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Shiʿi Opposition and Authoritarian Transition in Contemporary Bahrain:

The Shifting Political Participation of a Marginalised Majority

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This thesis is dedicated to the people of Bahrain,

and especially to the two Zainabs.

Abstract

This thesis considers the impact of Bahrain's 2011 Arab Spring uprising on the political participation of the country's Shiʿi community, a 'marginalised majority' whose engagement has historically shifted in response to cycles of repression and liberalisation manifest within the political system. With a particular focus on the most recent cycle of contention in Bahrain, this thesis makes the case that the 'National Action Charter' decade of 2000-2010 effectively transformed Bahrain into a liberalised autocracy, during which the regime exploited divisions between tolerated and antisystem opposition groups to maintain its grip on power whilst promoting its democratising credentials. Drawing on over sixty fieldwork interviews and an innovative content analysis study of the Shiʿi opposition's online activism, this thesis argues that Bahrain's Arab Spring protests led to a dramatic shift in both government-opposition and inter-opposition dynamics, resulting in the regime's transition from liberalised autocracy to full-authoritarianism. Highlighting the growing role of youth activism and online political participation during Bahrain's five year period of post-Arab Spring authoritarian transition, this thesis demonstrates that the recent proliferation of new media technologies in Bahrain has amplified the Shiʿi opposition's ability to mobilise and communicate with supporters, bolstering antisystem groups at the expense of the tolerated opposition. More broadly, this thesis provides an important and timely case study of the impact of structural changes within authoritarian regimes on citizen political participation, and ultimately calls into question assumptions surrounding political quiescence and monarchical stability in the resource-rich Arab Gulf.

Declaration

I certify that:

i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy,

ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii) The thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Kylie Moore-Gilbert

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I owe a debt of gratitude to a great number of people who have travelled with me on this journey, some only for brief, yet pivotal, moments and others who have borne the full brunt of this undertaking for its duration, and have somehow made it with me out the other side.

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Glossary of terms

al-ʿAjam	Bahraini Shiʿa of Persian origin
al-ʿAmal al-Waṭanī al-Dīmuqrāṭī	The National Democratic Action Society (Waʿad)
ʿĀshūrāʾ	The tenth day of the month of *Muḥarram*
ʿAzzāʾ	A Shiʿi religious procession
al-Baḥārna	The 'indigenous' Shiʿi inhabitants of Bahrain
Fatwā	An Islamic religious edict
Fidāwī (pl.)	Militia groups in early-modern Bahrain
Haʾiat al-Itiḥād al-Waṭanī	The National Union Committee
al-Ḥaraka al-Distūriyya	The Constitutional Movement
Ḥarakat Aḥrar al-Baḥrayn al-Islāmiyya	The Bahrain Islamic Freedom Movement
Ḥarakat al-Ḥuriyya wal-Dīmuqrāṭīyya	The Movement for Liberty and Democracy (Haqq)
Ḥawzāt (pl.)	Shiʿi religious seminaries
Infitāḥ	Opening/ liberalisation
Intifāḍa	Uprising
Istishhād	Martyrdom
Iʾtilāf Shabāb Thawrat ʾArbaʿat ʿAshr Fibrāyir	The Youth Coalition of the February 14 Revolution
al-Jabha al-Islāmiyya li-Taḥrir al-Baḥrayn	The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain
Jamʿiyyat al-ʾAṣāla al-Islāmiyya	The Islamic Authenticity Society (ʾAsalah)
Jamʿiyyat al-Irshād al-Islāmī	The Islamic Guidance Society
Jamʿiyyat al-Tawʿiyya al-Islāmiyya	The Islamic Enlightenment Society
Jamaʿiyyat al-Wifāq al-Waṭanī al-Islāmiyya	The National Islamic Accord Society (al-Wefaq)
Jamʿiyyat al-ʿAmal al-Islāmī	The Islamic Action Society (ʿAmal)
Jumhūriyya	Republicanism
Karāma	Dignity
Khums	A religious tithe
Khuṣūṣiyya	Unique attributes
Kutlat al-Wasīṭ al-Mustaqil	The Independent Middle Bloc
al-Lajna al-Baḥrayniyya al-Mustaqila li-Taqaṣī al-Ḥaqāʾiq	The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry
Majlis (sing.), *majālis* (pl.)	A traditional gathering/ consultative council

Majlis al-Nuwāb	The Council of Representatives
Majlis al-Shūrā	The Consultative Council
Makrama	An honour or gift bestowed
Marjaʿ (sing.), *marājiʿ* (pl.)	Clerical sources of emulation
Maʾtam	A Shiʿi 'mourning house'
Mīthāq al-ʿAmal al-Waṭanī	The National Action Charter
Mīthāq al-Luʾluʾ	The Pearl Charter
Muḥarram	The first month of the Islamic calendar
Muqaṭaʿāt (pl.)	Feudal estates
Murtaziqa (pl.)	Mercenaries
Mustashārūn (pl.)	British political advisers
Ṣāfriyya	King Hamad's residence
Shumūkh	Resistance
Sukhra	Debt servitude
Ṣumūd	Steadfastness
Ṣundūq khaīrī	A religious charity fund
al-Taḥāluf min ʾajl Jumhūriyya	The Alliance for a Republic
al-Tajamuʿ al-Qawmī al-Dīmuqrāṭī	The National Democratic Assembly
al-Tajnīs	Naturalisation
Tayār al-Wafāʾ al-Islāmī	The Islamic Loyalty Party (Wafaʾ)
Thawb	A white robe worn by men in the Gulf
ʿUlamāʾ (pl.)	Religious clerics
Vilayat-e faqih	The 'guardianship of the jurist'
Wāsṭa	Connections
Yawm al-ghaḍab	Day of Rage

إني المدينة والدروب مفاصلي

وصلاتي البتراء... وجه منازلي

يصطاف بي الأغراب كل حياتهم

فيفر أولادي لآخر كاحلي

حزني عميق مثل شهقة شارد

هالته أسوار السجون بداخلي

عيناي كحلها الرصاص بعتمة

فترقرقت ندف النجوم بساحلي

أغفو على حضن الخليج كأنني

جرح ويثقل بالجنائز كاهلي

اسمي أسامي اللؤلؤات جميعها

ذابوا جميعا ما بقت أسماء لي

Indeed I am the city and its alleyways are my body parts
And my tormented prayers… face my home
All my life strangers have neglected me
All my children are fleeing till the last of them

My sadness is deep like a fugitive's cry
Its halo is captured in prison fences
The kohl that lines my eyes is made from bullets of darkness
The edge of the stars is little seen from my shores

I drift to sleep in the bosom of the Gulf as though I am
A wound, weighed down at the ankle by funerals
I am the name of all the pearls
They vanish together without leaving me a name.

- Bahraini poet and activist, via Facebook.

Chapter 1: Introduction

A small island in the heart of the Arabian Gulf, positioned between regional foes Iran and Saudi Arabia and atop one of the world's most important trade routes, Bahrain has both suffered and profited from its strategic location. Whilst the country's size and small population has meant it has typically allowed its neighbours to shape regional geopolitics, Bahrain has weathered conquest and upheaval from the pre-Islamic trading empires to the spread of Safavid Iran, to the arrival of the European naval powers and the discovery of oil. In many ways modern Bahrain can be considered a microcosm of the wider Gulf, as it grapples with an array of challenges ranging from the transition to a post-oil economy, balancing absolute monarchy with democratisation, rising social tensions between both citizens and migrant workers and Sunni and Shiʿa, and geopolitical intrigues- all of which are familiar to its larger and more influential neighbours. Bahrain's geo-strategic vulnerability, dwindling oil reserves and penchant for social unrest have however arguably made it the weakest link in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), indeed the recent Arab Spring-inspired uprising was but the latest (although arguably the gravest) existential threat Bahrain's Al Khalifa monarchs have faced.

Bahrain's sectarian demography is unique in the Gulf, in that roughly two-thirds of the country's citizen population are estimated to be Shiʿa, most of whom are of Arab extraction alongside a small ethnically-Persian minority. The ruling Al Khalifa family conquered the island from the Arabian Peninsula, and their Sunni tribal origins have served as both a point of distinction and a source of friction between the monarchy and its largely sedentary, majority-Shiʿa subjects. The sectarian divide does not define Bahrain, and indeed viewing the country through such a simplistic frame ignores the other fissures which both tear at and hold together Bahrain's social fabric. Bahrain is a highly diverse and at times, combustible mix of religious, ethnic, tribal and ideological affiliations, all of which are manifest in the country's political landscape and history of political participation. The Bahraini Shiʿi community however, in spite of its sizeable internal diversity, can be considered a distinct and important demographic group whose unique local history, dialect, traditions and religious practice make it worthy of independent study as an entity

separate from wider Bahraini society. Bahrain's sectarian distinction has become particularly salient in matters of politics, both historically and in a contemporary context. Occupying the somewhat contradictory space of a marginalised majority, Bahrain's Shiʿa have sought participation in the country's administration, governance and political life for almost a century, with varying degrees of success. This thesis seeks to examine contemporary developments in the political participation of Bahrain's Shiʿi community, with a focus on the more recent events of the twenty-first century during the rule of King Hamad, but with a firm grounding in the formative experiences of twentieth century history.

The study of political participation in the Arab Gulf has typically been approached from two separate yet interrelated angles- understanding monarchical legitimacy, including ideas surrounding 'Gulf exceptionalism,' and the enduring theory of the rentier state. Whilst considerable scholarship has been devoted to exploring, and indeed debunking, the assumptions underpinning both concepts, the regional upheaval of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings has led to a renewed focus on not only political participation in the Arab world, but on the ethnic and sectarian dimensions which often inform it. Bahrain is an ideal case study for revisiting assumptions about participation in politics in the Gulf, as scholars have long struggled to match Bahrain's example with broader theories concerning stability and political quiescence in the region. Bahrain's rulers, for instance, emphasise their position as non-indigenous conquerors,[1] contradicting the common argument that Gulf monarchs trade on their role as guardians of local culture and heritage to shore up legitimacy and support. In addition, more recent research has persuasively argued that Bahrain is either a post-rentier state or that rentierism applies solely to the government's relationship with the Sunni community.[2] Bahrain also challenges the assumption that the Gulf monarchies are inherently more stable than other governments in the region- on top of almost a century of contentious opposition politics,

[1] Khalaf, Abdulhadi, 'Contentious Politics in Bahrain: From Ethnic to National and Vice Versa,' *Paper presented at the Fourth Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies*, Oslo, 13-16 August 1998, Available via: http://org.uib.no/smi/pao/khalaf.html, 2.

[2] See for example: Davidson, Christopher M., 2012. *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies*. London: C. Hurst and Co, 230; Gengler, Justin., 2015. *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 4.

Bahrain had already experienced a sustained period of popular unrest in the 1990s not dissimilar to the uprising which threatened the Al Khalifa's grip on power in 2011.

Bahrain's Arab Spring-inspired protests, which began on 14 February 2011, led to a dramatic shift in participatory strategies within the Shiʿi community and in particular for the formal opposition societies which had cooperated with the government during the pre-2011 period of liberalisation. This is in part due to the regime's[3] response to the protests, informed by geopolitical considerations, as well as developments within the opposition, which has become increasingly fragmented with the strengthening of radical[4] antisystem groups at the expense of moderates who sought dialogue and compromise. Shiʿi political participation has largely shifted from open engagement within the formal realm of parliament and authoritarian elections to the informal, underground realm of the antisystem opposition, adopting innovative methods of mobilising supporters, communicating policies and expressing dissent. As positions harden and radicals are bolstered in both the government and opposition camps, Bahrain risks the longer-term entrenchment of its political unrest, which may lead to further significant outbreaks of violence. Deepening sectarian tensions, compounded by divisive government policies, historical grievances and an increasingly polarised regional context, also threaten to prolong the country's crisis. As such, developing an understanding of the shifting political participation of Bahrain's Shiʿi community is crucial to understanding the nature of the country's current instability, the lessons of which are relevant not only to Bahrain's immediate neighbours in the Gulf but on a regional level throughout the Middle East.

[3] This thesis will use the term 'regime' to refer to non-democratic or authoritarian polities such as Bahrain, in keeping with much of the academic literature. See for example: Gandhi, Jennifer and Przeworski, Adam. 'Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats' *Comparative Political Studies*, 40:11 (2007): 1294.

