POLICY AND PREJUDICE
Shia Divisionism in Bahrain

Toward Completion of the MALD degree at:
The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy,
Tufts University

Student: Pia Sawhney

Date: May 2013
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## A. SUMMARY

3

## B. INTRODUCTION

- The Volatile Political Climate in Bahrain and Shia Public Opinion 7
- Demographic Portrait 10
- Primary Concerns 12

## C. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

- Recent Events: An Overview 14
- Historical Context 21
- King Hamad’s Reign 25
- The 1973 Constitution, the National Charter and Bahrain’s Judiciary 29
- A Legacy of Shia Disempowerment 32

## D. LAND AND LABOR REFORMS

- Restricted Lands and Housing Shortages 37
- Battling Unemployment 40

## E. GERRYMANDERING

47

## F. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Waves of Democratization 52
- Developing Transnational Networks 54
- Winning the Information War 55
- The Local-Global Framework 59

## G. CONCLUSION

61
A. SUMMARY

In early 2011, demonstrations erupted across the Arab world in an unprecedented fashion and revealed how powerful globalizing forces can weaken strong and even otherwise impervious states. Nations that experienced widening political revolutions shared a singular, significant trait—all had governments that were either monarchial or autocratic in structure. They were also situated for the most part in the Arabian Gulf and the Maghreb. Youth and pro-democracy movements that took hold also flared up on the Persian Gulf island of Bahrain, which has had the same ruling monarchs in power since 1783.

A tiny archipelago of 33 islands in one of the world’s geostrategic oil belts, Bahrain is a nation that relies heavily on revenues from oil refining, industrial enterprises, banking and financial services. Saudi Arabia’s Eastern province is minutes from the island’s western tip while Qatar lies to the south. Bahrain is a taxation-free, patronage-based, rentier state and the ruling al-Khalifa family has held political power over the years primarily by exercising its monopoly over the use of force.

These days, however, longer-term political dynamics are shaping the lives of most Bahraini residents. Demonstrators and private Bahraini citizens broadly seek better governing structures and demonstrators rally almost daily to make the case for them. Daylong marches and protests have become routine.

1 Shultz 2012.
As a result, traditionally stable but autocratic Arab states are contending with diverse new challenges. Many states globally have had to adjust their responses toward private citizens because of the sheer speed and political will that improved technology, communications and media enterprises have brought to bear. Millions are empowered by social media technologies, but nonviolent demonstrations do still require significant in-person engagement to ultimately succeed. And like other states that need to manage novel political revolutions with great care, Bahrain is no exception.

A scholar on the issue, April Carter, has addressed nonviolent movements like those in Bahrain as products of “urbanization, economic development, higher education levels, new forms of communication and a raising of individual expectations.” In terms of how to handle civil resistance movements, Bahrain’s monarchical government is at a crossroads. On the one hand, Bahraini security forces want to prevent large groups of demonstrators from mobilizing so as to ‘keep the peace’; on the other, at least a few of the nation’s parliamentary and senior leaders want reforms that will last and hold sway with younger protestors and citizens. The priority of the Bahraini government is also to keep the nation’s monarchy firmly in power.

But after over two years of near-daily demonstrations, mostly by Bahraini citizens who belong to the Shia religious sect of Islam, neither a peace agreement nor a credible reconciliation mechanism has emerged to resolve differences between the government and four parliamentary opposition parties. Since the protests began in February 2011, demonstrators have continued to
mobilize in large gatherings. Bahrain watchers are far from sanguine when it comes to the prospects of true democratic change in the country. Calls for reform by the pro-democracy movement in the country have largely gone unheeded. Primarily, the need for security forces to diversify their ranks and for the judiciary to strengthen the rule of law in the country has largely fallen on deaf ears. Both institutions are still closely tied to the monarchy, and their legitimacy remains highly contested at the present time.

There are few local avenues and political structures in place to absorb, organize and shape thoughtful dissenting opinions. Only a handful of local leaders, as a result, inspire trust and confidence within pro-democracy movement and amongst the public at-large. The Hamad government has also gerrymandered Shia communities across the state such that Shia advocates from local villages occupy disproportionately fewer seats in the elected chamber of parliament. Discriminatory practices over the years toward local Shia have also contributed to a significant trust gap between Sunni and Shia communities. The gap has only widened in the wake of political protests and demonstrations that started in 2011 as local groups, leaders and activists appeal either to violent rhetoric and tactics or more disciplined nonviolent civil resistance strategies to make their voices heard.

This project will assess how Bahrain’s policies are affecting relations between Sunni and Shia groups. It will draw upon opinions from Bahrainis and expatriates in the country and in the region

---

4 Angad 2013.

5 Ibid.

6 Khalid 2013.

7 Ibid.
who represent a moderate cross section of the population; and who remain concerned that the country’s instability is likely to worsen before it gets better.

For its part, the state has urged that protestors respect all sides of a nationally administered public conversation called the National Consensus Dialogue, which has been authorized by the nation’s king. Younger Shia populations and others that watch the country closely remain highly skeptical of the government’s agenda, however, and advocates citizens are increasingly mobilized along sectarian lines.

The purpose of the project is, therefore, to consider the history and impact of divisionist local policy in Bahrain, and to seed ideas, responses and opinions that chip away at the conflict’s harder edges. Ultimately, there is a need to infuse the conversation on Bahrain with fresh perspective and provocative new solutions and this research project aims to do this by speaking mostly to those local Bahraini moderates who have lived in the country for an extensive period of time.

---

8 Erlich 2013.
B. INTRODUCTION

The Volatile Political Climate in Bahrain and Shia Public Opinion

In February 2011, 18 members of the nation’s elected chamber in Parliament relinquished their posts, sparking an upset across the island. After being ignored and sidelined by Bahrain’s monarchy for several years, the opposition politicians considered that they might have better luck trying to appeal to the Hamad government as revolutionaries than as parliamentarians. For over ten years, the government had refused to accede or commit to the opposition’s demands. Despite a long list of reforms it signed into law in 2002, the Hamad administration made little progress implementing the measures. It had obsequiously designed them to appeal to the electorate; and yet none, if any, of the terms stated in reformist policy documents were met by the time the International Crisis Group wrote on the topic in 2005.\(^9\) Sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia have only intensified since then.

Furthermore, many members of the Shia majority remain estranged from the nation’s labor force (although several do hold prestigious posts in government ministries).\(^{10}\) Shia rates of unemployment are greater than twice Bahrain’s national average and there continues to be discomfort among Sunnis that Shia families are large and economically less fortunate, and that Shia mobilize demonstrations easily with the help and support of local clerics in the country.\(^{11}\)

---

\(^9\) International Crisis Group May 2005.

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
For the moment, then, rather than acquiescing to the opposition parties’ demands, Bahrain’s government has instead chosen to consolidate and strengthen its hold on power.¹² Bahrain’s leaders have resisted expanding the legislative capacities of Bahrain’s elected parliamentary members, for instance, a move that has largely pitted Sunni Members of Parliament against those that are Shia. Although efforts have been made, the Government of Bahrain (GOB) has also been unsuccessful placing Shia young men in jobs and helping them carve out meaningful careers.¹³ One of the outcomes of the callousness the government has displayed toward Shia groups has been that now Bahraini Shia, in large measure, are deeply frustrated and believe the government is entirely tone-deaf to their economic, social and political demands.¹⁴ Although the GOB may now be open to discussing changes to the parliamentary process, for instance, plenty of damage has already been done. Shia Bahrainis are skeptical of what the government has to offer and many are unresolved and unconvinced that government officials truly want to help.

Present circumstances suggest that the pro-democracy movement, which opposes the monarchy, has remained intact over the past two years but may now imminently be at risk of fracture. If it splinters into smaller elements, the movement would be far more difficult for the government to manage and contain and greater disillusionment toward police and security forces may well ensue. Significant violence has already broken out at protest marches and security personnel have responded by torturing, beating and jailing dozens of public demonstrators. A small

¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid.
fraction of protestors has even died at the hands of security forces. And as negative sentiments toward the ruling monarchy spread, deep-seated cynicism could spur more rage among the younger populations and sustain their disenchantment. Many older Shia Muslims have lost faith in Bahrain’s political process and elites from the Shia community feel marginalized, isolated and increasingly vulnerable. Some have withdrawn participation to shield and isolate themselves from inter-sectarian politics.15

Calls by transnational nongovernmental organizations, Shia political parties, journalists and human rights advocates to seek out novel pathways to reform have also not proven effective. Instead, for the moment, increasing international mobilization may be contributing to an unstable milieu and heightening mistrust on all sides.

Never before has information traveled so quickly to the global public; and never in the past have so many had instant grasp of the events surrounding them. A confluence of factors, which include (but are not restricted to) ubiquitous media outlets across dozens of languages, high levels of education and political engagement, and an array of prosperous, active and vital economies in the Arabian Gulf have led to keen expectations for reform and immediate, sudden and urgent political change in Bahrain. The Arab Spring has elevated hopes among Bahrainis that free elections, if granted the opportunity, could instantly, fairly and seamlessly yield positive and constructive outcomes. This perspective is prevalent among young Bahrainis and particularly among members of Bahrain’s opposition. And as time

15 Senior businesspeople in Bahrain, some of Shia origin, declined to be interviewed for this study. Others who agreed to speak stated the current political environment is ‘highly polarized.’
goes on, more protests, rallies and demonstrations that support this perspective are likely to follow.\textsuperscript{16}

**Demographic Portrait**

![Bahrain Map](image)

Total Population: 1,234,571\textsuperscript{17}

Foreign Labor Force (estimated): 54 percent\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Erlich 2013.

\textsuperscript{17} GlobalPost 2013.

