism-related charges, while a substantial swath of Shia youth find themselves imprisoned for illegally protesting.

The government has all-but eliminated the Shia presence in the government. While some Shia enjoy positions in government agencies, the vast majority of political power is concentrated with the Sunni al-Khalifa royal family and their vassals. The political system is designed in such a fashion that the best representation available to the Shia is a minority voice in the mostly-powerless lower house of parliament.

If that weren't enough, the government has at times even directly discriminated against the Shia faith itself. Following the 2011 uprising, the government exclusively bulldozed Shia mosques in an act of collective punishment against the Shia population. Although Sunni protesters took part in the uprising, the Sunni religious establishment was left untouched. Despite a government commitment to rebuild the mosques, many of these mosques remain demolished, and the Shia population themselves funded those that have been reconstructed.



In some ways, the situation mirrors apartheid in South Africa; the government consistently commits acts of violence against the Shia, interferes with their movement, prevents them from gaining power in the government, and destroys their religious establishments. In fact, Bahraini government behavior towards its Shia population meets many of the factors propagated by the Apartheid Convention, including legislative measures designed to ensure that Shia do not gain a substantial voice in the government, the torture of Shia based on their religious affiliation, and the extrajudicial killing of Shia during times of civil unrest. Were the Shia a race instead of a religion, one could make the case that their situation is covered by the Apartheid Convention.

Ending sectarianism in Bahrain will require an honest commitment from the government to end its discriminatory policies towards the Shia and better incorporate them into the electoral process and government. As the majority population in the country, the Shia are entitled to the right to self-determination, and should have no less nor more than a voice in the government proportional to their size. With such empowerment, all of the other issues should come to a halt. As they've demonstrated before, the Shia, Sunni, and all other populations in Bahrain are capable of both living and working together, so long as the government does not stop them from doing so.

# Recommendations

In light of the above findings, we make the following recommendations:

## **To the Government of Bahrain:**

- 1. Wholly re-examine the systematic use of violence against those who subscribe to the Shia faith:**
  - a. Curtail the use of violence against Shia protests by government employees, including Ministry of Interior employees and state security officers, by educating government employees on internationally-recognized acceptable standards for the use of force and best practices for the use of non-lethal force;
  - b. Eradicate the use of torture against all Shia and any other persons in Bahrain, especially those currently incarcerated in government detention centers;
  - c. Reform state anti-terrorism laws to better provide for the freedoms of expression and assembly, including the freedom to publicly criticize the government or peacefully dissent against government action;
  - d. Release any and all political prisoners currently incarcerated in Bahraini detention centers; and
  - e. Fully investigate any and all credible claims of torture, including those made by Shia protesters, with the goals of prosecuting any persons found to have authorized or committed acts of torture and retrying any persons whose convictions were attained by relying on evidence obtained through acts of torture
  
- 2. Reconcile the Shia population with the Bahraini political process:**
  - a. Appoint a proportional number of Shia representatives to the Shura Council in line with the Shia makeup of the population;
  - b. Reform political districts in Bahrain under the doctrine of “one person, one vote,” so as to better allow for Shia representation in the elected lower house of the Bahraini parliament;
  - c. Appoint Shia representatives to the Council of Ministers;
  - d. Immediately reincorporate any political parties dissolved by the government on political grounds, including, but not limited to, the *al-Wefaq National Islamic Society*;
  - e. Cease the practice of naturalizing foreign-born Sunnis for the purposes of changing the political makeup of the country;
  - f. Immediately release any political leaders incarcerated on political grounds, including Ibrahim Sharif and Shaikh Ali Salman; and
  - e. Consider re-examining the political structure of Bahrain to disaggregate political power into the Bahraini population.