[4] This thesis's use of the term 'radical' indicates a departure from established norms and practices, and does not refer to Islamic religious radicalism.

Research Problem

Bahrainis often remark that politics in their country progresses in cycles, oscillating between periods of authoritarian repression and political opening. Some scholars have also advanced this view.[5] Indeed, Bahrain has transitioned from feudalism to a British protected state, to an independent emirate to a kingdom holding parliamentary elections, and along the way opposition and civil society groups have been alternately encouraged and stifled. Some of these trends have been mirrored throughout the region, and changing cycles of political participation in Bahrain have at times been triggered by external events such as British retreat, Iranian encroachment, the Gulf wars and the Arab Spring, as well as developing internal demands surrounding social, political and economic reform. However the emergence of these cycles of repression and participation in Bahrain's politics are not simply quirks of history, in spite of the fact that traditional scholarship on the stability of the Gulf's rentier monarchies fails to account for them. Indeed, Trejo maintains that "understanding the rise, development, and demise of cycles of protest is crucial to explaining the prospects of stability and change in authoritarian regimes."[6] This thesis will argue that that cycles of political participation in Bahrain can be explained through an examination of regime-opposition dynamics, and in particular by developing an understanding of the relationship between the government and its Shiʿi majority. With a particular focus on the most recent cycle of liberalisation and repression in Bahrain, encompassing the democratising years of 2000-2010 and the post-Arab Spring authoritarian crackdown from 2011, this thesis aims to explore a number of key questions concerning political change and authoritarian stability in Bahrain and the wider Gulf.

The central objective of this thesis is to address the following research question:

> *How has Bahrain's Arab Spring-inspired uprising impacted the Shiʿi community's political participation?*

[5] See for example: Niethammer, Katja. 'Persian Gulf States' in: Lust, Ellen (ed) 2014., *The Middle East* London: Sage, 720; Coates Ulrichsen, Kristian, 'Bahrain's Uprising: Regional Dimensions and International Consequences' *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 2:1 (2013): 1.
[6] Trejo, Guillermo 'The Ballot and the Street: An Electoral Theory of Social Protest in Autocracies,' *Perspectives on Politics*, 12:2 (2014): 347.

The underlying assumption contained within this question is that change has taken place, and that the means and/or nature of the Shiʿi community's political participation has not remained constant or static. The task of this research is therefore to interrogate how and why this is the case. In order to address this core assumption, this thesis will also outline the nature of the changes which took place across a period from 1999, when King Hamad took to the throne, to the end of 2016 when data collection was completed. It will also provide important contextual background to this most recent cycle of contention by discussing Bahrain's broader twentieth century history. In its examination of the changing patterns of Shiʿi participation in Bahrain's politics, this thesis will principally discuss the impact of political liberalisation (*infitāḥ*), mass popular protest and authoritarian repression, informed by Bahrain's particularistic yet regionally-relevant historical and demographic circumstances. In doing so, it will examine how state-sanctioned repression or liberalisation impacts upon the ways in which the Shiʿi community engages with politics, and will investigate how technological developments have shaped the mechanisms of political participation in authoritarian political contexts such as Bahrain. This thesis will ultimately demonstrate that Shiʿi political participation in Bahrain is determined by inter-opposition dynamics and shifting institutional structures within the Al Khalifa regime, with oscillation between authoritarianism and liberalisation directly impacting the nature and structure of the opposition and its relationship with the government. This thesis will also argue that while the means of Shiʿi political participation have changed alongside technological developments, the core grievances motivating the political activities of Shiʿi opposition groups and social movements have remained relatively constant.

Limitations

This thesis's analysis of political participation in Bahrain is limited to an examination of the country's Shiʿi community, concluding at the end of the year 2016. While this thesis's focus is on the intersection between the Shiʿi community and Bahrain's formal political structures and institutions, a robust analysis of the internal politics within the Al Khalifa family is outside the scope of this study, except for when the internal dynamics of the ruling family directly impact Shiʿi political participation.

On a more practical level, the social media data analysis component of this thesis was constrained by technological limitations, including difficulties accessing the complete dataset of Facebook posts for the years 2011-2014. Due Facebook's restrictions on public access to historical data the researcher constructed a standalone archive of Facebook posts in real time for the year 2015 using the software program Quintly. Whilst access to previous years' data (particularly posts made during the 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising) would have been useful for comparative purposes, this thesis was still able to present a comprehensive snapshot of the online activism of Shiʿi opposition groups throughout 2015 in order to gain insights into the ways in which social media technology is impacting the Shiʿi opposition's activism.

Literature Review

Defining Political Participation

Political participation has traditionally been conceptualised by scholars as accounting for the deliberate actions of citizens seeking to influence government. For example, Verba and Nie's classic definition holds that political participation encompasses "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take."[7] Huntington and Nelson take a similar approach, defining political participation as an "activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making."[8] Within this, Huntington and Nelson distinguish between two distinct forms of political participation, mobilised and autonomous, with the former prevalent in autocracies and the latter more common to democracies. According to Huntington and Nelsen, "mobilised participation occurs only when political elites make efforts to involve masses of the population in politics," whereas, "autonomous participation can occur at reasonable costs only if political elites encourage it, permit it, or are unable or unwilling to suppress it."[9] Building upon this somewhat narrow understanding of political participation, scholars have recently sought to broaden the scope of the concept

[7] Verba, Sidney and Nie, Norman H., 1972. *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. New York: Harper and Row, 2.
[8] Huntington, Samuel and Nelson, Joan (eds)., 1976. *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 4.
[9] Huntington and Nelson, *No Easy Choice*, 28.

to include more passive forms of participation, such as civil disobedience, and the behaviour of individuals seeking to influence politics from outside the realm of government. Brady for example has defined political participation as simply an "action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes,"[10] emphasising that a clear and observable action must be taken by individuals who are not themselves political elites, with the intention of influencing a political outcome, which may or may not concern governments. Others have stretched the concept of political participation further still- for example Booth and Seligson adopt the broad definition of political participation as "behaviour influencing or attempting to influence the distribution of public goods."[11] Public goods are conceived of as utilities such as "roads, bridges, community centres, schools, and irrigation systems" which can either be provided by governments or procured directly via the donation of community funds and labour.[12] In the context of the Middle East, Alhamad similarly argues that "traditional definitions of political participation… are insufficient to capture the panoply of methods of political participation to which people resort,"[13] in particular due to the restrictions placed on formal political participation by authoritarian regimes. Alhamad rejects Huntington and Nelson's aforementioned definition as too narrow, arguing that it does not account for the informal means of political participation seen in the Middle East's authoritarian politics, in which for example, growing a beard or refusing to vote in gerrymandered elections can be interpreted as a political act.[14] Claiming that "seemingly non-political actions by citizens carry considerable political meaning,"[15] Alhamad calls for a broader definition of political participation capable of accounting for political activity outside the realm of formal politics.

[10] Brady, Henry 'Political Participation' in: Robinson, John P; Shaver, Phillip R and Wrightsman, Lawrence S. (eds), 1999., *Measures of Political Attitudes.* San Diego: Academic Press, 737.
[11] Booth, John A. and Seligson, Mitchell A, 'Images of Political Participation in Latin America,' in: Booth, John A and Seligson, Mitchell A (eds)., 1987. *Political Participation in Latin America: Volume 1, Citizen and State.* New York: Holmes and Meier, 6.
[12] Booth and Seligson, *Images of Political Participation in Latin America*, 6.
[13] Alhamad, Laila, 'Formal and Informal Venues of Engagement' in: Lust-Okar, Ellen and Zerhouni, Saloua (eds)., 2008. *Political Participation in the Middle East,* Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 35.
[14] Alhamad, *Formal and Informal Venues of Engagement,* 35.
[15] Alhamad, *Formal and Informal Venues of Engagement*, 36.

Patrick Conge considers the difficulty of defining the scope of political participation in an excellent review article on the subject, which identifies six major points of contention within the academic literature.[16] Key questions raised include whether or not passive forms of participation should be included, such as patriotic feelings or an awareness of political debates, along with more unconventional forms of participation such as political violence which also sit outside the formal realm of politics. Conge also queries whether what Huntington and Nelson identify as mobilised political behaviour, or participation prompted or directed by government, should be considered participation, or whether a definition should be restricted to autonomous political activities which originate with citizens themselves.[17] Conge ultimately concludes that extending the concept of political participation to encompass "behaviour outside the sphere of government and unintended political outcomes" as well as passive forms of participation and the intentions and outcomes behind political participation, risks rendering the concept indeterminate.[18] In contrast to Alhamad, Conge posits that including feelings and attitudes in a definition of political participation "may explain why individuals do or do not participate, but they do not account for what is meant by the term political participation," because they ultimately concern "political culture and socialization, not participation."[19] Likewise, Conge does not consider an awareness of politics, for example the act of reading newspaper articles about politics, to be political participation, as it does not indicate involvement- "at most, awareness is a precondition for political participation."[20]

Holger Albrecht has adopted a similar position to Conge, warning that expanding a definition of political participation too broadly risks transforming it into "a catch-all category that explains basically every kind of action of men and women, which would lose its explanatory power."[21] Building on Huntington and Nelson's definition, Albrecht emphasises their use of the term 'activity,' and like Conge argues that this excludes

[16] Conge, Patrick J. 'The Concept of Political Participation: Toward a Definition' (Review) *Comparative Politics*, 20:2 (1988): 241-242.
[17] Conge, *The Concept of Political Participation*, 242.
[18] Conge, *The Concept of Political Participation*, 248.
[19] Conge, *The Concept of Political Participation*, 246.
[20] Conge, *The Concept of Political Participation*, 246.
[21] Albrecht, Holger, 'The Nature of Political Participation' in: Lust-Okar, Ellen and Zerhouni, Saloua (eds)., 2008. *Political Participation in the Middle East,* Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 30.

notions of attitudes toward or an awareness of politics as constituting participation.[22] According to Albrecht, "political participation implies either direct political action (eg. to cast a vote at elections, join politically relevant organisations, or attend a demonstration) or in its most simple form, the *public formulation* of political opinions."[23] Both Conge and Albrecht reject Booth and Seligson's understanding of neighbourhood or community efforts to distribute public goods to be political participation, situating political participation firmly within the realm of government-society interactions.[24] Incorporating Huntingdon and Nelson's distinction between mobilised and autonomous participation, Albrecht distinguishes between 'classical' (eg. formal political parties) and 'state-mobilised' participation, the latter being popular in the Middle East with authoritarian leaders seeking to boost their legitimacy by staging elections. To this he adds a third category- 'informal social networks,' [25] a form of political participation also prevalent in restrictive authoritarian systems which will be discussed in depth throughout this thesis. In focusing on forms of political participation aimed at influencing government policy or indeed impacting upon or changing the political system itself, this thesis will adopt Conge and Albrecht's view that state-society relations lie at the core of political participation.

One distinction between Conge and Albrecht's understanding of political participation relates to the issue of intent. Conge argues that "political participation should be restricted to the acts themselves; it should not encompass the intentions of individual participants or the outcomes of their actions."[26] Conversely, Albrecht cites intention as a critical ingredient in defining political participation, arguing that classifying certain acts as political in the absence of intent risks rendering the concept meaningless.[27] This thesis adopts Albrecht's interpretation, arguing that intent is key in determining, for example, whether an individual's declining to vote in authoritarian elections is interpreted as a deliberate act of boycott or rather, can be attributed to more mundane reasons (perhaps they were deterred by the distance to the

[22] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 17.
[23] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 17. Emphasis in the original.
[24] Conge, *The Concept of Political Participation*, 247; Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation,* 15-16.
[25] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 15-16.
[26] Conge, *The Concept of Political Participation*, 247.
[27] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 30.

nearest polling station). Agreeing with Conge that "all behaviour opposing or supporting state structures, authorities, and/or allocative decisions regarding public goods [is] political participation whether it is sponsored by the government or initiated by the people," [28] this thesis adds Albrecht's critical ingredient of intent, arriving at the following definition:

Political participation constitutes an intentional activity of a formal or informal nature designed to influence government policy and/or state structures.