\textsuperscript{18} 2010 Census.
Indigenous Population:  *Less than 600,000*\(^{19}\)

Shia Muslims as a percentage of the indigenous population (estimated):  *65 percent*\(^{20}\)

Jobless rate among Bahraini workers:  *14 percent*\(^{21}\) (Among Shias it is twice that.\(^{22}\))

Overall Unemployment Rate:  *5.5 percent*\(^{23}\)

GDP growth rate (2011):  *1.8 percent*\(^{24}\)

GDP growth rate (2012):  *3.9 percent*\(^{25}\)

Projected GDP growth in 2013:  *5 percent*\(^{26}\)

Drop in GDP growth between 2006 and 2011:  *6 percent*\(^{27}\)

Drop in the rate of foreign direct investment between 2009 and 2011:  *9 percent*\(^{28}\)

Oil revenues as a percentage of government income in 2012:  *88 percent*\(^{29}\)  *(An estimated one-third of the nation’s oil revenues are funneled directly to friends and relatives of the royal family.\(^{30}\))

---

\(^{19}\) GlobalPost 2013.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) BBC News 2005.

\(^{23}\) National Census 2001.

\(^{24}\) 2011 CIA Factbook.

\(^{25}\) Financial Times 2013.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.

\(^{27}\) According to the CIA Factbook (2011) Bahrain’s drop in GDP growth is dramatic as compared with other countries in the region, most of which have experienced high rates of GDP growth since 2008. 2011 GDP growth rates from the same study for Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were 18 percent, 6 percent and 5 percent respectively. Singapore, another small state that competes for international capital, had a growth rate 2 percentage points higher than Bahrain’s in 2011.

\(^{28}\) IndexMundi.com.

\(^{29}\) Financial Times 2013.

\(^{30}\) Chayes and Matar 2013.
Concerns

This paper will present a cross section of opinions among upper middle class, moderate Bahraini residents and expatriates. It will also address issues that have divided the populations in Bahrain along sectarian lines for several years (and at least the past decade). The government favors Sunni Muslims over local Shia so visibly that policies and rhetoric on the Sunni-Shia divide are closely intertwined. A few concerns will be highlighted in this study in particular.

A. Youth employment and economics on the island. Several youth engagement programs have failed to integrate Bahrain’s young Shia men into private sector jobs. A 2006 International Labor Organization report suggested the Bahrain government tried to implement a pilot training initiative, but it was not successful. In the meanwhile, foreign direct investment in Bahrain fell significantly in 2011 as a result of the nation’s demonstrations by no less than 8 percent of 2009 levels. A new airline started by the Bahraini government has receded into bankruptcy, the FORMULA One Bahrain Grand Prix was canceled in 2011 amid fears that protestors would gather at the venue, and foreigners are leaving in droves in light of civil unrest. In February of this year, retired US Navy Admiral Dennis C. Blair urged the Pentagon to relocate the Fifth Fleet, the American naval base on the island.\(^3\) Such a move, were it implemented, would significantly derail Bahrain’s standing in the region and in the global economy.

B. Citizenship rights among the foreign expatriate community. Foreign expatriates have been cooperative members of the Bahraini labor force for decades, and have contributed

\(^3\) The Wall Street Journal (Europe) 2013.
significantly to enhanced economic growth in the country. Bahrain’s economy has expanded and continues to do so because its labor force benefits greatly from the influx of foreign workers. In recent years, the Government of Bahrain has loosened regulations on citizenship for foreigners and now grants some, Sunni Muslims especially, who have may have lived in the country for extended periods of time, the option to naturalize and become Bahraini citizens. Granting citizenship to foreign migrants is an enormously productive step for the people of Bahrain as it recognizes the nation’s diversity as a truly complex and rich Arab state.

However, the move has provoked a backlash both among the nation’s disadvantaged groups, and among Sunnis. In a 2005 report by the International Crisis Group, a new policy proposal by the Government of Bahrain considered whether to extend voting rights to Saudi nationals who frequently visit the island. Although this measure was not implemented, Saudi and Bahraini citizens are both eligible for dual citizenship in each country at the present time. (Saudi Arabians are predominantly Sunni Muslim.)

C. The role of inflammatory rhetoric on both sides of the sectarian aisle.

Rhetoric on both Sunni and Shia sides of the aisle has been escalating for several years, despite the king’s efforts to bring economic reforms to Bahrain. Violence could become a tactic demonstrators might use more consistently to critique and undermine the Emir and his cabinet. In light of this possibility there must be a worthy conflict resolution mechanism in place that guides young people to organize effectively and alerts them to the potential but also the limits of broad, rapid democratic reform. This means efforts
ought to be made to notify youth and politically motivated Shia groups that if their needs are unlikely to be met at the present time, alternative solutions and compromises should actively be sought. Their expectations, in other words, ought to be curbed to prevent further unrest and to ease relations between all political parties.

C. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Recent Events: An Overview

On Valentine’s Day, in 2011, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered in a range of locations across the island demanding the Emir, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa (SHBIK), abdicate the throne. The incident reflected how relations between the ruling family and the public had permanently soured.

Almost as soon as protests began, the Bahraini government enlisted the help of Saudi police to quell and disperse thousands of peaceful activists. An estimated 30 people died in the months that followed and hundreds were injured.\(^{32}\) Riot police consistently fired tear gas and rubber bullets at demonstrators and arrested hundreds.\(^{33}\) Furthermore, not since Shia uprisings in 1965, generations ago, has the island nation seen the sort of robust outpouring of political engagement

\(^{32}\) Human Rights Watch 2011.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.
of the kind that started in February 2011.\textsuperscript{34} The results of the demonstrations in political terms, however, have been limited and markedly grim.\textsuperscript{35}

Nevertheless, protestors took to the streets in unprecedented numbers. It appears that of those who came out, the majority were, in fact, Shia Muslim.\textsuperscript{36} An estimated 65 percent of all Bahrainis these days are Shia – and Bahraini Shia currently occupy posts in business, government and local politics.\textsuperscript{37}

But Shia demonstrations have not abated. Since early 2011, over 60 Bahrainis have died in public marches or in police custody.\textsuperscript{38} Scores more have been held in jail for extended periods, been wounded and maimed in marches, tortured by security forces and granted life sentences in prison principally for organizing political campaigns.\textsuperscript{39}

Demonstrations at this time are formally and officially not tolerated and emergency laws appear to be in effect.\textsuperscript{40} When a protestor died in early 2011 after being beaten in Bahraini custody, the

\textsuperscript{34} Central Intelligence Agency 1967.

\textsuperscript{35} Human Rights Watch 2011.

\textsuperscript{36} Deepak 2013.

\textsuperscript{37} This information was sourced from interviews with Angad, Ali and Khalid (2013). Their names have been changed in this study to protect their identities.

\textsuperscript{38} BBC News 2013.

\textsuperscript{39} Associated Press 2013.

\textsuperscript{40} Jane’s Intelligence Weekly 2012. According to the report, Bahrain’s minister of the Interior General Rashed bin Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Khalifa announced on 29 October 2012 that all rallies and gatherings in the kingdom were outlawed. However, Shia continue to organize in villages and in streets across the island.
incident sparked uproar throughout the kingdom. In March 2013, the case came to court and two police officers were sentenced to 10 years in prison for participating in the beatings. Three other policemen were acquitted. Demonstrators continue to take to the streets, however, as few amongst them have faith in the island’s political and public institutions.

Political life in Bahrain is turning increasingly fragile: both parties, the government and the opposition, are at a near stalemate; neither has, even reluctantly, loosened its grip or actively engaged deeply yet with other parties. Each party continues to represent a unique body of values, concerns and interests held by citizens of Bahrain, and understanding these concerns carefully and more deliberately is vital. For the moment, however, both sides have little basis upon which to trust one another – and the potential for Bahrain to descend into a long, persistent and existential conflict looms large.

Deepak is a Bahraini resident and an expatriate of Indian origin. He lives close to a local police station. In a recent interview, he described the political climate in-country as highly charged, and divided along sectarian lines.

[Political demonstrations take place] in remote areas and villages. Expats don’t go there but [Shia] are living in those areas. [Expats] stay indoors and don’t go outside. But,

The Guardian 2011. On March 18, 2011, Bahraini authorities dismantled the Pearl Roundabout, a cultural monument in central Manama in hopes they could “symbolically cleanse the city” of unrest but this approach has largely faltered and skirmishes between security forces and demonstrators have persisted since.

41 Associated Press 2013.

42 Ibid.

43 Interview with Erlich (2013).

44 Erlich, Report from Bahrain 2013.

45 Erlich, In Bahrain, a growing Sunni-Shia Rift 2013.
really, there’s no problem [between Shia and] expatriates. Very rarely do they bother expats…[but] the area here is troublesome and we have planned to move because behind our house is a Shia village…and being next to the police fort is [also] a problem…The violence is quite significant.

When I came to Bahrain we used to call it Ram Raj (“heaven” in Hindi). There was no crime, a lady could walk anywhere around town in the middle of the night. Now it is tough for a woman to do that. You don’t feel like going out in the evening after 10.

Another interviewee, Angad, who has lived in Bahrain since 1982, is also an expatriate of Indian origin. He suggested traffic sometimes gets held up and he finds that disruptive. But he works in the construction sector and favors the large development initiatives the Al-Khalifa family has supported over the years. He feels the economy in Bahrain has significantly improved since he arrived many years ago.

Our house is blocked almost two or three days a week. It takes on average four hours to clear…

[But] Bahrain has always been ahead of other Gulf states…The government has done so much for this country. The whole face of the country has changed. So much development work has been done but its not recognized as development for the country. The distribution of wealth has been a problem…But much has changed. There are highways, flyovers, bridges. Bahrain has invested in infrastructure.

Both Deepak and Angad are hopeful the Bahraini government will resolve its differences with Shia political parties though the National Consensus Dialogue, the new round of peace talks between the parties that started on February 10, 2013.