### **3. Cease all discriminatory policies against the Shia religious establishment and faith:**

- a. Immediately release all Shia religious leaders incarcerated on political grounds;
- b. Immediately cease the further demolition of Shia religious structures and mosques;
- c. Recommit to rebuilding any and all religious structures destroyed in retaliation against the Shia community for its involvement in the peaceful protest movement in 2011;
- d. Rebuild the *al-Dharr* mosque in its original location, and compensate the Bahraini Shia community for any resources it spent in rebuilding mosques destroyed by the government; and
- e. Reincorporate any religious societies dissolved on political grounds, including the Islamic “*Olamaa*” Scholars Council.

### **To the United Nations:**

#### **1. Pressure the Government of Bahrain to end its discriminatory policies against its Shia population:**

- a. Consider passing a resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council condemning the human rights situation in Bahrain and specifically noting the government discrimination against Shia;
- b. Examine in a report the consequences of government disclusion on extremism, and consider using Bahrain as a case study in such a report;
- c. Incorporate the subject of discrimination against the Shia into the next country visit by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and include an examination of the subject into any permanent mandate;

#### **2. Facilitate the missions of the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council:**

- a. Demand that the Government of Bahrain honor its commitment to allow the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, unusual, or degrading treatment or punishment to visit the country to conduct an assessment on Bahrain’s commitments towards the elimination of the use of torture;
- b. Request that the Government of Bahrain issue a standing invitation to all Special Procedures wishing to visit the country;
- c. Encourage the Special Rapporteur on religious freedom and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous persons to request access to Bahrain;

#### **3. Consider amending the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of *Apartheid* to allow it to apply to extremely discriminatory situations of a non-racial character, including situations in which persons face apartheid-like conditions on account of their religion or faith.**

**To the International Community, including the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States:**

1. **Pressure the Government of Bahrain to end its campaign of discrimination against the Shia population by instituting measures against Bahrain similar to those that ended apartheid in South Africa:**
  - a. Place an embargo on the Bahraini purchase of any and all weapons, including both military-grade weapons and non-lethal weapons purposed towards riot-control;
  - b. Institute trade sanctions against Bahrain specifically targeting high-end luxury goods generally consumed by elite government officials and the ruling family;
  - c. Demand the release of all Shia political prisoners;
  - d. Consider hosting multilateral talks between the Bahraini government and the Shia majority with the goal of creating a permanent and inclusive solution;
2. **Cease any and all military training programs provided to the Kingdom of Bahrain until such time as the Bahraini military fully integrates the Shia population;**
3. **Consider passing a resolution condemning the Bahraini campaign against its Shia population in the United Nations General Assembly, the European Parliament, the US Congress, and the European Parliament;**
4. **Broaden policy on Bahrain to include bilateral and multilateral approaches to human rights issues and discrimination against specific populations within Bahrain;**
5. **Provide assistance with training programs to the Bahraini government on best practices to ensure the Shia population is included in government jobs and other areas where the Shia population is not fully represented;**
6. **Include analysis on the subject of Shia discrimination in any human rights reports released in 2015, including the United States Department of State Human Rights Report and the United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth Office Report; and**
7. **Consider amending the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of *Apartheid* to allow it to apply to extremely discriminatory situations of a non-racial character, including situations in which persons face apartheid-like conditions on account of their religion or faith.**