This definition is broader than the classical definitions of Verba and Nie or Huntington and Nelson, in that it allows for informal means of political participation and incorporates attempts to change the structure of the political system, in addition to simply seeking to influence government policy. It also emphasises that acts of political participation require intent. However, it is not so broad so as to include community or neighbourhood-based activities not connected to government policy or decision-making, and activities with unintended political outcomes. This understanding of political participation will inform this thesis' examination of formal and informal Shiʿi opposition groups' engagement with the political process prior to and in the aftermath of the country's 2011 uprising. It is also an important factor in understanding the role of political opposition within authoritarian or liberalised-autocratic political systems, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Political Participation in Bahrain and the Gulf

Two approaches have traditionally dominated the academic literature on political participation in the Gulf-theories of 'Gulf exceptionalism,' which seek to explain the authoritarian resilience of Gulf monarchies, and rentier state theory, both of which have been increasingly called into question as a result of the events of the Arab Spring. The Gulf monarchies themselves have sought to promote the view that their region is politically, economically and culturally exceptional, due to the presence of *khuṣūṣiyya*, or unique attributes, including religious practices and tribal affiliations.[29] This includes claims surrounding monarchical

[28] Conge, *The Concept of Political Participation*, 247.
[29] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 13.

legitimacy, whereby rulers argue that tribal or cultural norms have endowed the Gulf monarchies with a form of popular legitimacy and authenticity lacking in other parts of the Arab world whose monarchies fell victim to uprisings or coups.[30] A similar argument is often made in justifying the lack of democracy in the Gulf, with ruling elites claiming that conservative social norms are at odds with democratic principles, and that Gulf citizens are not 'ready' for democratisation, revealing the paternalism which often characterises the relationship between ruler and subjects in the region.[31] In their scathing 2010 article *Examining the 'Post' in Post-Democratization*, Valbjørn and Bank condemn much of the pre-Arab Spring scholarship on Middle East politics as either promoting a similar understanding of monarchical stability, in which democratisation is "written off with reference to an inherently undemocratic Islamic culture,"[32] or falling victim to a "demo-*crazy*" impulse of prematurely predicting "impending democratic revolution."[33] The Arab Spring has prompted a renewed focus on explaining authoritarianism and monarchical resilience in the Gulf, as despite significant protest movements in a number of Arab monarchies all of the authoritarian regimes which fell in 2011 were republics.

Rather than drawing on cultural or religious characteristics in explaining the relative stability of the Gulf monarchies, a number of scholars have attributed monarchical resilience to more pragmatic structural factors, arguing that the perceived legitimacy of rulers had little to do with the Gulf states' ability to deflect political challenges. Yom and Gause have identified three factors which have accounted for monarchical resilience thus far in the Gulf: "Cross-cutting coalitions" of interest groups linked to the royal family through patronage networks, which act to insulate the monarchies against mass popular unrest; the Gulf monarchies' mobilisation of resource wealth as a means of purchasing political quiescence; and the support of "foreign patrons" who utilise economic, diplomatic and military incentives to support the ruling regimes.[34] According to Yom and Gause, these three factors "are the real roots of their exceptionalism- not

[30] Yom, Sean L. and Gause, F. Gregory, 'Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On' *Journal of Democracy,* 23:4 (2012): 75.
[31] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 13.
[32] Valbjørn, Morten and Bank, André, 'Examining the 'Post' in Post-Democratization: The Future of Middle Eastern Political Rule through Lenses of the Past' *Middle East Critique*, 19:3 (2010): 185.
[33] Valbjørn and Bank, *Examining the 'Post' in Post-Democratization,* 186.
[34] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 75-6.

inherent qualities of royalism, Arab culture, or Islam, but deliberate regime strategies pursued amid fortuitous geographic and other circumstances."[35]

In accounting for these structural factors in Bahrain, this thesis will show that the Al Khalifa's exclusion of the Shiʿi community meant the monarchy was unable to construct a cross-cutting coalition powerful enough to forestall the emergence of a mass popular uprising in 2011. The presence of Yom and Gause's final two factors however were arguably critical in ensuring the regime was able to retain power in spite of what amounted to a grave threat to monarchical stability. Whilst Bahrain's oil reserves are dwindling, the regime was still able to target the Sunni community in particular with increased welfare payments leading up to the protests as a means of encouraging them to stay at home. Most significant however was the role of foreign backers in strengthening the Al Khalifa monarchy. The $10 billion aid package provided by the GCC in March 2011[36] strengthened the regime's efforts at economic co-optation, and the willingness of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to intervene militarily in Bahrain ultimately ensured the failure of the uprising. The muted response of powerful Western backers such as the United States and the United Kingdom, both of which maintain sizeable military and economic interests in Bahrain, further strengthened the regime's hand, particularly during the repressive crackdown which followed the protests. According to Yom and Gause, the presence of two of the three factors outlined above is sufficient to account for Gulf exceptionalism,[37] and this more pragmatic approach certainly seems to better explain the Bahraini regime's ability to weather the storm of the Arab Spring than explanations surrounding religious or cultural *khuṣūṣiyya*.

The Al Khalifa monarchy's reliance on repression has led some to speculate that the current situation in Bahrain does not in fact amount to monarchical resilience, particularly in the medium-to-long term. According to Okruhlik, "real resilience requires flexibility, re-invention and growth… the regimes of the Gulf

[35] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 85.
[36] Laessing, Ulf and Johnston, Cynthia, 'Gulf States Launch $20 Billion Fund for Oman and Bahrain' *Reuters* 10 March 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-fund-idUSTRE7294B120110310
[37] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 86.

have dug in their heels."[38] Christopher Davidson has described Bahrain as the weakest link in the GCC, identifying it as the Gulf state whose regime has the most tenuous grip on power and is most vulnerable to instability.[39] Davidson's book *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* argues that a revolution in one Gulf state will trigger a domino effect in which neighbouring monarchies will suffer crises of legitimacy and will most likely also fall.[40] Coates Ulrichsen has made a similar argument in the case of Kuwait, noting that "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link" and as such "any threat to one monarchy in the Gulf will have serious and immediate ramifications for all the others."[41] An appreciation that the myth of monarchical exceptionalism will only resonate in the Gulf if it holds true for all GCC monarchies was likely a strong motivating factor behind the intervention of more stable neighbouring regimes in Bahrain's domestic unrest.

The dominant theoretical model underpinning much of the academic literature on political participation in the Gulf is arguably the concept of the rentier state. Rentier theory suggests that the Gulf's sizable oil and gas revenues provided governments with a source of income independent from taxation, enabling them to construct a ruling bargain whereby citizens forfeit participation in political decision-making in exchange for a cradle-to-grave welfare system and the absence of income taxes.[42] Davidson comments that oil rents have "allowed the state to act independently of demands in society," and have essentially created a citizen "rentier class"[43] whose economic wellbeing ensures the maintenance of a distributive, authoritarian model of governance. Moreover, a number of scholars have noted that the state's rentier wealth and role as distributor of resource revenues strengthens authoritarianism by enabling Gulf rulers to selectively reward the support of key constituencies.[44]

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[38] Okruhlik, Gwenn, 'Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States: Lessons from the Arab Uprisings,' in: Selvik, Kjetil and Utvik, Bjorn Olav (eds)., 2016. *Oil States in the New Middle East*. London: Routledge, 34.
[39] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 2.
[40] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 2.
[41] Coates Ulrichsen, Kristian, 'Politics and Opposition in Kuwait: Continuity and Change' *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4:2 (2014): 228.
[42] See for example: Beblawi, Hazem, 'The Rentier State in the Arab World' in: Luciani, Giacomo (ed)., 1990. *The Arab State,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 85-98.
[43] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 6-7.
[44] Gandhi and Przeworski, *Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats*, 1285.

Core assumptions surrounding the rentier thesis have however been challenged by a growing body of literature which argues that "the rentier framework… vastly overstates economic determinism"[45] in suggesting that economic satisfaction is the dominant factor driving political participation. The arrival of Arab Spring-inspired unrest in the GCC also challenged this assumption- indeed Matthiesen has argued that "the theory of the rentier state… has been refuted by the protests in the Gulf."[46] Once again the situation in Bahrain appears to defy conventional wisdom. The country's long history of unionism, coalition-building and political activism contradicts the rentier expectation that resource wealth and the absence of taxation encourages political quiescence, and Bahrain's many cycles of contentious politics (outlined in Chapter 3), which culminated in the 2011 uprising, appear to exhibit very little correlation with the economic development and growing prosperity experienced by many in the country in the decades following the 1970s oil boom. According to Okruhlik, "money does not spend itself. Choices are made by state authorities about who gets how much when. We know that a legacy of biased choices, or maldistribution, can fuel popular dissent."[47] In other words, it is possible that rather than strengthening authoritarian stability, rentier wealth can actually serve to undermine distributive regimes when resources are not perceived to have been divided equitably among social groups, fostering political participation driven by grievance.

Probably the most comprehensive critique of the applicability of rentier theory to Bahrain, Justin Gengler's *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf* argues that rentierism fails to account for the mobilising potential of the ethnic, religious and tribal affinities that exist throughout the Gulf and are sharply pronounced in Shiʿa-majority Bahrain.[48] Rentierism rests on the assumption that resource rents are distributed relatively evenly across the populace by Gulf rulers, and that every citizen has a share in their country's wealth. Gengler argues that Gulf rulers do not however extend their economic patronage universally, and demonstrates that oil revenues are instead utilised to disproportionately patronise

[45] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 18.
[46] Matthiesen, Toby., 2013. *Sectarian Gulf*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 129.
[47] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 18.
[48] The discussion of Gengler's book presented here is based on the following review essay published in 2016: Moore-Gilbert, Kylie. 'Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State' (Review) *Arab Studies Journal*, 24:1 (2016): 340-344.

sectarian and tribal in-groups.[49] This phenomenon is not exclusive to Bahrain- Gengler shows that whilst the nature of the various in-groups may change, in most other Gulf states this tactic, essentially a form of divide and rule, remains the same. This leads him to conclude that the "wealth-for-acquiescence agreement" between Gulf monarchies and citizens "never existed at all."[50] In Bahrain in particular, the lack of trust between the Al Khalifa monarchy and the country's Shiʿa majority prevents the regime from utilising one of the "most common avenues of political buy-off available to allocative governments"[51] in the form of mass public sector employment. Inverting the traditional rentier model, Gengler shows that in Bahrain "it is not public-sector employment that secures political allegiance; rather it is political allegiance that tends to secure public-sector employment."[52] Because Bahrain's Shiʿa are essentially prevented from gaining employment in key ministries and the military, the government is unable to make use of what is typically a powerful means of procuring political support. This explains the indispensability of repression, particularly following the 2011 uprising, as one of the only avenues remaining for the government to assert its control over Bahrain's Shiʿa, who have been excluded from the coercive benefits of rentierism.

In seeking to build an alternative model to rentierism to explain political participation in the Gulf, Gengler draws on social movement theory concerning collective action and the salience of group identities. The social movement literature has a long history of theorising the relationship between identity and contentious politics, and one of the strengths of Gengler's study is his application of an approach which has been criticised as being "predominantly theoretical"[53] to the practical political realities of a Gulf context. According to Klandermans, "at the heart of every protest are grievances… The more people feel that the interests of the group and/or the principles that the group values are threatened, the stronger is their motivation to take part in protest to defend their interests and principles."[54] Gengler's contribution has been to apply this understanding of political participation, which differs considerably to rentierism in its

[49] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 5.
[50] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 7.
[51] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 34.
[52] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 59.
[53] Klandermans, PG, 'Identity Politics and Politicized Identities: Identity Processes and the Dynamics of Protest' *Political Psychology*, 35:1 (2014): 2.
[54] Klandermans, *Identity Politics and Politicized Identities*, 5.

focus on the impact of collective identity on political behaviour, to a Bahraini context, leading him to propose his own conceptual framework, termed "group-based political mobilisation."[55]

Gengler's model is anchored in social movement theory approaches which emphasise the role of community in collective-action. Mario Diani for example has shown that "non-political forms of social organization of a largely ascriptive nature"[56] inform much group-based political participation, and that activist networks tend to organise according to identity cleavages (such as sectarian identities) when these cleavages are salient within broader society, weakening the pull of cross-cutting political or social coalitions.[57] In an important study, Karen Bodnaruk Jazayeri has demonstrated that "group level political inequality" is "a causal mechanism for resistance" and that the exclusion or marginalisation of identity groups from political participation "is significantly associated with increased counts of domestic protest and an increased probability of violent domestic resistance campaigns."[58] The ability of identity groups, such as Bahrain's Shiʿi community, to mobilise is enhanced by their "interlinked social networks," which enable them to draw on resources such as "religious leaders… geographical concentration and group cohesion."[59] Bodnaruk Jazayeri's study in fact concludes that levels of identity group conflict in the region support the notion of Middle East exceptionalism, where "tribal and religious identity has created a peculiar regional system where political discrimination becomes a salient factor in antigovernment resistance."[60] Gengler has similarly suggested that the Gulf states have a "structural tendency toward ascriptive group politics" due to the region's unique economy and the structure of Gulf political institutions.[61] Like Diani and Bodnaruk Jazayeri, Gengler argues that this leads to political participation "on the basis of outwardly observable social categories such as ethnicity, religion, tribal or regional affiliation, and so on," the result of which is

[55] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 10.
[56] Diani, Mario, 'Social Movement Theory and Grassroots Coalitions in the Middle-East' *Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting*, Boston, 1-4 August 2008. Available via: www.academia.edu/458255/Social_movement_theory_and_grassroots_coalitions_in_the_Middle-East, 2-3.
[57] Diani, *Social Movement Theory and Grassroots Coalitions*, 11.
[58] Bodnaruk Jazayeri, Karen, 'Identity-Based Political Inequality and Protest: The Dynamic Relationship Between Political Power and Protest in the Middle East and North Africa,' *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 33:4 (2015): 401.
[59] Bodnaruk Jazayeri, *Identity-Based Political Inequality and Protest*, 404.
[60] Bodnaruk Jazayeri, *Identity-Based Political Inequality and Protest*, 414.
[61] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 20.