Despite the impasse between the Hamad administration and Shia political parties, government officials have refused formal international help from the United Nations to mediate their talks. The purpose of inter-sectarian dialogue the government proposed is to manage tensions between both sides, and principally among the four political groups that had seats in the lower chamber of
parliament.\textsuperscript{46} (Political parties are officially banned but parliamentary political societies are not forbidden.\textsuperscript{47})

But the Bahrain News Agency, a government-backed media network, reported in mid-March that one of the lead managers of Bahrain’s political talks between the government and opposition parties, Dr. Majid bin Ali Al-Nuaimi, has said of recent negotiations that, “[t]he National Consensus Dialogue is a Bahraini internal issue and we refuse any external interference.”\textsuperscript{48} Dr. Al-Nuaimi is the nation’s Education Minister and is representing the Bahraini government in the talks.\textsuperscript{49}

Britain’s Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, traveled to the country in mid-March of this year, however, to help.\textsuperscript{50} The International Peace Institute, a new UN-affiliated think-tank based in New York, recently announced it would open an office in Bahrain.\textsuperscript{51} The Bahraini government, the US and European governments as well as the Qatar and UAE governments, support the Institute financially.\textsuperscript{52} The new organization also has the former head of Saudi intelligence, Turki al-Faisal, on its advisory council.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{46} Bahrain News Agency 2013.
\textsuperscript{47} The Guardian 2011.
\textsuperscript{48} Bahrain News Agency 2013.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid
\textsuperscript{50} Gulf Daily News 2013.
\textsuperscript{51} ProPublica 2013.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid
Although the public dialogue already underway has not renewed hopes among many Bahrainis quite yet, US Secretary of State John Kerry also nonetheless noted (after a discussion in-country with the nation’s Foreign Minister, Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmad al-Khalifa), that negotiations are being conducted “in good faith” by government officials. The purpose and mission of Bahrain’s government is complicated also, however, by substantial internal rifts within the Sunni royal family. There is added risk, in fact, that these fissures could threaten a nascent peace process. One close Bahrain watcher has said of the nation’s crisis that “[t]he longer it remains unresolved…the more that radical factions on both sides of the political divide are emboldened.”

All those interviewed for this project confirmed that conditions are tense and could escalate. All also spoke on background for fear their phones could be tapped. They are perplexed the Bahraini government has not released local information or allowed independent media to report on protest marches, politics or the influence of Iran on Bahrain. One interviewee, Khalid, suggested he tries to listen to both sides of each debate and keeps his judgments to himself. Khalid is Sunni Bahraini and was not in the country when the protests began but believes that members of the opposition are secretive and hard to identify in daily life because they wear masks at demonstrations.

54 In an early meeting in March 2013, US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Bahrain’s Foreign Minister to urge that political talks with the opposition continue. Reuters quoted Secretary of State Kerry as saying that he, “encouraged [the Foreign Minister] to continue…dialogue, and to reach a resolution. He assured me they would continue in good faith” (Reuters 2013).


56 Financial Times 2013.
On the opposition side, they really wanna stir things up. It has been changing recently. [But the Shia] fuel hatred; they try to get international attention…You would never be able to identify an opposition member. If you met someone in a shopping mall, he is wearing his best clothes, he looks completely normal. They wouldn’t dare say anything bad about the government. But if they go home, where everyone shares their view, he listens to his cleric, its different. Some of them have a double view when they go into rioting mode…They don’t know what they want.

My personal view is that they really do conduct vandalism. They pour oil on highways, imagine the risk, the dangers that might pose. My friend got into a really big crash – 10 cars in a row because of this…I feel bad for the police…The police are in greater danger than the people doing the vandalism.

Khalid is upper middle class and works at an oil company. Despite his discomfort with Shia, he acknowledges security forces in Bahrain are overwhelmingly Sunni and have been hired from overseas, something he believes is unfair. He also believes relations between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have improved since the protests began.

Now we think [Shias] are not trustworthy. I don’t sympathize with claims they make but I do understand. One of their claims is about naturalization of Pakistani [police] in Bahrain. Anyone can understand that because Bahrainis don’t have jobs. Nationals are unemployed. So claims will be made but we do want the government to stay stable. We want the country to develop.

After Saudi [police] forces [intervened] in Bahrain, it strengthened our bonds on all levels. On the government level, on personal levels, in business…Many Saudis have dual citizenships…[But] Sunnis only. Not Shiites – they only look up to Iran.

Another Sunni Bahraini citizen, Faisa\textsuperscript{57}, described the influence of Saudi Arabia in these terms:

I think that [intervention by Saudi forces to quell protests in Bahrain] was great and that what is what we expect [from the Saudis]. Bahrain is not all alone – its part of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council).

…and Bahrain has multiple issues. The biggest and most profound is not sectarian…The Shia are very much integrated in society. They are advisors to the King and Prime Minister. They are well represented [in Bahrain’s Government]. There are rich families that are Shia and they own large businesses. They also constitute the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education…Demonstrations have been instigated.

\textsuperscript{57} Faisa 2013.


**Historical Context**

In 1949 the US established the MIDEASTFOR Command or Middle East Force, a “facility” rather than a naval base, designed to build contacts and conduct outreach in the Persian Gulf region. The British government, which held Bahrain with the Emir’s blessing at the time, gave the US license to operate. The British left the country in 1971. Twelve years later, the US established a naval base on the island (34 years after the first American ship first entered Bahraini territory). The presence has strengthened since the early seventies and the Fifth Fleet of the US Naval Forces today is tasked with advancing “the interests of the United States and the security and prosperity of the region by building and effectively employing forward, capable and Coalition-focused forces across the full spectrum of maritime operations.” The Fifth Fleet has proved a stabilizing influence and oversees 2.5 million square miles of water area that covers the territories of 20 countries in the region. It is currently part of the US Forces Central Command.

In the winter of 1957, however, eight years after MIDEASTFOR was approved by the British government, and during violent civil uprisings by Bahraini Shia that shook the island, the Shah

---

59 Ibid.
60 US Navy 5th Fleet homepage.
61 Ibid.
62 US Navy 5th Fleet homepage.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
of Iran expressed to the US Ambassador in Tehran that, “the US does not fully appreciate the importance which Iran attaches to the “recovery of its rightful sovereignty over Bahrain.””\textsuperscript{65} The Shah went on to state that he did not understand “why Britain insists upon keeping this piece of land which to them is worthless but whose recovery lay in the very heart of Persian national aspirations.”\textsuperscript{66} The al-Khalifa ruling family, perceived to be “conservative and largely incompetent” at the time\textsuperscript{67}, first conquered Bahrain from Persian rulers in 1783.

The message from the Shah was articulated in a memo circulated at headquarters in Washington, DC by the US Department of State. Seldon Chapin, the US Ambassador in Tehran responded to the Shah by stating that, “the matter was not one of direct concern to the US.”\textsuperscript{68} Although the communiqué was not made public at the time, the Bahraini government’s relations with Iran have been cool ever since. Indeed, present day news articles frequently cite the Sunni government’s fears that heightened engagement on the part of Bahraini Shia communities will lead to stronger informal ties between Bahrain and Iran.

Strengthened Shia organizations, given this calculus, are a threat to the ruling Bahraini political establishment. In informal conversations with a respected American reporter, this journalist learned that the US and Yemeni Coast Guard recently discovered a dow, a traditional Arab boat, with stockpiles of Iranian weapons onboard. The dow was bound for Yemen and located close

\textsuperscript{65} Department of State 1957.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67} Central Intelligence Agency 1967.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
to the eastern Yemeni border. Said, a Lebanese Shia interviewee said he had heard that Shia from Lebanon were trying to gain entry into Bahrain under Christian names, and believes there is a distinct possibility that members of Hezbollah may be the ones taking such actions. He remarked that the group has expressed support for Bahraini Shia on Al Manar Television, a Hezbollah-run television news network.⁶⁹

Therefore, cause for concern may be warranted when it comes to sectarian politics in the region and interactions with Iran in general. At the current time, under Bahraini law, visits by local Bahrainis to Shia religious scholars and shrines in Iran are permitted but security forces carefully monitor such travel.⁷⁰

Said is Shia and Lebanese, lives in the UAE, and volunteered in the course of our discussion that he was confident money was flowing from Shiites in Lebanon into Bahrain, although he added that, “he does not know about weapons.” Faisa said she felt “100 percent certain” that external support and money from Iran was entering Bahrain. There is plenty of hearsay on the topic so it is difficult to know which opinions and descriptions are entirely accurate; however, Khalid,

---

⁶⁹ Said lives in the UAE and reported that visas for Shia Muslims from Lebanon are being denied at the moment; and foreign workers from that country who live in other Gulf nations are having a difficult time gaining entry to Bahrain. Their visas have been denied over and over again; and several have given up trying to do business in Bahrain entirely (Said 2013).

Another Lebanese interviewee, Mohammed, in the UAE who works in the construction sector corroborated this claim; and also stated that foreign infrastructure contracts in Bahrain have stalled because the government has temporarily placed a number of projects on hold (Mohammed 2013).

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has reported the government in Manama is running budget deficits at the present time despite the fact that Bahrain’s revenues from oil remain significant.

⁷⁰ GlobalPost 2013.
Faisa and Said do not know each other and all three felt relatively sure there was external financial support from Iran to clerics and citizens in Bahrain.

Many who perceive Bahrain’s discriminatory practices against Shia to be credible, however, have undermined the crux of the afore-mentioned argument. The notion that Shia are a threat to the monarchy may be a ruse, for instance, Bahraini civil society organizations argue, to deflect attention away from Shia disenchantment and weaken the rhetoric of Shia advocates in the kingdom.71 (Many Shia Muslims currently do lead Bahrain’s liberation struggles on the island.)