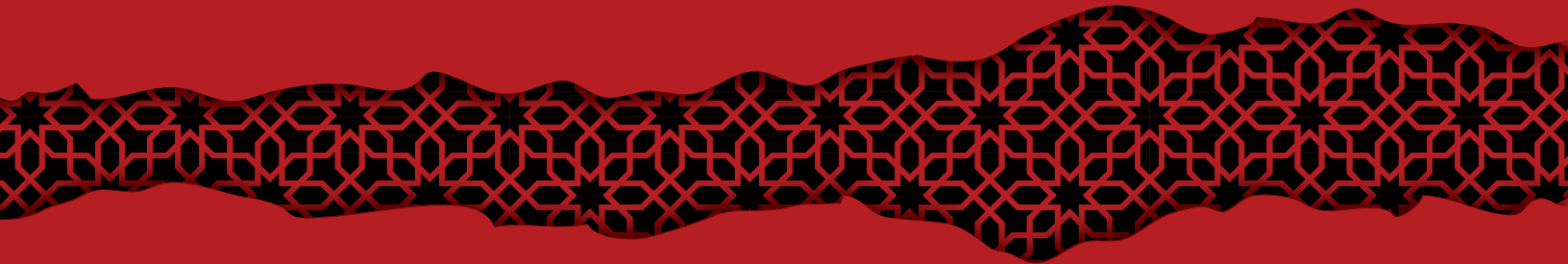
## ANNEX I

The February 2015 edition of this report contained outdated material concerning the rebuilding of several mosques. A subsequent report released by the Bahrain Human Rights Observatory in 2015 provided updated information regarding the reconstruction effort, showing that, of the 38 mosques and other religious structures destroyed by the government in 2011, a total of 24 have been fully rebuilt on their original locations. 16 of the religious structures were rebuilt by the government, while eight were rebuilt without government support. The government rebuilt an additional three mosques in locations different from their historical sites.

The following table provides updated information concerning the reconstruction effort.

MOSQUE	AREA	STATUS
Imam al-Baqer Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the people
Abu Thar al-Ghafari Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Authority didn't commit to rebuilding it
Shaikh Yousif Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the people
Imam al-Hadi Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the people
Imam al-Sadeq Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the people
Salman al-Farsi Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the people
Imam al-Hasan Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the people
Mo'emmen Mosque	Nuwaidrat	In last stage of rebuilding
Imam al-Jawad Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the people
Al-Douweira Mosque	Nuwaidrat	Rebuilt by the authorities
Imam Ali Mosque	Zayed Town	Rebuilt by the authorities
Al-Zahraa Mosque	Zayed Town	Authorities did not commit to reconstruction
Al-Rasool al-Adham Mosque	Karzkan	Rebuilt by the authorities
Al-Watiya Mosque	Maqaba	Being rebuilt
Fadak al-Zahraa Mosque	Hamad Town	Being rebuilt
Abu Taleb Mosque	Hamad Town	Rebuilt by the authorities (part of the land was taken)
Um al-Baneen Mosque	Hamad Town	Rebuilt by the authorities
Salman al-Muhamadi Mosque	Hamad Town	Rebuilt by the authorities

MOSQUE	AREA	STATUS
Jame'a Shaikh Moosa	Hejr	Authorities did not commit to reconstruction
Imam Ali Mosque	Sadad	Rebuilt by the authorities
Al-Barbagi Mosque	A'ali	Authorities rebuilt another mosque 100 meters away
Ain Rastan Mosque	A'ali	Authorities rebuilt another mosque near its location
Imam Hasan al-Askari Mosque	Hamad Town	Authorities rebuilt another mosque 740 meters away
Watiya Shrine & Mosque	Mahooz	Rebuilt by the authorities
Al-Alawyeen Mosque	Manama	Authorities did not commit to reconstruction
Al-Marawhna	Zinj	Authorities did not commit to reconstruction
Kuwaikbat Shrine & Mosque	Kawra	In last stage of rebuilding
Shaikh Abed	Sitra	Rebuilt by the authorities
Imam al-Jawad Mosque	Hamad Town	Rebuilt by the authorities
Imam al-Sajad	Lozy	Rebuilt by the authorities
Al-Baqei Mosque	Lozy	Rebuilt by the authorities
Al-Imam Shrine	Dar Kulaib	No decision has been taken regarding reconstruction
Imam al-Sadeq Mosque	Salmabad	Rebuilt by the people
Imam Husain Mosque	Salmabad	Authorities did not commit to reconstruction
Imam al-Hadi Mosque	Hamad Town	Rebuilt by the authorities
Abu Thar Mosque	Karbabad	Authorities did not commit to reconstruction
Al-Abeed al-Saleh Mosque	Burhama	No decision has been taken regarding reconstruction
Bin Shamlan Mosque	Burhama	Authorities did not commit to reconstruction



Americans for Democracy  
& Human Rights in Bahrain