"larger ethnic-cum-political groupings competing both over material benefits as well as over control of the polity itself."[62]

Whilst Gengler's conceptualisation of group-based political mobilisation is hardly new in social movement theory circles, his innovation lies in the development of these theories within a broader political science framework and their practical application to a case study of Bahrain. Gengler's book is centred on an ambitious mass survey of political attitudes undertaken in Bahrain in 2009, the results of which are used to illustrate his claim that Bahraini political participation is overwhelmingly determined by sectarian affiliation, rather than rentier economics. The survey was based on the Arab Barometer questionnaire developed at Princeton and the University of Michigan, and covered a nationally representative sample of 435 Bahraini households, with at least one respondent from each of Bahrain's numerous villages.[63] Gengler also used the survey data to attempt to quantify the country's sectarian distribution in demographic and geographic terms, and claimed that Bahrain's Shiʿa majority had reduced to between 53 and 62 percent of the population as a result of the Al Khalifa's demographic engineering policies[64] (discussed further in Chapter 4).

Gengler weaves a sophisticated argument in support of the continued relevance of his 2009 survey, and deftly attempts to connect its findings to current trends. However, while the survey provides a fascinating insight into the views of ordinary Bahrainis of every sect and socioeconomic status in 2009, it is unclear how representative the political opinion data is of current views, after the dramatic events of 2011 transformed Bahrain's socio-political landscape. It is possible that had Gengler conducted his survey today, or even in 2012, he would have presented significantly different results. For example, his survey shows that in 2009 university-educated Sunni and Shiʿi Bahrainis did not have statistically different chances of finding work in the public sector,[65] which is no longer likely to hold true. Gengler also finds that there is a correlation between strength of religiosity and political activism for both sects, and that Sunnis from poorer

[62] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 10.
[63] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 94-95.
[64] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 96.
[65] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 116.

backgrounds were more likely to vote in elections.[66] Given growing Sunni extremism and Bahrain's worsening economic crisis, it is possible that these trends have further intensified following the 2011 uprising.

A number of other important studies have been published which seek to reconcile the arrival of Arab Spring protests in the GCC with broader assumptions concerning the participation of Gulf citizens in the political process. These include Frederic Wehrey's *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, Toby Matthiesen's *Sectarian Gulf*, Yoel Guzansky's *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East* and Alaʾa Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones' *Bahrain's Uprising*. Much of the recent academic research into the Gulf has focused on geopolitics and security, analysing for example Saudi-Iranian tensions or GCC involvement in the wars in Syria and Yemen, or has examined the Gulf through the lens of rising sectarianism. Whilst Bahrain's Shiʿi political societies have been discussed in numerous studies, there is a clear lack of research into the political behaviour of the Shiʿi opposition following the 2011 uprising, in particular surrounding the emergence of Shiʿi youth movements and the role of online activism in Bahrain's post-Arab Spring politics. In addition, scant scholarly attention has been focused on the issue of Bahrain's process of de-liberalisation and return to full-autocracy following a decade of democratising reforms during the 2000s. This thesis aims to address both these omissions.

Much of the political science literature concerning Bahrain interprets the country's unrest through the lens of sectarianism, which has inevitably led to a proclivity to view Bahraini politics as a microcosm of broader regional trends such as deepening sectarian polarisation and the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Most troublingly, some scholars project this perspective onto their examination of Bahrain's historical record, leading to a tendency to view the Sunni-Shiʿa split as the primary driver of contentious politics in Bahrain, even during periods in which ideological divisions were much more likely to influence political behaviour. Assuming a sectarian understanding of events in Bahrain has also led some to adopt a securitising approach to Bahrain's cycles of opposition activism, with echoes of popular fears of an emerging 'Shiʿa crescent' and a

[66] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 127.

tendency to characterise Shiʿi participation in the political arena as a security, rather than political, threat to Al Khalifa rule. This thesis rejects such an approach, and by providing an in-depth and multidimensional analysis of shifts in the participation of Bahrain's Shiʿi community in politics, seeks to avoid sectarian binaries whilst acknowledging the role sectarian differences play in shaping political participation.

Yoel Guzansky's *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East* provides an insightful glimpse into the Gulf monarchies' combination of soft power strategies and military deterrence to prevent Arab Spring unrest from taking hold in the Gulf, including analysis on the balance of power dynamics within the GCC as it grapples with a growing number of internal and external threats.[67] Guzansky's nuanced assessment of the Peninsula Shield Force's involvement in suppressing the uprising in Bahrain is valuable, however his treatment of sectarian demographics as a strategic threat at best oversimplifies a complex socio-political issue, and at worst risks repeating the inflammatory narratives promoted by Gulf rulers and state-run media outlets. Guzansky too often falls into the trap of perceiving sectarian tensions as yet another manifestation of the GCC's geopolitical rivalry with Iran, in which the Gulf Shiʿa are *ipso facto* presented as a fifth column sympathetic to Iranian interests. Whilst the theoretical basis to Guzansky's analysis of Iran's strategic threat to the Gulf is solid, he at times draws on unreliable sources, including state-run media, to suggest that Iran is directly interfering in the GCC's internal affairs.[68] Guzansky overemphasises Iran's historic role in stoking sectarian tensions in Bahrain in particular, linking an Iranian Revolution-inspired coup attempt in 1981 with Bahrain's period of popular protest in the 1990s,[69] which was motivated by concerns surrounding civil rights and democratic reform wholly unconnected to Iran. Statements such as "the instability in Bahrain has once again made clear the depth of the Sunni-Shiite-Arab-Iranian conflict"[70] paint Bahrain's unrest with the broad brush of geopolitical sectarian rivalries, and reflect a lack of engagement with the particularities of Bahrain's domestic context. Guzansky is ultimately unable to provide

[67] The discussion of Guzansky's book presented here is based on the following review essay published in 2015: Moore-Gilbert, Kylie. 'The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East: Between Iran and the Arab Spring' (Review), *The Middle East Journal* 69:4 (2015): 630-631.
[68] Guzansky, Yoel., 2015. *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East: Between Iran and the 'Arab Spring.'* London: Palgrave MacMillan, 89.
[69] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 88.
[70] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 94.

any convincing evidence of Iranian interference in the Gulf Shiʿi communities, which have for the most part denied any ideological affinity with Iran and frame their opposition around domestic grievances.

Toby Matthiesen's *Sectarian Gulf* also appraises Gulf politics through a sectarian lens, albeit one primarily directed at the policies of Gulf ruling families and informed by a more nuanced understanding of domestic and regional dynamics. Matthiesen adds his voice to those of a number of other Gulf scholars, including Valeri,[71] Louër[72] and Coates Ulrichsen,[73] who have argued that sectarian sentiments are deliberately manipulated or encouraged by regimes as a divide and rule strategy to strengthen their grip on power. Matthiesen characterises growing sectarianism as the result of a top-down process, with sectarian sentiments filtering from governing elites down to all levels of society, before cycling back to elites via popular discourse.[74] Whilst Matthiesen's analysis of Al Khalifa efforts to foment sectarianism as a means of dividing Bahrain's 2011 protest movement is sound, like Guzansky he is at times prone to sweeping statements which tend to exaggerate the role of sectarian tensions at the expense of other factors. For example, Matthiesen broadly claims that the Saudi-backed crackdown in 2011 "made it socially acceptable to hate the other sect"[75] and that the Gulf monarchies' sectarian policies were "at least tacitly backed by the West,"[76] both of which are difficult to justify in practical terms. Matthiesen also speculates that regime manipulation of sectarian identities "threatens to tear apart the social fabric in the Gulf states… as had previously happened in Lebanon and Iraq,"[77] which is perhaps too premature a conclusion to draw, particularly in light of the fact that sectarian divide and rule tactics have existed in the Gulf for decades and did not suddenly emerge in response to the Arab Spring.

[71] Valeri, Marc, 'Contentious Politics in Bahrain: Opposition Cooperation between Regime Manipulation and Youth Radicalisation' in: Kraetzschmar, Hendrik (ed.) *The Dynamics of Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World: Contentious Politics in Times of Change.* London: Routledge (2012): 129-149.
[72] Louër, Laurence, 'Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36:2 (2013): 245-260.
[73] Coates Ulrichsen, *Bahrain's Uprising*, 1-12.
[74] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, ix-x.
[75] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 68.
[76] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 127.
[77] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 123.

Matthiesen's book provides an in-depth examination of the GCC states' response to the Arab Spring, and is rich in detail concerning opposition activism in Bahrain, including some valuable analysis of the emergence of Shiʿi youth movements. His central argument, that the region has transformed into a 'Sectarian Gulf' due to GCC governments fomenting sectarian conflict as a means of securing their grip on power,[78] is certainly persuasive in the case of Bahrain, but falters when applied to all of the GCC. Matthiesen's chapters on Oman and Kuwait complicate his Sectarian Gulf thesis, as neither appears to fit the neat model of sect-based patronage networks and/or attempts to inflame social divisions on the basis of sect evidenced in Bahrain. The fact that two of the six GCC states do not match Matthiesen's conception of the 'Sectarian Gulf' indicates that such a sweeping categorisation does not adequately represent the complexity of sectarian politics in the region. Such an outcome further emphasises the case in favour of examining the contextual particularities of Gulf states such as Bahrain individually- whilst findings can often be shown to be regionally representative, the Gulf's considerable cultural, religious and ethnic diversity ensures that developing theory applicable across the GCC is a risky undertaking, as previously illustrated by the debate surrounding rentierism in Bahrain.

In a similarly in-depth study, Frederic Wehrey's *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf* speculates that using sectarianism as an analytical frame may in fact be "simply an artificial construct employed by Western academics to make sense of the region's complex politics."[79] Wehrey's comprehensive study of Gulf politics maintains that sectarianism is misunderstood in the Gulf- whilst agreeing with Matthiesen and others that monarchs utilise sectarian tensions to strengthen their grip on power, he argues that international factors have been given insufficient attention. These include the nature of Shiʿi transnational religious and cultural links and the impact of other Middle Eastern conflicts on sectarian inter-communal relations in the Gulf.[80] Echoing Gengler's theory of group-based political mobilisation, Wehrey describes ordinary people's

[78] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 29.
[79] Wehrey, Frederic M., 2014. *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings.* New York: Columbia University Press, xi.
[80] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* xiv.