Furthermore, Bahraini political life is deeply affected by the island’s close relations with Saudi Arabia. Although Bahraini leaders do not espouse Wahhabism or Salafist strains of Islam as stringently as do leaders in Saudi Arabia, nonetheless, some of Bahraini jurisprudence, particularly family law, is based on shari’a or Islamist legal principle.72 One of the opposition parties in parliament is also comprised of Sunni Salafist Islamists, although their allegiance is primarily to the monarchy rather than to Salafist scholars in Saudi Arabia.73 Over time, the Bahraini government could end up trying to merge with Sunni parties, strengthening Salafist rules, or implementing harsher Shari’a laws if demonstrators and opposition leaders harden their stance and both sides refuse to compromise through political negotiation.

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 The Guardian 2011.
King Hamad’s Reign

The history of political crises in Bahrain is long and searing. Although there was a yearlong Shia uprising in 1956 and 1957, Shia populations in Bahrain have staged smaller protests in every decade since British colonizers left the island in 1971. In March 1999, after the death of Emir Shaikh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa, who spent over three decades on the throne, a new king came to power promising real change.74 Son of the previous king and educated in the UK and the United States, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa (SHBIK) is a formidable sovereign insofar as he has helped enact new plans for democratic reform on the island.

In the early aughts, while both international and local groups were skeptical of his intent, SHBIK aimed to turn Bahrain into a constitutional monarchy in which “the al-Khalifa family’s supremacy would be balanced by an elected parliament.”75 Early in his tenure, he also pledged to reform Bahrain by altering “the fundamental distribution of power within the kingdom.”76 SHBIK was instrumental in creating a new charter for Bahrain in 2001, an historic step that has allowed local politics to flourish ever since.77

75 Mohamoud 2005.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Indeed, the 2001 National Action Charter was an inflection point, in many senses, for those in the Bahraini government.\(^{78}\) New mandates in the charter have meant many of the king’s family members with significant posts in government ministries have been marginalized.\(^{79}\) By February 2002, after the Charter was ratified into law, SHBIK had “transformed himself from Emir into a king and had regained some of the powers that his father had delegated to the Prime Minister and the government.”\(^{80}\) He “appropriated these powers from his uncle, the Prime Minister, who was disliked by the people because of his oppressive policies and the widespread corruption that was a feature of life for the decades under his rule.”\(^{81}\) SHBIK has argued broader powers as king allow him the room to enact greater political reforms.\(^{82}\) His critics suggest he stripped away power from other centers to expand his own reach, and that he has acted in self-interest rather than out of altruistic concern.\(^{83}\)

However, the National Action Charter sought to revise Bahraini laws on the books as well. In particular, the new king hired several experts to join a committee that would re-interpret Bahrain’s Constitution, which was originally ratified in 1973.\(^{84}\) In early 2001, SHBIK convened 44 experts, locals and members of the SHBIK government to draft the new charter and the final document became a source of fresh hope for Bahrainis of all stripes, but especially those of the

\(^{78}\) Ibid.
\(^{79}\) Ibid.
\(^{80}\) Ibid.
\(^{81}\) Ibid.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
\(^{83}\) Ibid.
\(^{84}\) Ibid.
Shia ilk. Although only 6 members of the drafting committee were from the Shia opposition, the document promised greater political influence for both Shia and Sunni parties, even if it did not grant them substantially greater authority as a legislative body.

Part of the king’s directive in 2001, for instance, allowed for the “releasing of political prisoners, permitting exiles to return home, freezing repressive state security laws, declaring the state security law would be reviewed and promising to hold elections and allowing limited freedom of speech and association.” The nation’s State Security Law otherwise prescribes emergency powers allow security professionals to detain individuals for three years without charge or trial. These laws were altered as a result of political pressure on behalf of community groups. As one analyst has outlined, SHBIK decided to concede “to the people requests,” after recognizing his father’s emergency powers were unjustifiable and unnecessary. Suggesting such powers would be “frozen” made SHBIK popular with local constituencies and as one Bahraini parliamentarian described in a 2005 interview, this action helped forge a cordial relationship between the king and his otherwise disenchanted citizens. The parliamentarian described it, thus:

2001 was a good year for Bahrain. There was a honeymoon between the government, the opposition and the public. The sudden improvement of the political climate in the

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
country was something which many people had neither expected nor imagined would ever happen in Bahrain, let alone so soon.\textsuperscript{91}

Bahrainis passed the Emir’s National Charter on February 14 and February 15 of 2001 by national referendum. The Charter proposed a legislative system composed of two chambers – one lower chamber (elected) and one upper chamber (appointed by the king).\textsuperscript{92} It also called for the establishment of a “constitutional court” and an independent judiciary with powers that set it apart from those of the monarchy.\textsuperscript{93} In practice, however, Bahrain’s judiciary favors the ruling establishment and many of the conditions outlined in the Charter have not been met – a circumstance that has disappointed members of Bahrain’s opposition.\textsuperscript{94}

Furthermore, the National Charter identifies the need for elected parliamentary members to have greater legislative authority but only alludes to these conditions in vague terms.\textsuperscript{95} For the most part, the “Preamble of the Charter recognizes that “implementation of the some of the essential ideas included shall require constitutional amendments” but leaves open the question as to how these amendments would come about, and which groups would have the clout to present or contest draft amendments that do emerge.\textsuperscript{96} Formally, according to the National Charter, the

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
king also has final word over all three branches (i.e. executive, legislative and judicial) of government as well.\footnote{Ibid.}

**The 1973 Constitution, the National Charter and the Nation’s Judiciary**

It is significant that the Bahraini Constitution, ratified in 1973, laid the groundwork for judicial independence.

Article 101 (a,b) offers that:

“(a) The honour of the judiciary and the integrity and impartiality of judges are the bases of rule and a guarantee of rights and liberties. (b) In the administration of justice judges shall not be subject to any authority.”\footnote{International Commission of Jurists 2002.}

The government does not adhere to these guidelines strictly by any means; and has not had an independently functioning judiciary since its liberation in 1971.\footnote{Ibid.} The monarchy routinely intervenes to skew judicial decisions, and this aspect of Bahrain political life remains a sore point among advocates.\footnote{Ibid.}

Furthermore, Bahrain’s judges are appointed “upon recommendation of the Ministry of Justice and Islamic affairs,” a division primarily led by Al-Khalifa family members.\footnote{Ibid.} Military courts, according to the 1973 Constitution, can also have jurisdiction over civil cases, according to Article 102 (b), in select circumstances “during the time of martial law and within the limits

\footnote{Ibid.}
determined by law.”¹⁰² Currently military courts have been meting out long prison terms so their jurisdiction over civil courts appears to be in effect. Civil and Shari’a courts differ according to the Constitution insofar as Shari’a laws regulate “marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody” cases for Muslims.¹⁰³ Non-Muslims are subject to civil courts¹⁰⁴ and all other cases, civil and criminal, are otherwise bounded by conventional rules of civil procedure.¹⁰⁵

The earlier State Security provisions in Bahrain’s Constitution allowed the government to prevent defendants from seeking counsel before they enter court and denied defendants access to court documents.¹⁰⁶ Defendants brought before the court also had limited access to defense attorneys, and evidence or cross-examination was not required for judges to decide cases.¹⁰⁷ Recourse in cases decided by judges was also limited and the only way to truly contest a decision was to seek “clemency from the Amir.”¹⁰⁸ Under the National Charter, the king abolished these measures in February 2001. Plus, Chapter II (6) of the National Charter now states:

The sovereignty of the law is the basis of ruling in the State, and the independence and the immunity of the judiciary are two essential warranties to protect rights and liberties. The State is entrusted with completing the judiciary commissions stipulated by the

¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
Constitution and with appointing the judicial authorities that have jurisdiction over disputes on the constitutionality of the laws and regulations.\textsuperscript{109}

As language in the Charter reflects, the 1973 Constitution does recognize the importance of an independent judiciary and the National Charter reiterates this point clearly enough.\textsuperscript{110} It also suggests SHBIK’s intent has been to seek some measure of reform. However, a good majority of Bahrainis would have preferred a reinstatement of the 1973 Constitution, which was largely suspended by SHBIK’s father, Shaikh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa; this did not happen in 2002 and was “deftly sidestepped” by the Hamad government according to American intelligence reports.\textsuperscript{111} Bahrainis are critical of the incident and at the time it was “widely held that what Bahrain has created for itself is a new form of dictatorship supported by an illegitimate constitution.”\textsuperscript{112} Censorship was also prevalent when the Charter was passed and websites supporting the opposition were blocked by the Hamad administration. In prescient fashion, one intelligence analyst wrote of Bahrain’s political crises in September 2002:

If an intifada does break out, it won’t be a constitutional monarchy [Shia] will be demanding, but the removal of the Al-Khalifa.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Jane’s Islamic Affairs Analyst 2002.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
A Legacy of Shia Disempowerment

In October 2002, four opposition parties (registered as ‘political societies’) boycotted Bahrain’s parliamentary elections.\(^{113}\) Allegations that “Saudi-based Sunnis had been allowed to vote” were rife among Shia groups.\(^{114}\) But the boycott did not trigger a response from the monarchy. Later that month, Sunni Muslim Islamists, in fact, swept parliament.\(^{115}\)

Today, Sunni Islamists make up two of the four opposition parties in office and are allied closely with the Al-Khalifa government. There are well founded fears that the “Islamists conservative agenda represents a threat to the leadership’s ambition to turn Bahrain into the ‘Gulf’s Singapore’, with a cosmopolitan mix of Western-style tourist facilities and widespread availability of alcohol.”\(^{116}\)

On the other side of the political aisle, the Islamist al-Wefaq Shia opposition movement today represents Shia Bahrainis very broadly. Shaikh Isa Qassim, a Shia scholar educated in Iran, is one of its leaders; and he and his compatriots have tried to emphasize “consensus” over divisionism as part of al-Wefaq’s political platform.\(^{117}\) However, there remains considerable doubt among Sunni Bahraini leaders that Qassim and his party could capably lead productive legislative or democratic changes in Bahrain’s parliament. Furthermore, the reputation of the

\(^{113}\) Ibid.
\(^{114}\) Ibid.
\(^{115}\) Ibid.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Alfoneh 2012.
Shia movement in Bahrain has been tarnished by the government’s smear campaign against al-Wefaq and the rest of the Shia opposition.

In October 2010 Sunni parliamentarians once again swept seats yet again, as they had done in 2002, and in subsequent elections thereafter. In 2010, this outcome was yet again at the expense of the Shia-led al-Wefaq (AW) movement, Bahrain’s largest opposition party. After a decade of political campaigning in a sustained fashion to get the monarchy’s attention, AW members decided to relinquish their seats entirely in February 2011. Their reactions prompted the demonstrations that followed. The 18 AW members in the parliament’s lower chamber caused an upset, an inflection point in the nation’s history, and Bahrainis have rallied for mass demonstrations ever since. The government accepted resignations from 11 of 18 of those who submitted them in March of that year.

The government also fired 2,000 people from public sector jobs in mid-2011 as retribution for participating in nonviolent demonstrations. Over 500 students were expelled or suspended for attending and some suggested they had effectively been blacklisted permanently for their involvement. At least 97 students studying abroad lost scholarships they attained from the government toward higher education degrees and a small fraction are now seeking asylum in the

119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
UK as they were allegedly homeless after their grants were terminated.\textsuperscript{123} The exact numbers of students involved in demonstrations who were Shia is not clear, but several accounts from people in the region suggest Bahraini demonstrators are ostensibly Shia much of the time.

Angad believes demography is also a concern for the ruling monarchy and for the public at-large; and that Shia generally have had a harder time assimilating into the culture of a Sunni-oriented Bahrain.

[Shia] unemployment has emanated from two sources. They are not permitted to participate in the police or defense posts. But that’s the only area [where this is the case]. [In the] ministries, the Ministry of Health – everywhere they are prominent. They shine and they are very intelligent. But the issue is not just intelligence – they say we are being deprived of power. [They say] we are the majority, we should be ruling in the majority…

The Shia are larger in number, the population growth is larger than the other community and they outnumber the others. They want to create problems in the roads, schools, malls. The investment climate is not there, they have created real trouble…

I think the country can become a shining star in the Gulf region if there’s progress [in the national dialogue and compromise]. That’s what I pray and I want this to happen. I fully support the government because they have done a great job. There are always things to add but you can’t put on colored glasses and say its dark on the other side. Remove your glasses and see what is on the other side.

Angad hopes the situation will improve but his sentiments about Shia in the region are shared widely among moderate Bahrainis, expatriates and others who live in the country. Ali, a former senior government official, who also happens to be Shia, described the reaction of Shia protestors in this way in a recent interview:

The demonstrations are allowed. Every time they come out they say they will be peaceful – but then if you cannot control your demonstrators you should allow us to take care of it. You shouldn’t stop them? They demolish power stations in the area, the telecommunications poles in the area because of this violence. They just do that…The

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
coordination and the violence [is extreme] – they just send people to aggravate the policemen and [the policemen] shoot back.

Although there is a formal ban on political organizing in Bahrain, Ali’s feelings on the subject are consistent also with those in the private sector. Khalid is Sunni and concurs that the demonstrators have gone too far in staging their discontent but also described the situation in these terms:

There is a very thin line between good and bad things that are happening. There’s two sides to every story. The government does not disclose anything to the public. Its really difficult. There are literally two sides here. What else can I say? The opposition claims that excessive naturalization and nationalization from overseas mean that demographics of the country have been changing for the worse. There’s lots of Syrians and Yemenese who aren’t of traditional Bahraini roots – they are people from other Middle Eastern countries. There has been no shortage of people flying in. Its not really hard to notice. There’s big changes in the demographics…and they are changing for the worse. It’s a fault on the government’s side.

The demographics are a sore point both for Shia and Sunni Muslims in Bahrain. At this time, Khalid, like many others, believes Shia clerics in Bahrain have been instrumental in drawing particular attention to the issue.

That sentiment is probably shared closely among Sunnis. There also continues to be speculation that Shaikh Isa Qassim, an erudite scholar trained by prominent intellectuals in Iran, may turn toward conservative interpretations of Shia Islam as part of his ongoing political platform to galvanize supporters. In a piece published by the American Enterprise Institute last summer, Qassim was described as one of Bahrain’s most respected Shia Islamic scholars and one with significant political ambitions. Widely considered the “spiritual father” of the Shia opposition party al-Wefaq, he urged his supporters to attack Bahraini police and “die for our honour” in an
impassioned sermon he gave in January 2013. Violence broke out in the aftermath of the talk, and the Bahraini government issued a public statement calling Qassim’s rhetoric “irresponsible.”

The incident reflects rifts between Sunni and Shia Muslims on the island have only become more tenuous this year. Qassim has otherwise been described as a moderate Islamist; since his outburst, the Bahraini government as well as Sunni Muslims now consider his positions to be suspect. Protests and demonstrations have been banned since October of last year although they are still prevalent in villages across the island and take place on a near-daily basis. Security forces conduct arrests routinely and have stepped up surveillance activities throughout the country. Public criticism of the ruling family is also prohibited. Some I tried to interview recently for research purposes declined to participate for this reason.

On November 23, 2011, a report on human rights abuses by the government toward protestors was presented for review to the king. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) investigated cases in which security forces had applied heavy-handed tactics in dealing with those who demonstrated in February and March 2011. The commission found both sides culpable for the violence that followed, and concluded that government forces as well as the opposition had contributed in escalating the conflict. However, BICI also noted that security forces overreacted in a slew of cases – and arrests were vague and broad, torture was widespread

124 BBC News 2012.
125 Ibid.
126 Jane’s Intelligence Weekly 2012.
and students who had protested peacefully were unjustifiably expelled.\textsuperscript{128} Measures have been taken since to reinstate the vast majority of students who were prevented from returning to school at the time, and since then most have been pardoned after signing a loyalty pledge to the king.\textsuperscript{129} Many have since resumed their studies.\textsuperscript{130}

**D. LAND AND LABOR REFORMS**

**Restricted Lands and Public Housing Shortages**

The tiny landmass on which Bahrain sits (approximately 766 square kilometers, according to The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) has become the subject of one of the most contentious political issues in the country. Despite efforts on the part of the Bahraini government to award public housing to those in the country who need it, the wait time can sometimes be very long, up to 10 years in some cases.\textsuperscript{131} This has led to severe disillusionment among Shia groups that rely on the government for subsidies and housing.\textsuperscript{132} Furthermore, nepotism at the hands of the royal family has created severe imbalances between those who have access to land and property and those desperately in need\textsuperscript{133}; and has fueled the opposition’s political platform against corruption.\textsuperscript{134} Both Shia and Sunni political societies have placed the

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid
\textsuperscript{131} Khalid 2013.
\textsuperscript{132} Chayes and Matar 2013.
\textsuperscript{133} Khalid 2013.
\textsuperscript{134} Chayes and Matar 2013.
issue of corruption at the heart of their campaigns and though many Bahrainis believe they ought to keep the king in power, they have urged for greater transparency. For Faisa, an upper middle class woman of Sunni background, corruption and transparency are governance concerns in Bahrain that deserve far greater attention than sectarianism at the present time.

She describes it in this way:

…[T]he Bahraini government [is] unplanned and there’s no transparency, corruption is a problem – and there is no balance of power. This has left gaps and weaknesses that can be taken advantage of. There is an imbalance in the distribution of wealth. But that is not unique to Bahrain. The politics are that Bahrain is a mixed country.

Public housing is one glaring example of the imbalances of power that Faisa referred to in her interview. She believes that reforms in this area have been overlooked for a long time and remain desperately wanting. 41 percent of Bahrainis surveyed in a 2011 Gallup poll in Bahrain reflected the same sentiment. They stated “they had lacked the money to provide adequate shelter for their families over the past twelve months.” It has also become routine for multiple generations of Bahraini families to live in single-room apartments while they wait for public housing to become available. When Google Earth featured photos online (widely circulated) that reflected “nearby verdant tracts belonging to the royal family,” furor toward the monarchy only intensified. These days, most Bahrainis are desperately searching for leadership that addresses these concerns, and sectarian sentiments do fill the political vacuum on this score for many locals. A study in 2010 identified that land contracts for approximately “one-quarter of

---

135 Ibid.
136 Faisa 2013.
137 Khalid 2013.
138 Chayes and Matar 2013.
Bahrain’s landmass” were unaccounted for, and parliamentary investigators consider that it is likely a healthy portion of these tracts were transferred to private individuals.\textsuperscript{139} The government has refused, however, to consider or conduct analyses on the topic.\textsuperscript{140}

Furthermore, Bahrain’s government has been conducting land reclamations for several years in shallow waters just off the coast of the mainland – and awarding these new tracts in transfers to friends and family of the monarchy.\textsuperscript{141} Researchers at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace estimate that between $40 and $60 billion dollars or “four to six times the Bahraini government’s annual revenues from oil and taxes, projected at $9.8 billion for 2013,” have been funneled directly to the ruling family through reclamations. It is considered likely these revenues have reached the coffers of the Prime Minister, Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, an increasingly unpopular figure among Bahrainis as he is a hardline Sunni Muslim conservative, loosely referred to as “Mr. 50 Percent” for his reputation extracting national resources for private gain.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Khalid 2013.
\textsuperscript{142} Chayes and Matar 2013.
Battling Unemployment

In 2009 the UN released a study on the youth bulge in the Middle East and North Africa region. In it, an estimated 190,000 young people in Bahrain are between the ages of 15 and 24. The study also characterizes Bahraini youth as “highly literate and urban.” However, as the figure below reflects, Bahraini youth make up a far smaller segment of the working population than the average in most Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. While the regional average is 30 percent, the percent of Bahraini youth in the labor force is only 19 percent – a figure that may be linked to the influx of foreign workers in the country.