"latching on" to sectarianism as a "safety net" in times of upheaval,[81] arguing that sectarian tensions arise "from a combination of exclusionary policies at home and regional shocks from abroad."[82]

One of the most significant omissions in the scholarly literature on post-Arab Spring Bahrain is a lack of research into what is arguably the most important constituency behind both the 2011 uprising and subsequent unrest: Shiʿi youth movements. Several studies make passing mention of the youth groups which mobilised via social media during the uprising and are believed to have initiated the Pearl Roundabout protests, however Wehrey's *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf* is distinct in its attempting to analyse the role of Shiʿi youth in any great depth. Whilst Matthiesen briefly discusses the anonymous youth-driven February 14 Coalition for example, even arguing that it is "at least as important as al-Wefaq in Bahraini Shia politics,"[83] a paucity of information about the group limits his ability to explain why this is the case. Otherwise comprehensive studies of post-Arab Spring Bahrain, such as those of Louër[84] and Meijer and Danckaert,[85] fail to discuss youth activism at all, despite the acknowledged importance of the role of youth in the Arab Spring uprisings. Wehrey provides a rare overview of the structure of the February 14 Coalition, describing it as a "loose coalition of youths… made up of autonomous secretive networks organised by village or suburb" which is largely leaderless and not confined to a single political ideology or geographic location.[86] The Bahraini government has listed the February 14 Coalition as a terrorist organisation, and has claimed that the group is part of a foreign conspiracy to destabilise the regime, however no research has been conducted on whether Bahraini Shiʿi youth groups maintain links with Shiʿi governments or activist groups abroad. Wehrey has however argued that the government's closing of mainstream media outlets affiliated with the Shiʿi community (for example the *al-Wasat* newspaper) pushed Bahraini Shiʿa to increasingly rely on social media as a news source, a platform largely dominated by youth groups such as

[81] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 208.
[82] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 219.
[83] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 61.
[84] Louër, Laurence., 2012. *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press.
[85] Meijer, Roel and Danckaert, Maarten. 'Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict,' in: Zartman, William (ed) 2015., *Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat,* Athens: University of Georgia Press.
[86] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 94-5.

the February 14 Coalition whose perspective is generally more radical than that of the established Shiʿi political parties.[87]

There has been relatively little scholarly focus on the impact of the internet and social media on Bahrain's uprising, despite its arguably crucial role in facilitating the mobilisation of supporters, coordination of protests and communication between activists. Most studies have a tendency to focus on the activities of established political groups, which are also important actors in Bahraini politics but have become increasingly marginalised in the post-Arab Spring era due to a combination of regime repression and growing support for more radical factions. Given the prominence of youth groups and the growing role of online activism in Bahrain, it is surprising that there is such a dearth of research into this topic. One exception to this is *Bahrain's Uprising*, edited by Alaʾa Shehabi and Marc Owen Jones. Shehabi and Jones, along with a number of contributors to their volume, devote considerable space to discussing groups such as the February 14 Coalition as well as to the innovative protest tactics and strategies developed by youth activists during the 2011 uprising. Jones dedicates an entire chapter, called "Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics in the Bahrain Uprising,"[88] to studying the role of social media during Bahrain's Arab Spring protests, with a particular focus on the ways in which the Al Khalifa regime uses the internet to monitor activists and keep tabs on the opposition. Jones argues that "social media, and in particular Twitter and Facebook, has assisted the Bahraini government and those representing the hegemonic order in maintaining their position of dominance,"[89] and shines an important light onto practices designed to uncover the identities of anonymous social media activists, including hacking, malware and sending "malicious links."[90] Jones' study could in fact be seen as providing the reverse angle to this thesis' social media research (outlined in Chapter 7). Rather than examining the ways with which Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition groups utilise social media as a tool for mobilisation, Jones' chapter highlights the utility of social

[87] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 75.
[88] Jones, Marc Owen, 'Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics in the Bahrain Uprising' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising* London: Zed Books.
[89] Jones, *Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics*, 241.
[90] Jones, *Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics*, 247.

media in boosting government repression, through surveillance, exposing anonymous accounts and state-backed "trolling" of activist groups.[91]

Bahrain's Uprising is an exceptional book which provides unique insights into little-studied elements of Bahrain's Arab Spring protests, and is an invaluable resource for research into this period in Bahrain's contemporary history. However its unorthodox structure and unashamedly activist message are at times problematic, particularly when the book fails to present a measured perspective on contentious issues which are the subject of much scholarly and popular debate. *Bahrain's Uprising* seeks to balance academic enquiry with eyewitness accounts of the 2011 protests, and includes among its chapters a speech given by imprisoned secular-nationalist opposition leader Ibrahim Sharif to the Supreme Court of Appeal,[92] a narrative account by a Bahraini poet of his imprisonment and torture during the uprising[93] and the tale of an Australian teacher living in Bahrain who was deported after filming the February 17 crackdown at the Pearl Roundabout from his nearby apartment building.[94] *Bahrain's Uprising* passionately condemns the Al Khalifa regime, and many of its chapters direct considerable anger at the role of the British government in particular as "a key international actor and determinant in the 'repressive potential' of the Bahraini regime."[95] This is a clear reflection of the authors' position as co-founders of the UK-based NGO *Bahrain Watch*, which works to promote democracy and transparency in Bahrain and has campaigned against weapons sales to the Bahraini government. Whilst it is possible to argue that Shehabi and Jones do not claim that their book is impartial, nor that it should even be considered an academic volume, the activist agenda underpinning *Bahrain's Uprising* muddies the reader's ability to distinguish claims informed by research from those informed by the authors' politics. This thesis aims to build on the insights provided in

[91] Jones, *Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics,* 250.
[92] Sharif, Ibrahim, 'A Trial of Thoughts and Ideas' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising* London: Zed Books.
[93] Al Jallawi, Ali, 'God After Ten O'Clock' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising* London: Zed Books.
[94] Mitchell, Tony, 'A Room with a View: An Eyewitness to the Pearl Uprising' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising* London: Zed Books.
[95] Holman, Zoe, 'On the Side of Decency and Democracy; The History of British-Bahraini Relations and Transnational Contestation,' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising* London: Zed Books, 203.

Bahrain's Uprising, particularly concerning social media and youth activism, whilst ensuring that greater weight is afforded to developing an empirically and theoretically robust research framework.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1

The current chapter provides a brief introduction to this thesis' focus on Shiʿi political participation in Bahrain and outlines its central research question. The research limitations are examined and the challenge of defining the key term 'political participation' is discussed. This is followed by a review of the relevant academic literature concerning opposition politics in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf, indicating the areas of insufficient research that this thesis will contribute to addressing.

Chapter 2

Part 1 of Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework which informs this thesis' approach to analysing Shiʿi political participation, examining the theoretical literature concerning the role of political opposition under authoritarianism. Introducing the concept of liberalised autocracy, this chapter will show how authoritarian regimes use democratic instruments such as parliamentary elections and formal opposition parties as mechanisms for securing authoritarian rule and regime stability.

Part 2 of Chapter 2 outlines the interdisciplinary methodological approach developed to analyse the textual and visual social media data examined in this thesis's case study of the Shiʿi opposition's online activism. This section details the data collection and analysis methods employed in the social media study, and highlights how content analysis can be utilised to provide insights into the political ideology and mobilisation techniques of the Shiʿi opposition groups examined.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 analyses Bahrain's twentieth century imperial and post-independence history through the lens of authoritarian divide and rule, providing crucial contextualisation to this thesis's focus on the contemporary period of King Hamad's reign in Bahrain. This chapter demonstrates that a divide and rule strategy is

structurally-embedded within the Al Khalifa monarchy's approach to governance, and continues to be employed as means of managing Shiʿi political participation. Highlighting previous episodes of cross-sectarian and cross-ideological cooperation, including the 1954 National Union Committee, 1973 parliament and 1990s *Intifāḍa*, this chapter seeks to contextualise the 2011 uprising against the backdrop of Bahrain's lengthy history of contentious politics.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 discusses the emergence of a distinctly Shiʿi communal identity in Bahrain as a response to a number of socio-historical factors, and links it to the rise of political Shiʿism following the Iranian Revolution. Informed by the researcher's fieldwork interviews, this chapter considers some of the Bahraini Shiʿi community's core grievances, including discrimination in housing, education provision and employment and the government's naturalisation and citizenship policies, as key motivating factors behind present-day Shiʿi political activism.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 analyses the Shiʿi opposition groups which emerged during the era of King Hamad's National Action Charter, a period of political liberalisation which saw Shiʿi-Islamist societies participate in electoral politics for the first time since the dissolution of parliament in 1975. Considering al-Wefaq and the Haqq Movement, it draws on theories of liberalised autocracy and opposition under authoritarianism to analyse the impact of King Hamad's reforms on political participation and relations between the government and the Shiʿi opposition.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 provides a brief overview of the events of the 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising in Bahrain and its immediate aftermath. It examines the post-2011 landscape of Shiʿi political participation, characterised by the rise of antisystem youth activism, and considers the threats and opportunities this poses for the

established Shiʿi opposition societies. This chapter also analyses the role of social media and new communications technologies in the uprising and their impact on post-2011 Shiʿi activism.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 seeks to examine how Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition utilises online forms of activism in the increasingly repressive years following the Arab Spring-inspired uprising. This chapter presents the results of a content analysis study of the Facebook pages of three Shiʿi opposition groups, representing three different organisational structures and approaches to activism, throughout 2015. Shedding light on the ideological positions, aims and tactics of the then-tolerated al-Wefaq, the antisystem Haqq and the decentralised youth movement the February 14 Coalition, this chapter draws on framing theory to examine how each group approaches concepts such as religion, nationalism and sectarianism.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 overlays this thesis's theoretical discussion of opposition under authoritarianism and liberalised autocracy with the results of Chapter 7's social media study to consider the implications of Bahrain's post-2011 authoritarian transition for the political participation of the Shiʿi community. This chapter argues that a new status quo has developed in post-Arab Spring Bahrain, in which formal political participation has been limited to the regime-loyal opposition, and previously-tolerated groups have been forced to choose between regime co-optation and the support of their constituents.

Chapter 9

The concluding chapter emphasises this thesis's key findings and considers future trends in light of developments in the political participation of Bahrain's Shiʿi community. The contribution of the research presented in this thesis to both the theoretical literature concerning opposition under authoritarianism and the Bahrain-specific literature is highlighted, and recommendations surrounding the need for further research in these fields are proposed.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Part 1: Theorising Political Participation under Authoritarianism

The scholarship on political participation has traditionally focused on the role of formal opposition parties, civil society and social movements within democratic states, wherein opposition is institutionalised and acts to check the power of the government and push demands for reform from within the system. The concept of political participation however is arguably "critical to a comprehensive understanding of state-society relations"[96] irrespective of regime-type, including in countries such as Bahrain- which despite the introduction of liberalising reforms arguably remains an authoritarian state. Part 1 of this chapter will outline this thesis's theoretical framework, which is rooted in the literature concerning opposition under authoritarianism, as a means of informing this thesis's analysis of how shifting institutional structures within the regime impact popular political participation, and vice versa, within Bahrain's contentious politics.

Holger Albrecht has noted that when scholars have focused on political opposition within authoritarian regimes, they have typically approached the subject from the perspective of democratic transitions away from authoritarianism, or have used the opposition's presence to highlight an authoritarian regime's "repressive and co-optative mechanisms" in order to explain its rejection of democratisation.[97] This strong focus on democratisation is most apparent in early studies of authoritarian elections, which often contained an underlying assumption that elections *ipso facto* foster democratisation.[98] In fact, Gandhi and Lust-Okar have found that elections can act to bolster, rather than undermine, authoritarian rulers, and argue that "given that autocrats are so successful at using elections to perpetuate their rule, the theoretical links between authoritarian elections and democratisation would appear to be tenuous."[99] Rather than

[96] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 15.
[97] Albrecht, Holger, 'Political Opposition and Arab Authoritarianism' in: Albrecht, Holger (ed)., 2010. *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 24.
[98] Gandhi, Jennifer and Lust-Okar, Ellen, 'Elections Under Authoritarianism' *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 417.
[99] Gandhi and Lust-Okar, *Elections Under Authoritarianism,* 416.

examining the potential for opposition groups to overthrow authoritarian regimes, or viewing them as agents for democratisation, recent scholarship by Albrecht, Lust-Okar, Larbi Sadiki and others makes the case for treating political opposition within authoritarian regimes as an integral, and often stabilising, part of the political system.