In the past several years, the Bahraini government has significantly stepped up visas for foreign workers and Bahrainis are circumspect of the policy as it dilutes both Shia and Sunni influence in the country. (Most of those who comprise the foreign labor force in Bahrain are Asian and hail from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Other Muslims from neighboring countries have also been offered visas.)

---

143 Roudi 2011.

144 Foreign workers cannot live or work in Bahrain without a labor contract from a local employer. Therefore, the youth unemployment rate likely reflects domestic Bahraini unemployment more accurately than the overall employment rate in the country (which is far lower and normally derived from National Census data that samples from the population as a whole).
Furthermore, large proportions of young people are unemployed in Bahrain because they lack higher education. Shia and Sunni are both disproportionately low-skilled as compared with foreign labor on the island; but also, a 2005 study by the US State Department identified that few truly wanted jobs in the private sector. The table below indicates the percentages of low-skilled workers that are unemployed. Women in the MENA region, according to the UN Population Division, also make up the lowest percentage of the labor force as compared with anywhere else in the rest of the world. The table reflects the number of women in Bahrain that belong to the workforce as compared with women from other Gulf countries.

145 The Telegraph (Wikileaks).
FIGURE 2: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION (Primary, secondary or tertiary) AND SEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of labour force participants ages 15 - 64 who are unemployed, by sex and level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria 2004</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain 2009</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran 2004</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait 2004</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco 2004</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia 2009</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia 2004</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey 2009</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE 2004</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Shia unemployment accounts for a large proportion of those without jobs in the region, and over the past few years foreign labor figures have crept up to 54 percent in Bahrain. This is consistent with trends in other MENA countries but given the sectarian politics in the country, the high rates of unemployment have hit a particularly sensitive nerve. Bahrain’s ratio of foreign to domestic workers is not disproportionately higher compared with its neighbors, however. In Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, for example, foreign labor comprises 90 percent of the total working population.\(^{146}\)

Bahraini youth are also especially disadvantaged because they prefer to work in the public sector. In interviews conducted by the US State Department in 2005, many young Bahrainis confirmed that this was the case and suggested that Sunni disproportionately gain access to those jobs. According to a member of the Al-Wefaq opposition party, which is overwhelmingly Shia, “[t]he good jobs go to certain people – Sunnis – and especially in the public sector.” The

\(^{146}\) Roudi 2011.
respondent was a young teacher. For him, “Shia are more focused on professional development in order to secure jobs in the more competitive and fair private sector.”\textsuperscript{147} However, according to the UN Population Division reports, private companies tend to prefer foreign over domestic workers, Shia or not, because there are fewer restrictions involved. Local Bahrainis are subject to stringent domestic labor standards that make them far more difficult for private employers not just to employ but also to fire.\textsuperscript{148}

The memo also reflects that Bahraini youth, more generally, express a sense of entitlement in the workplace and several Sunni and Shia Bahraini employers suggested that some Bahrainis have a “poor work ethic” and that this was a more significant reason for their unemployment than the sectarian question.\textsuperscript{149} One respondent interviewed was from a prominent Shia family, however, and indicated she “declined two job offers because of low wages.”\textsuperscript{150} In another situation, after a French multinational supermarket chain offered internships to poor Shia Bahraini students, the employer found that none showed up for the “initial interview because they deemed the wages to be too low and the jobs were not “in management.””\textsuperscript{151} The overall comment by the officer who completed the Embassy memo confirms this point, for the most part. This is especially significant, according to the Embassy researcher, because:

the Government of Bahrain’s economic vision – led by the Crown Prince – is based on an innovative and world-class private sector that will serve as the engine of growth. Developing the nation’s human capital is the \textit{sine qua non} of this vision but the sense of

\textsuperscript{147} The Telegraph (Wikileaks) 2011.

\textsuperscript{148} Roudi 2011.

\textsuperscript{149} The Telegraph (Wikileaks) 2011.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid
entitlement and preference for the public sector prevalent among Bahrain’s youth make them appear reluctant recruits for the reformist plans of Bahrain’s leaders.  

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has published graphs on Bahrain’s influx of foreign workers. Both figures show how, in the meanwhile, that in recent years foreign employment has grown steadily and that the number of foreign citizens employed in Bahrain only continues to rise.

\footnote{Ibid}
FIGURE 3: BAHRAIN’S POPULATION EXPLOSION
SOURCE: CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE
FIGURE 4: AN INFLUX OF NON-BAHRAINIS
SOURCE: CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE
E. GERRYMANDERING

Bahrain’s political history has benefitted in part from the National Charter, passed by referendum in 2002, as it heralded a new phase in electoral reform. However, although the Charter recognized the need for an elected lower chamber of parliament, it also led to the establishment of electoral districts that favored the Sunni minority and the royal family.\(^{153}\) A blogger from Pakistan has followed the issue closely – and has identified that most of the districts in Bahrain have been gerrymandered to create a significant electoral advantage for those regions comprised of Sunni voters.\(^{154}\)

---

\(^{153}\) Angad 2013.

\(^{154}\) Desmukh 2013.

*Source: Bahrainwatch.org*
Blogger Fahed Desmukh describes how Shia have been confined to particular geographic areas and how their votes have been undermined.\textsuperscript{155} Sunni members and friends of the royal family, as mentioned earlier, own large tracts of Bahrain’s highly coveted land in a country only one-quarter the size of Rhode Island.\textsuperscript{156} In gerrymandered areas where the tracts are located, Fahed Desmukh describes the distribution of voters in electoral districts in this way:

In Bahrain, the principle of “one person, one vote” was thrown out of the window when the government drew up electoral districts in 2002. The deviation between the population of the electoral districts here is so big [and disproportionate] that it is better expressed in multiples rather than percentages. If we consider the recent parliamentary elections held in 2010, the largest electoral district (Northern 1) had over 21 times the number of eligible voters than the smallest district (Southern 6).\textsuperscript{157}

Desmukh includes tables and charts in his blog post that he sourced from the independent Bahraini newspaper, \textit{Al Wasat}, which is printed in Arabic and publishes articles on controversial topics in Bahrain. Those charts, pasted below, are convincing pieces of evidence that confirm Desmukh’s suggestions and his arguments. The lines in bold in the table below reflect, for instance, that highly populated districts did, in fact, go the way of the opposition party, Al-Wefaq (AW), by a large margin; and that the ruling family has carefully weighted the Sunni vote in their favor to manage and consolidate their hold on power. The figures that follow the table are graphical representations of the electoral results and seats won by AW in 2010.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Chayes and Matar 2013.
\textsuperscript{157} Desmukh 2013.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Eligible Voters</th>
<th>Al-Wefaq</th>
<th>Opposition vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Capital1</td>
<td>4276</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Capital2</td>
<td>5708</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>86.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Capital3</td>
<td>3995</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>85.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Capital4</td>
<td>7560</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Capital5</td>
<td>3456</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>67.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Capital6</td>
<td>3320</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Capital7</td>
<td>4737</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Capital8</td>
<td>5772</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>86.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Central1</td>
<td>16144</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>67.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Central2</td>
<td>13191</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Central3</td>
<td>6718</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Central4</td>
<td>9937</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Central5</td>
<td>11503</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Central6</td>
<td>10206</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Central7</td>
<td>8803</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Central8</td>
<td>13125</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Central9</td>
<td>8631</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Muharraq1</td>
<td>6810</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Muharraq2</td>
<td>4741</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Muharraq3</td>
<td>4381</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Muharraq4</td>
<td>10751</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Muharraq5</td>
<td>4829</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Muharraq6</td>
<td>7173</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>83.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Muharraq7</td>
<td>11790</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Muharraq8</td>
<td>6758</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Northern1</td>
<td>16216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>85.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Northern2</td>
<td>11774</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>87.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Northern3</td>
<td>12372</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Northern4</td>
<td>3964</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Northern5</td>
<td>9207</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>86.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Northern6</td>
<td>11301</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Northern7</td>
<td>12705</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>86.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Northern8</td>
<td>14887</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Northern9</td>
<td>14632</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Southern1</td>
<td>5764</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Southern2</td>
<td>3306</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Southern3</td>
<td>4215</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Southern4</td>
<td>2070</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Southern5</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Southern6</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 1:**

**BAHRAIN'S**

**40 ELECTORAL SEATS**

(BOLD REPRESENTS DISTRICTS WON BY AL WEFAG)
FIGURE 2 (BELOW): GRAPH OF DISTRICTS WON BY THE AL-WEFAQ OPPOSITION IN 2010 (RED)
SOURCE: AL WASAT NEWSPAPER (BAHRAIN)

FIGURE 3 (BELOW): GRAPH OF ELECTORAL REGIONS BY NAME
SOURCE: CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE
FIGURE 4: DISTRICTS WON BY AL-WEFAQ (AW) IN 2010
SOURCE: AL WASAT NEWSPAPER (BAHRAIN)
NOTE: THE NUMBER ‘1’ INDICATES WINS BY AW, THE NUMBER ‘0’ REPRESENTS SUNNI PARTIES

FIGURE 5: ELECTORAL DISTRICTS BY POPULATION SIZE.
SOURCE: AL WASAT NEWSPAPER (BAHRAIN)
F. LITERATURE REVIEW

Waves of Democratization

The democratization process in Bahrain and in other countries close by captivated the world in 2011. Fundamentally, the governments in power had operated as dictatorships and monarchies for decades before the Arab spring emerged. Samuel Huntington described the democratic transitions in other developing states in 1991 as part of a seminal essay he penned on the subject.158 Titled, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” Huntington, a professor of strategic studies at Harvard at the time, noticed developing countries (or ‘transitioning countries’ as Huntington calls them) were experiencing, along with high rates of economic growth, free elections for the first time in their histories. Huntington was stunned by the turn then, which took place in Latin America and Eastern Europe, especially, and projected that more such movements were likely to rise in Asia and the Middle East through the course of the 1990s.