Autonomous political participation was also typically viewed within the early literature as a feature of democratic politics. According to Albrecht, it was recognised that authoritarian regimes did not welcome autonomous political participation, and often went to great lengths to supress it, and as such it was assumed to be largely absent as a feature of autocratic political systems.[100] Albrecht argues that political participation in authoritarian regimes, including those of the Arab world, is diverse in scope and often plays an important political and social role unrelated to democratisation.[101] Ellen Lust-Okar, in her influential work on authoritarian elections in the Arab world, claimed that most prior studies "largely ignore formal institutions in authoritarian regimes," [102] including the political participation of legal and/or tolerated opposition groups, as they are seen as weak and beholden to the whims of authoritarian rulers, and are therefore assumed to be inconsequential. Lust-Okar argues that regime and formal opposition institutions matter because of the impact they have on political participation.[103] For example, she demonstrates that authoritarian regimes use institutional structures to influence the relationships that exist between different opposition groups in an effort to affect "when opposition groups will make sustained demands for political change and when they will not."[104] Lust-Okar also identified two further limitations in the existing literature on political participation under autocracy: "First, scholars have tended to overlook important relationships among various opposition groups. Second, they have largely ignored the extent to which state elites

[100] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 16.
[101] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 16.
[102] Lust-Okar, Ellen., 2005. *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents and Institutions,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1.
[103] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 1.
[104] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 23.

influence the relations among various oppositions groups, shoring up some while harshly repressing others."[105]

While a number of important studies by scholars including Lust-Okar, Albrecht and Quintan Wiktorowicz have sought to apply this new understanding of political participation and opposition under authoritarianism to the Middle East, most remain highly theoretical in scope, and few have attempted to apply this lens to case studies in the Arab Gulf. This thesis will examine the mechanisms through which Bahrain's regime, which has arguably oscillated between full-authoritarianism and liberalised autocracy, employs institutional structures and divide and rule strategies to maintain the status quo, and how this delicate balance was upset by the Arab Spring uprisings. It will closely examine the relationships between Bahrain's main Shiʿi opposition groups, and will use the theoretical literature on opposition under authoritarianism to consider how opposition-government and inter-opposition relations affected political participation before and after the 2011 uprising.

Authoritarianism and Liberalised Autocracy

In his excellent study on democratisation and electoral politics in the Arab world, Larbi Sadiki identifies the period of 1998-2008 as being broadly characterised by "election fetishism,"[106] referring to a rising trend of authoritarian elections which resulted in "an explosion of cosmetic elections everywhere but no substantive democracy to speak of anywhere" in the Middle East.[107] In line with this observation, the decade 2000-2010 in Bahrain was marked by a period of top-down economic and political liberalisation, which began following King Hamad's 1999 succession to the throne and escalated within the regional milieu of responses to US democracy promotion in the Middle East during the first years of the 'War on Terror.' Characterised by attempts to liberalise the political system from above, leading to a "broadening of

[105] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 23.
[106] Sadiki, Larbi., 2009. *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections without Democracy* Oxford: Oxford University Press, ix.
[107] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 107.

the social base of the regime without changing its structure,"[108] various scholars have referred to this phenomenon as "competitive authoritarianism,"[109] "inclusivist-liberal authoritarianism"[110] and "manipulated pluralism."[111] The term for this phenomenon which is arguably the most widespread however is liberalised autocracy, attributed to Daniel Brumberg. According to Brumberg, a system of liberalised autocracy is characterised by the following:

In liberalized autocracies… Rulers permit (or even encourage) a wide range of groups to mobilize through parliaments and state-managed electoral systems, professional syndicates, religious institutions, NGOs, universities, media outlets, and even the courts. Amid the fragmentation that this breeds, rulers play one group against another, helped by the patronage ties that they maintain with various groups. The resulting jostle of interests leads to an equilibrium that can endure so long as no one group gains enough power to threaten the vital interests of state actors or rival regime-protected groups.[112]

In other words, rather than being a step toward democratisation, authoritarian regimes use democratic instruments such as elections, parliaments and the establishment of formal political parties as mechanisms for securing authoritarian rule and regime stability. The veneer of democratisation enables an authoritarian regime to project an image of openness and reform to critics both at home and abroad, whilst maintaining its exclusive control over policy making and the executive arm of government.[113] In this sense, authoritarian elections are "Janus-faced,"[114] allowing liberalised-autocratic regimes to "possess the democratic

[108] Pridham, Geoffrey., 1995. *Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe,* Dartmouth: Aldershot, 66.
[109] Levitsky, Steven and Way, Lucan A., 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
[110] Albrecht, *Political Opposition and Arab Authoritarianism*, 21.
[111] Zartman, IW, 'Opposition as Support of the State,' in: Dawisha A and Zartman, IW (eds)., 1988. *Beyond Coercion: The Durability of the Arab State,* London: Croom Helm, 64.
[112] Brumberg, Daniel, 'Transforming the Arab World's Protection-Racket Politics' *Journal of Democracy,* 24:2 (2013): 90-91.
[113] Schmidmayr, Michael, 'Islamist Engagement in Contentious Politics' in: Albrecht, Holger (ed)., 2010. *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 173.
[114] Trejo, *The Ballot and the Street,* 334.

process"[115] and employ democratic elements to "reassert the authority of ruling families"[116] whilst "evading policies that could affect durable democratisation."[117] Bahrain is often cited as an example of a liberalised autocracy *par excellence*,[118] and this thesis will pay particular attention to the changing patterns of political participation evidenced during the 2000-2010 liberalisation period, the stability of which was radically (and potentially irrevocably) disrupted by the 2011 uprising. In conceiving of pre-Arab Spring Bahrain as a liberalised autocracy, Chapter 5 of this thesis will examine this period in detail in an effort to explain the behaviour of both formal and underground Shi'i opposition groups within Bahrain's then-liberalising political system. It is however important to first consider the broader role of political opposition under authoritarian and liberalised-autocratic regimes.

In his classic study of political opposition in democratic states, Robert Dahl observed that opposition is typically permitted to emerge when incumbents consider "that an attempt to coerce the opposition is likely to fail, or… even if the attempt were to succeed, the costs of coercion would exceed the gains."[119] Authoritarian regimes make similar calculations, although their understanding of what constitutes acceptable coercion typically differs from that of democratic governments. Albrecht classifies opposition groups in authoritarian political systems into three types, based on their objectives and their level of acceptance of authoritarian regime structures:

1. The "regime-loyal opposition" which is willing to operate according to the rules of the game established by the authoritarian regime, and typically differentiates itself by opposing specific policies.

[115] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization,* 93.
[116] Tetreault, Mary Ann; Okruhlik, Gwenn and Kapiszewski, Andrzej, 'Twenty-First-Century Politics in the Arab Gulf States' in: Tetreault, Mary Ann; Okruhlik, Gwenn and Kapiszewski, Andrzej (eds)., 2011. *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 5.
[117] Tetreault, Mary Ann, 'Permanent Interests, Variable Policies: The United States in the Gulf' in: Tetreault, Mary Ann; Okruhlik, Gwenn and Kapiszewski, Andrzej (eds)., 2011. *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 261.
[118] Wright, Steven, 'Fixing the Kingdom: Political Evolution and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain' Occasional Paper 3, Georgetown *University School of Foreign Service in Qatar*, (2008) http://qspace.qu.edu.qa/bitstream/handle/10576/10759/No_3_Fixing_the_Kingdom.pdf?sequence=1, 1.
[119] Dahl, Robert., 1966. *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, xii.

2. The “tolerated opposition” which also works within the existing political system however is less easily co-opted and is often content to occupy the role of a permanent opposition.
3. The “antisystem opposition” which opposes the structure of the regime itself, and is typically illegal or unauthorised.[120] The degree of mutual recognition between the government and opposition present in the first two categories is absent from this form of opposition.

Zartman has advanced a similar categorisation of authoritarian opposition, replacing ‘regime-loyal’ and ‘tolerated’ with a distinction between “tame” and “vocal” oppositions.[121] He has added a fourth category to this list which is relevant to a Middle Eastern context, the “corporate opposition,” which typically exists in the form of professional syndicates or labour unions which become involved in politics not to oppose the government per se, but to advance their members’ policy interests.[122] Figure 1, adapted from Albrecht,[123] sets out these forms of opposition relative to the position of the government in a system of liberalised autocracy. All four forms of opposition have been active in Bahraini politics, however this thesis’ focus on specifically Shiʿi patterns of political participation ensures that the behaviour of the tolerated and antisystem opposition groups will receive the greatest attention.

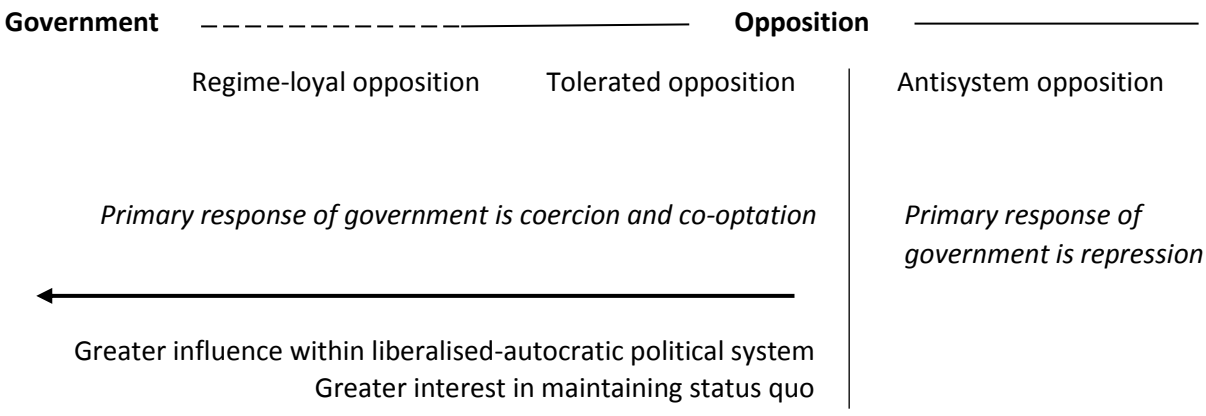

Figure 1: Opposition under liberalised autocracy

[120] Albrecht, *Political Opposition and Arab Authoritarianism*, 21.
[121] Zartman, *Opposition as Support of the State*, 77.
[122] Zartman, *Opposition as Support of the State*, 78-79.
[123] Albrecht, *Political Opposition and Arab Authoritari*anism, 22.

While many authoritarian states include an element of regime-loyal opposition, and often feature antisystem opposition groups which are typically subject to severe repression, liberalised autocracies are characterised by an expansion of the tolerated opposition, and the mechanisms through which the regime maintains power are more varied in scope.[124] According to Brumberg, a fully authoritarian political system is "simpler to run, as it does not require constantly adjusting relations among many players. But it is also less resilient, for it leaves the autocracy dependent on at most a few key allies."[125] In addition, authoritarian regimes are typically more heavily reliant on repression as a means of ensuring regime stability, and prolonged periods of repression can lead to the formation of radical antisystem opposition groups which resist co-optation and seek to overthrow the regime itself.[126] In contrast, liberalised autocracies rely on "periodic renegotiations of political alliances and arrangements" between opposition groups and the regime,[127] often manifest in divide-and-rule strategies, as their primary means of ensuring regime stability. In liberalised autocracies, participation in and influence over formal politics acts as a carrot offered to the opposition, and repression is drawn on as a stick only when necessary. According to Paczynska, "repression is not an effective mechanism for maintaining a liberalised autocratic system,"[128] however as we will see in the case of Bahrain, it remains ever-present as both a coercive mechanism and as a last resort if a regime miscalculates or external factors force its hand.

Liberalised autocracies are typically characterised by a relatively free media and an active civil society, with criticism and debate of government policies permitted as long as they do not challenge the rules of the game established by the regime. Municipal and parliamentary elections are allowed, and are often celebrated by a regime as evidence of its progressiveness, however electoral rules typically favour the government and in some cases restrictions are placed on the ability of opposition groups to organise and campaign.[129] Parliaments often perform an advisory role only, and the cabinet and other executive

[124] Paczynska, Agnieszka. 'The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism' in: Albrecht, Holger (ed)., 2010. *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 39.
[125] Brumberg, *Transforming the Arab World's Protection-Racket Politics,* 91.
[126] Brumberg, *Transforming the Arab World's Protection-Racket Politics,* 91.
[127] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 38.
[128] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 43.
[129] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 38.

positions are typically appointed rather than contested by the opposition in elections. Nevertheless, the elections themselves are usually considered fair and "electoral contests can sometimes produce unpredictable and, from the regime's perspective, undesirable results."[130]

Whilst the tolerated opposition groups which emerge under liberalised autocracy operate independently from the regime, government control of the rules of the political process has a direct impact on "which opposition groups exist and how these groups interact with each other."[131] Liberalised-autocratic regimes are able to influence when opposition groups form coalitions and when they split from each other, as well as when opposition groups decide to join or remove themselves from the political system, by employing a combination of co-optation and coercion and controlling the parameters of formal political participation.[132] Government rules and institutions therefore help determine the nature of the opposition's involvement in politics. Under liberalised autocracy, opposition groups first must decide whether they are willing to accept a restrictive participatory structure, which aligns with the regime's interests, in exchange for some influence over policy-making and the ability to stand for election, or whether they want to reject the rules of the game and oppose the political system itself, which leads to repression and political exclusion.[133] Albrecht argues that the participation of the tolerated opposition within liberalised autocracies can be explained through a "sitting-at-the-table rationale."[134] More pragmatic opposition groups conclude that "access to the political arena, either to realise material gains or to challenge particular policy areas" is more likely to further their interests than adopting "a more radical and possibly violent form of contention,"[135] knowing that the regime retains the option of employing the repressive measures which characterise fully-authoritarian polities in the event that an opposition group crosses its participatory red lines.

[130] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 38.
[131] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 34-35.
[132] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 35.
[133] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 143.
[134] Albrecht, Holger, 'Introduction' in: Albrecht, Holger (ed)., 2010. *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 7.
[135] Albrecht, *Introduction*, 7.

One reason some consider liberalised autocracy to be a stable form of governance[136] is that it offers benefits to both the regime and the opposition for broadening political participation. Paczynska refers to what she terms "the loyalty strategy," which suggests that "some kind of bargain was struck between the challengers and the regime that both sides thought met some of their fundamental interests."[137] Opposition groups may aim to change the political system from within, but by agreeing to participate they necessarily abandon any prior demands for a fairer or more equitable system, and as such validate political structures which were designed to maintain a status quo in which the government is dominant. The regime therefore has an interest in sustaining the tolerated opposition, and as such enables it to wield some influence (even if only symbolic) over governance and/or policy-making, allowing opposition groups to "present their constituencies with some visible successes"[138] as long as they pose no threat to the regime's grip on power. One advantage of this strategy for a liberalised-autocratic regime is that if a tolerated opposition group believes its interests are being met, it will become "reluctant to push for further political reforms that may undermine these particularistic gains."[139] While the tolerated opposition remains independent from the government and cannot be seen to be completely co-opted, granting it concessions which it may struggle to retain in a fully democratic system ensures that the opposition maintains a direct interest in the continuation of the status quo, which ultimately serves to strengthen the regime.

Another benefit to the regime of opposition participation is that it channels societal grievances into an institutionalised setting, providing an outlet from within the system which is much less likely to result in illegal or antisystem mobilisation against the government.[140] Allowing "contested, yet fully managed elections" acts to reduce political tensions before they develop to challenge a regime's grip on power,[141] particularly during difficult or politically-unpredictable periods such as, in the case of Bahrain, monarchical succession and regional threats from Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Zartman has also argued that the

[136] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 40.
[137] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 42.
[138] Schmidmayr, *Islamist Engagement in Contentious Politics*, 173.
[139] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 41.
[140] Zartman, *Opposition as Support of the State*, 61-87.
[141] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 130-131.

tolerated opposition can play a useful role as an intermediary between everyday citizens and the monarchical and political elites,[142] and claims that in some countries the opposition has even been used as an "official devil's advocate" to communicate messages to external powers such as the US and Israel which the regime itself did not wish to formally endorse.[143]

Liberalised autocracy also serves to bolster regime legitimacy in the eyes of Western benefactors, charities and institutions- allowing for elections and legalising formal opposition groups "helps attract political rents, distributed not along strategic or military considerations but along ideational sentiments."[144] In Bahrain for example, the United States praised the Al Khalifa monarchy's liberalising policies, and has often acted to pressure Bahraini opposition groups to participate in the country's electoral politics, even during the more repressive post-Arab Spring era when the opposition appeared to have little to gain by doing so.[145] According to Parolin, "formal compliance with legal democratic standards provided the Bahraini regime with a high degree of apparent legitimacy," winning the Al Khalifa monarchs "commendations on the international stage while its opponents were dismissed as rabble-rousers."[146]

Modelling Opposition under Liberalised Autocracy

Ellen Lust-Okar has developed a useful model for explaining regime-opposition relations in liberalised autocracies such as Bahrain, based around the concept of "Structures of Contestation" which can be constructed as exclusive, inclusive, unified or divided.[147] Structures of Contestation are essentially the outcome of regime strategies toward the opposition, and are formed in particular "through the decision to grant or withhold access to the political system."[148] Unified Structures of Contestation occur when a regime enables all opposition groups to participate formally in politics (inclusive), or excludes all opposition groups

[142] Zartman, *Opposition as Support of the State*, 64.
[143] Zartman, *Opposition as Support of the State*, 75.
[144] Albrecht, *Political Opposition and Arab Authoritari*anism, 28.
[145] Kinninmont, Jane, 'Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond' in: Selvik, Kjetil and Utvik, Bjorn Olav (eds)., 2016. *Oil States in the New Middle East,* London: Routledge, 123-4.
[146] Parolin, Gianluca P. 'Reweaving the Myth of Bahrain's Parliamentary Experience,' in: Tetreault, Mary Ann; Okruhlik, Gwenn and Kapiszewski, Andrzej (eds)., 2011. *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 39.
[147] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 75.
[148] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 75.

from politics (exclusive) as in the case of totalitarian regimes. Divided Structures of Contestation involve the inclusion of some opposition groups in the political system and the exclusion of others- see Figure 2 (adapted from Lust-Okar).[149] Whether or not an opposition group is included or excluded is related to whether it is perceived by the regime as being moderate or radical, however this largely depends on the nature of its demands on the government and does not necessarily align with broader societal perceptions of the group's ideology.[150]

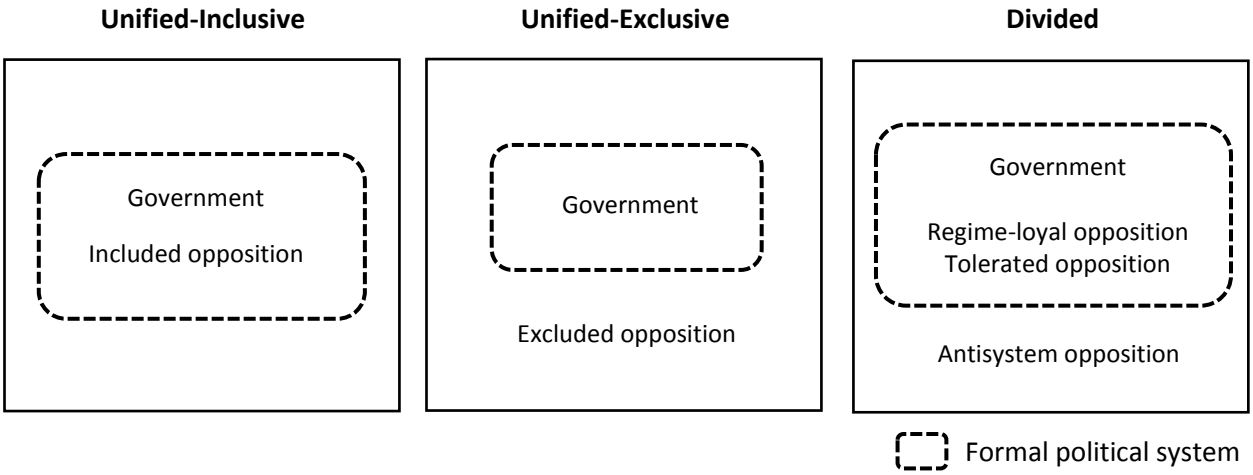

Figure 2: Structures of Contestation

Within Unified-Inclusive Structures of Contestation, Lust-Okar argues that coalitions between opposition groups, all of which participate in the political system, are advantageous to the interests of the opposition. This is because, unlike say cooperation between the included opposition and an antisystem opposition group, coalitions within Unified-Inclusive Structures of Contestation continue to operate according to the regime's rules, but are likely to have more clout collectively in interactions with the regime than if their interests were represented separately.[151] In addition, in Unified-Inclusive Structures of Contestation the regime has an interest in co-opting the more radical groups within the system and strengthening the more

[149] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 39.
[150] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 69.
[151] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 96.

moderate regime-loyal groups, so as to shift the opposition's demands as a whole closer toward maintaining the status quo.[152]

The situation is however more complex in the case of Divided Structures of Contestation, in which some opposition groups are included within the political system and others are excluded from it- the model which most closely characterises Bahraini politics during the 2000-2010 period of liberalisation. Rather than attempt to moderate radical groups, in Divided Structures of Contestation it is in the regime's interests to balance excluded groups with those included within the system, in order to minimise the ability of both to advance their demands[153]- a classic divide and rule strategy. Lust-Okar shows that included opposition groups, encompassing both the regime-loyal opposition and the tolerated opposition, typically adopt a more conciliatory approach to the regime when their support is threatened by more radical, excluded or antisystem opposition groups. As such, "moderates who previously challenged incumbent elites may choose not to do so when radical groups enter, even if incumbents have not accommodated their own demands."[154] This dynamic typically becomes more pronounced during periods of political or economic crisis, which often result in growing popular support for radical or antisystem groups.

In Unified-Inclusive Structures of Contestation, coalitions of opposition groups tend to raise their demands on the government during crises, as the regime's weakness means they are more likely to win concessions, whilst not posing a threat to the political system itself.[155] However, in Divided Structures of Contestation, included opposition groups become more reluctant to make demands of the government during periods of crisis. According to Lust-Okar, there are two reasons for this. Firstly, included groups are unwilling to exploit the crisis as a means of threatening the regime or extracting concessions because they fear the regime will punish them by removing the privileges they gained through their participation in the political system.[156] Secondly, they fear that rising popular support for excluded opposition groups during periods of crisis will

[152] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 153.
[153] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 6.
[154] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 129.
[155] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 5.
[156] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 5.

erode their own support, which will also impact their influence with the regime and their ability to make demands on the government. Therefore, in situations in which radical or antisystem groups are able to mobilise political support from outside the system, regime-loyal and tolerated opposition groups "will refrain from mobilising against the government… They prefer maintaining the status quo to either losing the privileges they have achieved or affording currently excluded groups greater influence."[157]

In constructing Divided Structures of Contestation, liberalised-autocratic regimes are therefore able to ensure that included opposition groups act to strengthen regime stability during crises. In order to maintain such an advantage, it is in the regime's interests to permit the more radical antisystem groups to compete for support with the included political opposition. The regime therefore takes steps to balance both forms of opposition, and periodically employs repression against excluded groups to prevent them from accruing too much power and influence relative to the regime-loyal and tolerated opposition.[158] The transformation of Bahrain into a liberalised autocracy in the decade prior to the 2011 uprising led to a system of political participation based on a Divided Structure of Contestation, which enabled the Al Khalifa regime to balance tolerated and antisystem Shiʿi opposition groups as a means of forestalling meaningful reform and strengthening the status quo.

This thesis will draw on the theoretical framework of opposition under authoritarianism, outlined in the above discussion, in its examination of the cycles of contention which underpin and inform the Shiʿi community's political participation, in particular during the period leading up to and following the 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising. Chapter 3 provides crucial context in support of this approach by critically examining Bahrain's historic cycles of contention, which prompted the liberalisation policies that saw the country transition from absolute monarchy to liberalised autocracy during the 2000s. Chapter 5 discusses the 2000-2010 period of liberalisation in depth, focusing on the role of the Shiʿi tolerated and antisystem opposition groups within King Hamad's liberalised-autocratic political system. Chapter 6 considers the shifts

[157] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 5.
[158] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 6.

which took place within opposition political participation and government-opposition relations on account of the Arab Spring, and Chapter 8 takes stock of the past fifteen years of Bahraini history, arguing that Bahrain has transitioned from liberalised-autocracy back to full-authoritarianism. If Bahrain has abandoned liberalisation and reverted back to authoritarianism, what does this mean for the political opposition and the Shiʿi community more broadly? Chapter 7 offers a practical case study exploring issues of political participation and opposition under authoritarianism examined in the theoretical literature through an analysis of the mechanisms by which some of the most influential Shiʿi opposition groups endeavour to mobilise supporters and make demands of the government in the wake of the post-2011 crackdown. The following section will provide an outline of this thesis' methodological approach, with a particular focus on the methodology underpinning this case study.