Asian nations saw high rates of economic growth during the 1990s, and South Korea became one of the first nations in the region to transition from authoritarianism to democracy. In the rest of Asia, the pattern has otherwise been spotty. In the Middle East, after the Arab Spring, political changes have been underway but the results thus far have been mixed at best.

When he wrote in the early nineties, Huntington predicted that once growth became a guiding force in both Asia and the Middle East, there would be greater demands on authoritarian

governments and they would have to submit to democratic impulses. In fact, he considered that Islamic law and jurisprudence were inconsistent with Western-style democratic ideals.

As far as predictions go, Huntington may be somewhat accurate about the latter. His reservations over Islamist and democratic ideals co-existing together are now actively being tested across an array of Arab states. However, in terms of timing, Huntington’s prediction that there would be greater democratization in the 1990s proved ambitious. Twenty-two years later, the majority of Arab states continue to progress economically as dictatorships and only a handful after the Arab Spring look truly poised to turn toward democratic governance for the long haul.

Bahrain may well be one of those that will democratize partially, though at the time of this writing, its history on that score is still unfolding. The island is at a precipice and will continue to inform democracy scholars and those with an interest and passion in social movements for years to come. In the interim, however, the impact of international advocacy, a syndicated news media and millions of politically engaged citizens across the international spectrum mean the relationships between governments and citizens are changing at a startling rate.
Developing transnational networks

Popular movements have for centuries been promulgating their ideas, methods and symbols of struggle across frontiers, and gaining external support. Diasporas have also a long history of seeking support for national liberation struggles. Nevertheless, the speed and extent of today’s global communications, the ability to transmit telling pictures as well as vivid written reports, combined with the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and networks operating at a transnational level, have created a much greater potential for assisting particular resistance movements.

*People, Power and Political Change (2012)*
April Carter

In her recent book on civil resistance, researcher April Carter has identified how effective protest movements continue to be, especially given the role and perspective of media organizations that cover and perpetuate democratic-style public dialogue globally. She also discusses how grassroots movements are gaining ground over governments and considers that ‘old’ technology (such as television) is still an important vehicle for the spread of ideas.

Bahrain’s government is well aware of the risks associated with a global news media. It asked the Qatari government, for instance, to lean on the widely disseminated Al-Jazeera news network not to report broadly on protests in Bahrain. The Government of Bahrain, furthermore, continues to present its perspectives primarily through locally owned and operated news outlets. News coverage on Bahrain on all other major international news networks, however, has helped the nation’s activists expand and grow their cause. Facebook and Twitter have

---

159 Carter 2012.
160 Mackinnon 2012.
161 All respondents interviewed for this study concurred that this was indeed the case.
been especially effective in Bahrain as they have been in many other parts of the world. Carter addresses how conflicted an issue this can be, but also considers that the impact of new technologies and communication strategies carries with it the enormous potential for positive engagement and change.

Both governments and local activists are in a constant tussle in much of the world to manage media and information wars between local and global publics; and new governance challenges, broadly, not just in the Middle East, have resulted in both in more stable environments and also more destabilized ones.

**Winning the Information War**

On March 24, 2013, a passionate and disciplined young Bahraini woman activist published a letter in the *New York Times* to announce her hunger strike against the Bahraini government. From her jail cell in Isa Town, Zainab al-Khawaja (whose father has also been imprisoned for organizing), wrote eloquently of the struggles of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. to draw attention to her case. She was arrested for being a part of an “illegal gathering of more than five people” and “participating in an illegal march.”

In her letter, she appealed to the United States government for help and suggested she would not wear orange jail attire as she had not committed a crime. When prison guards mentioned she

-----

162 Amnesty International 2012.
could see her family if she complied with their demands to change her clothes, she refused the offer. Her letter outlining the interaction in an American newspaper has formidable impact in policy circles and her words are persuasive.

When I was placed in a cell with fourteen people — including two convicted murderers — and I was handed orange prison clothes, I knew I couldn’t put them on without having to swallow a little bit of my dignity. Not wearing the convicts’ clothes, because I have committed no crime, that became my small act of civil disobedience. Not letting me see my family and my three-year-old daughter, that has been their punishment. That is why I am on hunger strike.

Prison administrators ask why I am on a hunger strike and I reply “because I want to see my baby” and they reply “obey and you will see her.” But if I obey, my little Jude won’t be seeing her mother, but a broken version of her. In a letter, I told the prison administration that I will not be wearing the convicts’ clothes because, as Dr. King said of Henry David Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience, “no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice.”

April Carter suggests that civil resistance movements profit when they are in a position to demand and realize a sense of fearlessness from their supporters and among those in the electorate. Bahrain has protestors like al-Khawaja that are ardent, headstrong, daring and deliberate. As the democratization movement in the country grows and continues to gain credibility in the international press, greater moral legitimacy around the campaign can be expected to expand with it.

The process of democratization, therefore, is invariably messy. In the 1967 National Intelligence Estimate, prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the authors pointed to Bahrain’s al-Khalifa family being especially skittish in response to political demands placed upon them.

Bahrain, with its deep water port, international airport, and military stockpiles is the chief British military base in the Persian Gulf. Bahrain has benefited economically from three decades of modest but steady income from oil production and refining, and from its entrepot trade with other Gulf states…The…ruling family, alarmed by civil disorders in
At the time, Bahrain remained a protectorate under the British and the al-Khalifa family ruled over the island with an iron hand, allowing little room for change. The note from the CIA also reflects how unrest among underemployed Bahrainis today is an outcome and byproduct of this highly traditional approach to maintaining order and managing national security.

Security study scholars, for instance, have pointedly noted in the literature that the global security paradigm is far more complex these days than it was in the 1970s, as non-state actors have proliferated and information propaganda wars have spread far and wide and remain broad, persistent and more deliberate. Within this climate, the al-Khalifa ruling family’s approach to civil unrest does appear, from the outset, and in part, to be unimaginative and stale.

The memo, for instance, from the CIA in 1967 reflects how the ruling family’s understandings of the Shia-Sunni divide, but also the security paradigm, have not changed as radically as one might expect. The note describes the extent of political unrest that swept the country at the time, and the striking comparison with incidents in the present day is markedly clear. Consider that the author of the memo suggests that protests at the time were mismanaged by the ruling family, and that, as a result, according to the analyst, more violence was likely to ensue:

Bahrain is unique among Gulf states in having a substantial number of educated unemployed who chafe at political and social repression. Its 200,000 people, half of them town-dwellers, are the most politically troubled in the area. This discontent is manifested periodically in major riots and demonstrations. Although the Arab Nationalists Movement and the National Liberation Front function separately and draw their supporters from different sections of the population, organized elements from both

---

163 Central Intelligence Agency 1967.
successfully paralyzed the island’s commercial activity for almost a month in 1965. Though the British will continue to support the ruling family, they are unlikely to be able to force more than token advances in modernizing the state machinery or in political liberalization. Thus, further instability and occasional violence can be expected. ¹⁶⁴

Bahrain’s rulers now have a long history quelling intelligent dissent, and continue to believe that peace-meal approaches dealing with the opposition will be sufficient to sustain Bahrain’s current political structure. In these terms, however, it is clear the monarchy underestimates the effect that globalizing dynamics have both in-country, and in the region. Inertia on the part of the Bahraini ruling establishment risks crippling the chances of reconciliation between government and opposition groups – and it remains to be seen whether movements like the kind al-Khawaja is mobilizing could prove fruitful in galvanizing international public opinion against the regime.

For the moment, Zainab al-Khawaja, her sister Maryam (the Acting President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights), and their father, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja (also imprisoned and currently serving a life sentence), are powerful advocates for the Bahraini pro-democracy cause, and their attempts at political mobilization have proved relatively effective. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights published a comprehensive report in February of this year that outlines how security forces have tortured and maimed activists in prison, for instance, and these deeply unsettling accounts have stirred Bahrainis, Americans, journalists, policymakers and others to take the cause seriously.

The Al-Khalifa’s harsh treatment of protestors who demonstrate against the government has weakened the monarchy’s claim to legitimacy globally. In the eyes of transnational human

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.
rights advocates and local leaders, therefore, in some measure, democratization is already a force at play that has struck the island – and the results and effects of transnational networks on local activism have begun to show. Over time, it is possible that elites in Bahrain as well as government leaders who contend democratic reforms are infeasible may not have support any longer from the local public – and this shift in public opinion may be aided by the international community through media coverage sympathetic to the opposition’s cause. Bahrain’s government would do well to absorb dissensions in parliament, and in the public and private sectors in a manner that is focused, benevolent and patient. Furthermore, the nation’s political identity is being permanently tested and, therefore, reforms are pressing at the current time.

**The Local-Global Framework**

The local-global relationship is especially important in Bahrain’s evolution toward a constitutional monarchy. In his 1990 book, “The Consequences of Modernity,” Anthony Giddens characterized nation states as being a multi-pronged structure composed of four dimensions. Each dimension or institution, Giddens argues, guides state behavior. Those four institutions are: capitalism, surveillance, industrialism and military power.

On its’ own capitalism is insufficient, Giddens argues, to explain advances, activities and decisions made by nation states. Bahrain is one relevant example. Over the past several years, despite great economic development, demonstrators have turned a secure, successful nation state into one in which the investment climate is floundering, the state’s long-term stability is under threat; and its people, both elites and non-elites, on both sides of an ethno-political divide, are

---

165 Giddens 1990.
grossly dissatisfied. Bahrain is at an impasse—a consequence Giddens would describe as being the product of an environment of “high modernity” in which “class relations, religious ties and security structures are at odds with one another.”

Capitalism in this context is *secondary* to the development of nation-states though its presence, for good reason, is essential. Giddens suggests as much when he writes:

> If capitalism was one of the great institutional elements promoting the acceleration and expansion of modern institutions, the other was the nation-state. Nation-states and the nation-state system, cannot be explained in terms of the rise of the capitalistic enterprise, however convergent the interests of states and capitalistic prosperity have sometime been… *Capitalist production, especially when conjoined to industrialism, provided a massive leap forward in economic wealth and also in military power.*

Giddens points to “*the complex relations between local involvements and interactions across distance (the connections of presence and absence)*” as being aspects of globalization that can capably explain transnational political organizing in the modern era. Applying Giddens’ theory, those international campaigns that cross boundaries have distinct local flavors that need to be considered in complex terms. The nation state in such circumstances is effectively weakened by globalization and transnational information flow has a significant impact on local political environments.

The uprisings in Bahrain have, therefore, an international dimension that is less well understood. The globalization literature is especially fundamental in ushering in new interpretations, in this regard, along with some of the events in Bahrain that have effectively stunned much of the Arab and Western world. For the moment, the literature informs the situation in Bahrain as it confirms the importance and need for strategic and tactical choices on the part of the government
in helping to mold the Bahraini nation state as well as manage the flavors and vulnerabilities of the local environment.

Addressing that means confirming that an entrenched democratic impulse does exist in modern Bahrain and that citizens, nonviolent or otherwise, are entirely capable of destabilizing the local environment. Therefore, the ruling family’s grasp of the international and local contexts will prove decisive in helping transition Bahrain to a constitutional monarchy; and the public’s commitments to democratic ideals ought not to be misjudged, undervalued or underestimated. Indeed, conditions that lead the country toward democracy must be met if the state is to stay intact, grow and survive as a modern state over the long term.

**G. CONCLUSION**

In their books, Anthony Giddens and April Carter describe how local and global interactions spur new complex relations within the nation state. Giddens focuses on interactions between four particular dimensions; namely, capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and military power. April Carter considers that transnational communication networks can grant nonviolent social action greater thrust and meaning. Zainab al-Khwaja’s poignant letter in the *New York Times* is an example of the rhetoric that holds international sway – and which is capable of undermining and unraveling the government’s perspective rapidly and unexpectedly.

Given this, the ruling monarchy in Bahrain would do well to consider reforms that neutralize the sectarian political climate. Based on the research this journalist has conducted, a handful of new
policies could become significant levers in the debate if carefully and thoughtfully implemented. Furthermore, the list below helps capture a few ideas that add to those initiatives the government already has underway, such as forging new reconciliation channels with opposition parties, for instance.

A. **Naturalize high-skilled foreign workers, tax citizens and focus on improving the investment climate in the country.**

Given the large influx of foreign workers in Bahrain, it is evident the country has great need for skilled employees. These demands will grow as Bahrain’s economy expands. However, those who live in the country and have working visas, contracts and permits to work are not eligible for citizenship at the present time. Muslims of Sunni descent from Middle Eastern countries have been naturalized in some measure, as Khalid and Faisa explained in interviews with this author; however, others that are South or East Asian ought also to have a path to citizenship.

Granting foreign skilled workers a path to citizenship would mean those who want to start new businesses of their own, for instance, would now have a means to do so. At the present time, foreign workers must have a contract with a Bahraini employer and these measures have stifled growth in Bahrain. Furthermore, as a politically empowered class, high skilled foreign workers, if naturalized, would endow Bahrain with rich, diverse new sources of political speech – and may well steer Bahrainis away from sectarian concerns. Bahrain is already a complex, rich Arab state and foreign citizens have been part of the nation’s
working fabric for decades. Citizenship would offer them an opportunity to make their voices heard while simultaneously helping stimulate small business and local industry.

Furthermore, all citizens in Bahrain ought to pay taxes so that more of them have a stake in the political process. Since the nation’s independence in 1971, the monarchy has not required that Bahrainis pay a tax either on services or on income, although private contracts with the government often mean that members of the private sector pay bribes in exchange for contracts.\textsuperscript{166} The money from bribes and other similar transactions do not reach government ministries but instead find their way into the pockets of members of the royal family.\textsuperscript{167} Furthermore, Manama’s budget deficits may be stifling and preventing foreign firms from investing in Bahrain as they consider Bahrain’s dwindling finances a signal that the Bahraini government may have become cavalier with public funds.

Levying taxes on citizens would encourage elites to play a greater role in politics – and this may be a source of political opportunity for those in the elite classes in the country. A wealthy Shiite community has lived and prospered in Bahrain for many years and may be encouraged to join the political fray if they begin contributing taxes to the state. Wealthy Shia moderates could also appeal to other classes of Shia – and again, as these families are secular and highly educated – it would mean sectarian dialogue could be neutralized and managed more sensitively through their involvement.

\textsuperscript{166} Faisa 2013.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
B. Grant citizens political space for nonviolent free speech and expression and formally allow them to organize public gatherings.

The ban on public demonstrations may be necessary at the current time. It does appear that the pro-democracy movement is on the verge of splintering and this may mean some nonviolent protestors could turn toward more violence. Given this, there may be a need to curb those demonstrators that endanger the public at-large. However, Bahrain’s limits on expression and speech have also stymied efforts at reconciliation and exacerbated political interactions with conservative Shia leaders. This may mean that the government needs to establish open forums throughout the country for young people to gather in a controlled setting; and to allow them to make public speeches, plan secular engagement and appeal to all social classes within Bahrain.

There is a need at the present time for local and foreign expatriates to participate adroitly and intelligently voice dissenting views. Those leaders who do preach peace and stability rather than violence ought to be encouraged and granted greater room for controlled public expression. Local media and television outlets should broadcast unbiased political commentary and international media organizations should be invited in to jumpstart independent journalism initiatives in Arabic.

Political prisoners like Zainab al-Khawaja should also be freed as her imprisonment only drives international scorn for the monarchy. Over time this rhetoric is counterproductive to national stability for Bahrainis at-large.
There is also a climate of fear that is prevalent throughout the country and efforts should be made to encourage moderates, both Sunni and Shia, to voice their concerns about the Shia opposition publicly and with great care. Productive exchanges on politics ought to be principled, and political and civic education initiatives should be promoted. Winning the information war in Bahrain in the context of a syndicated international media climate means that government actions need to be sensitive and highly restrained. Torturing human rights advocates should not be permitted – and traditional methods of law enforcement that follow human rights norms should be reinstated. Riot police should have clear rules of engagement; and those demonstrators who hurl petrol bombs or Molotov cocktails should be treated more severely than those who demonstrate peacefully. As most protestors are nonviolent, they ought to be permitted to politically organize in small settings as their concerns, thoughts and ideas are deeply important to the future of a well-run, disciplined but also open-minded Bahrain.

C. Establish a judiciary that recognizes the 1973 Constitution and strengthen rule of law.

For the most part, the Hamad administration has prevented the formation of an independent judiciary in Bahrain – and this is deeply unsettling for most Bahraini citizens. Under such a framework, citizens often have little idea what to expect from the government and so have a hard time planning their protests, marches or other actions accordingly. Crackdowns, for instance, in universities were brutal in early 2011; university professors were threatened and lost jobs simply for protesting peacefully according to the Bahrain Independent Commission
of Inquiry report published later that year. Such arrests should not persist, surveillance mechanisms ought to be held at bay and restraint on the part of law enforcement and security forces is critical at the present time. Arresting university professors should be considered in symbolic terms as such action triggers instant outrage on the internet, for instance; and over the long run, curtailing the speech of advocates hurts the government’s legitimacy a good deal. (Torture, similarly, has been used in the country and does not strike any chords for either Bahrainis or non-Bahrainis alike.)

Lastly, although the 1973 Constitution is a document most Bahrainis respect, the Hamad administration has chosen not to recognize it. The National Charter too was suspended in the past two years at times and martial law was established instead. Public demonstrators have documented abuses by security forces, and harsh actions again only work to undermine the government. Martial law is also not transparent and harder to subject to international scrutiny and, therefore, should be reconsidered.

Lastly, monarchs in Bahrain have learnt governance and crisis management from their fathers and uncles; in the era of high speed communications there is a need to upgrade the playbook at the present time. Hopefully, in the next few years, the monarchy will help transition the state economically and politically by deriving lessons that are more solidly grounded in the aspirations of its citizens.

In the meanwhile, this study is a first pass at the topic, and hopefully there are lessons to be drawn from the voices of Bahrainis at-large. All those I interviewed, Bahrainis and
expatriates alike, are relatively hopeful, broadly speaking, about the future of the state. This is partly because its history has been relatively secure under the present monarchy.

However, just as Bahrain has gained from moving from an economically disenfranchised state to a highly modern one, there is a shared belief among residents I spoke with that political and sectarian development might follow sooner or later. Bahrain’s leaders, demonstrators and citizens, in other words, may at some stage of the democratization process, fundamentally put aside some of their differences and finally start to agree.
Bibliography


Central Intelligence Agency. "National Intelligence Estimate (for the Middle East)." May 18, 1967.


Deepak, interview by Pia Sawhney. (February 21, 2013).

Department of State. "Staff Summary Supplement." December 17, 1957.


Faisa, interview by Pia Sawhney. (April 13, 2013).


Mohammed, interview by Pia Sawhney. (April 1, 2013).