Part 2: Methodology

This thesis is informed by two separate primary source datasets collected throughout 2015 and 2016. The first dataset is comprised of more than sixty semi-structured fieldwork interviews conducted by the researcher in Bahrain and among the Bahraini exile community in Australia. AlShehabi has asserted that "building up social capital via personal contacts and word of mouth [is] the most effective way of obtaining the trust of the diverse communities in a small country like Bahrain,"[159] and the researcher sought to replicate this approach during her in-country period of fieldwork. Because cultivating relationships and gaining the trust of participants is crucial, particularly as this research project touches on sensitive and contentious issues, the researcher engaged in months of preparation and network-building prior to commencing fieldwork in Bahrain.

The majority of interview subjects were Bahraini activists, participants in the 2011 uprising, and/or members of political societies or youth movements of a range of ages, sects, genders and socio-economic backgrounds. Most interviews were conducted in English, and the interviewees' names have not been

[159] AlShehabi, Omar Hesham, 'Divide and Rule in Bahrain and the Elusive Pursuit for a United Front: The Experience of the Constitutive Committee and the 1972 Uprising' *Historical Materialism* 21:1 (2013): 115.

provided to protect their anonymity and personal security. Interview data was coded and analysed using the Nvivo software package. Relevant primary source documents were also utilised, including legislation, political manifestos and statements, leaked diplomatic cables and material sourced from the official websites of government departments and opposition organisations.

The second dataset consists of a comprehensive archive compiled throughout 2015 of the Facebook posts of three Bahraini Shiʿi opposition groups: the then-tolerated opposition society al-Wefaq and the antisystem groups Haqq and the February 14 Coalition. The archive was put together using the social media data mining tool Quintly, which captured the textual content of all posts and additional data including time, date, unique URL, and any attached videos and images. The archive's textual data was translated from Arabic into English by the researcher, and was analysed using the framing and content analysis method, techniques borrowed from media and communications research.

Whilst this thesis' approach is primarily rooted in political science, it became clear that additional methodological tools were required to examine the rise of social media activism in Bahrain, a crucial component of contemporary Shiʿi political participation. As such, in building the case study of Shiʿi online political participation featured in Chapter 7, a media and communications research method was adopted. Applying an interdisciplinary approach to analysing political participation in virtual spaces enabled the researcher to construct a methodologically rigorous study capable of providing insights into the political ideology and mobilisation techniques of Shiʿi online activists appropriate to this thesis' aims. Indeed a consideration of the changing patterns of Shiʿi political participation in Bahrain would be incomplete without evaluating the role of social media in contemporary Shiʿi activism, particularly in the repressive post-Arab Spring political environment which has significantly constrained offline forms of opposition mobilisation. This thesis's incorporation of a media and communications methodology into its analysis of government-opposition dynamics in Bahrain also addresses criticism expressed by some political science scholars that increasing segmentation within the discipline has prevented "scholars of cognate areas of

political contention" from "profiting from each other's work."[160] The next section will outline the framing and content analysis methodology in greater depth, and will explain how a communications approach can be used to reveal important information about the online political participation of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition.

Framing Online Activism: The Content Analysis Method

The case study of the social media activism of a number of Bahraini Shiʿi opposition groups presented in Chapter 7 employs the framing and content analysis method. Framing can broadly be defined as the process of selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality" in order to "make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."[161] The framing method breaks down the ways in which a text communicates meaning in order to analyse the political, social and ideological assumptions underpinning it. According to Entman, this can be either a conscious or unconscious process, and is achieved by increasing the salience of particular frames over others, typically through "placement or repetition, or by associating them with culturally familiar symbols."[162] Media outlets regularly draw on framing techniques such as selection and salience to communicate a particular ideological position held by the creator of the content, referred to by Judith Butler as "the instrumentalising of certain versions of reality."[163] Numerous studies have shown the relationship between the media's framing of certain policy issues and public opinion,[164] and a similar understanding of the ways in which framing decisions underpin traditional journalism can logically be extended to social media, in which similar ingredients are present. Much like an editor or producer, the owner of a Facebook account or

[160] McAdam, Doug and Tarrow, Sidney 'Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements' *Perspectives on Politics* 8:2 (2010): 529.
[161] Entman, Robert. 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm' *Journal of Communication* 43:4 (1993): 52.
[162] Entman, *Framing*, 53.
[163] Butler, Judith., 2009. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 73.
[164] See for example: Fahmy, Shahira and Kim, Daekyung 'Picturing the Iraq War: Constructing the Image of War in the British and US Press' *The International Communication Gazette* 70:6 (2008): 443 -462; Abdul-Nabi, Zainab 'Based on the Peace Journalism Model: Analysis of Al-Jazeera's Coverage of Bahrain's Uprising and Syria's Chemical Attack' *Global Media and Communication* 11:3 (2015): 271-302.

the moderator of an online forum goes through the same process of curating content and employing selection and salience to emphasise certain frames over others.

Fahmy and Kim, in their study of the US and UK media's visual representation of the 2003 Iraq war, also emphasise the critical role selection itself plays in the framing of news events, arguing that image selection transforms photojournalism into "socially constructed products" which depict "only a slice of reality."[165] Focusing largely on news media, a significant body of research exists demonstrating that journalists and editors apply selection and framing as a means of emphasising particular events or stories over others, informed by factors such as social assumptions and political views.[166] Indeed Fahmy and Kim's study shows that "when specific visual frames dominate the narrative of a specific event, they indicate that the majority of the target audience would be more susceptible to come to congruent understandings of that event."[167] As such, "a careful examination of visual topics and the extent of their use can reveal much about… organising ideas and… visual framing choices."[168] Recognising the importance, and indeed centrality, of visual elements to social media communication, the research presented in Chapter 7 analyses visual framing techniques alongside its analysis of the posts' textual content.

In addition to its widespread use in media research, framing is also often applied to the study of social movements, and is seen as an important tool for activist groups to communicate their message to followers both online and offline. One common way to achieve framing resonance is to draw on "indigenous cultural symbols, language and identities" which are "more likely to reverberate with constituents,"[169] motivating them to mobilise and take up a particular cause. This is of particular relevance in the Arab world, which has a greater tendency to "rely… on understood cultural distinctions to communicate messages to members of

[165] Fahmy and Kim, *Picturing the Iraq War*, 445.
[166] For examples relevant to the Middle East, see: Fahmy and Kim, *Picturing the Iraq War*; Ferrero, Christopher 'The Iran Narrative: The Ideational Context of US Foreign Policy Decision-Making toward the Islamic Republic of Iran,' *Iran and the Caucasus* 17, (2013): 41-76.
[167] Fahmy and Kim, *Picturing the Iraq War*, 445.
[168] Fahmy and Kim, *Picturing the Iraq War*, 449.
[169] Wiktorowicz, Quintan, 'Introduction' in: Wiktorowicz, Quintan (ed)., 2004. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 16.

in-groups."[170] Prior to the advent of social media, Wiktorowicz argued that participants in contentious politics typically produce "mobilisation frames rooted in symbols, discourse and practice, often designed to evoke a sense of injustice to encourage activism."[171] For many activists, mobilising online is a natural extension of this, and in post-Arab Spring Bahrain online activism arguably at times surpasses offline activism.

Repetition is a common means of measuring the salience of a particular frame within a text. The content analysis method is often used in communications research to decode the framing decisions underpinning a piece of textual or visual media, based on the assumption that repetition is an indicator of importance and/or preoccupation. Content analysis can be broadly defined as a method for aggregating inferences about the content of a set of visual or textual data, "a way of asking a fixed set of questions unfalteringly… in such a way as to produce countable results."[172] Content is broken down into codifiable units and categorised, using frequency as a measure of importance; assuming that greater frequency indicates greater preoccupation with a concept or topic.[173] A detailed coding manual was developed to streamline the coding process, including definitions of terms and examples of each coding category. The coding process was first tested on a sample of data made up of posts from each of the opposition groups across a period of two hours, and adjustments to the scope and definitions of categories were made accordingly. A semiotic approach to visual content was used in the coding process, in which a post was categorised thematically according to its manifest content, as opposed to its more subjective connotative or interpretative meaning.[174] The Facebook posts were therefore only coded when their content explicitly matched a thematic category set out in the coding manual. In order to eliminate the issue of inter-coder

[170] Elmasry, Mohamad Hamas; Auter, Philip J and Peuchaud, Sheila Rose, 'Facebook Across Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Content Analysis of Egyptian, Qatari, and American Student Facebook Pages,' *Journal of Middle East Media,* 10 (2014): 34.
[171] Wiktorowicz, *Introduction*, 3. Chapter 4 presents a broad discussion of this within a Bahraini context.
[172] Carney, TF., 1972. *Content Analysis: A Technique for Systematic Inference from Communications.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 6.
[173] Weber, Robert Philip., 1985. *Basic Content Analysis.* Sage: Beverly Hills, 52.
[174] Ahuvia, Aaron, 'Traditional, Interpretive and Reception Based Content Analysis: Improving the Ability of Content Analysis to Address Issues of Pragmatic and Theoretical Concern.' *Social Indicators Research* 54:2 (2000): 141.

reliability, often identified as a potential limitation to the validity of the content analysis method,[175] the researcher acted as the sole coder of all three social media datasets.

The three datasets were collected using social media data mining software, which created a complete archive of all the Facebook posts of each opposition group across the study's three data collection days; including photographs, graphics and videos originating on Facebook or embedded via a third party website. Each post was then coded individually by the researcher according to the categorisation rules set out in the coding manual. The units of analysis were the posts' raw textual data and any associated image files (photographs and graphics). A graphic was defined as any image which has undergone some form of obvious editing, such as a photo collage or graphic design material. Some graphics featured text in addition to imagery, for example in martyrdom posters or promotional material for an upcoming protest. Links to other webpages, which may contain further textual or visual data, were not included in the study. Only re-posts or embedded visual media from other social media sites, in which the text or image itself appeared on the Facebook page of the account, were examined in the study.

Conclusion

This thesis' theoretical approach to examining the changing nature of Shi'i political participation in Bahrain, and in particular its focus on opposition-government and inter-opposition relations as a factor acting to either strengthen or challenge the authoritarian status quo, in many ways compliments the research methodology also outlined in this chapter. In understanding political participation to be "the public formulation of political opinions,"[176] and emphasising the existence of informal and antisystem forms of participation, this thesis' case study of online political activism in Bahrain has the potential to provide important insights into the ways in which new media technologies have impacted the behaviour of opposition groups in authoritarian regimes. Indeed this thesis' theoretical discussion of inter-opposition dynamics under authoritarianism and liberalised autocracy, outlined in Part 1 of this chapter, provides an

[175] Ahuvia, *Traditional, Interpretive and Reception Based Content Analysis*, 144.
[176] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation*, 17.

important framework for interpreting Chapter 7's analysis of the social media activism of several tolerated and antisystem opposition organisations. The broader theoretical implications of some of the trends observed in this thesis' case study of Bahraini Shiʿi online activism will be outlined in the latter part of this thesis, which will argue that Bahrain has abandoned liberalised autocracy in favour of a retreat to authoritarianism in the wake of the Arab Spring uprising.

Chapter 3: Cycles of Contention in Bahrain- A Historical Overview

A number of scholars have remarked that Bahrain's politics progresses in cycles, or "recurrent periods of contestation,"[177] characterised by outbreaks of social unrest and collective action against the country's rulers or their policies, which is at times placated by negotiation and compromise, but more often culminates in the reassertion of authoritarian repression- only for the cycle to begin again. Such cycles have been evident recently in a number of Arab states, in particular due to the trend of neoliberal economic reforms which opened up some countries in the region from the 1990s, and were often accompanied by real or symbolic efforts at democratisation. Sadiki has remarked that this regional trend "seems to be following a cyclical trajectory" but that "elections have not thus far halted the return to the point of departure: autocracy by the same ruling elites and unchecked rule by the same royal houses."[178] In other words, authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have used these cycles, or have perhaps engineered them, as a means of maintaining their grip on power. Tilly and Tarrow have sought to define the phenomenon, which they refer to as "cycles of contention:"

Cycles of contention consist of many episodes in the same or related polities, some of them intersecting, but many responding to the same changes in opportunities and threats. In most such cycles, contention begins moderately and in interaction with institutions… Although it sometimes produces reform, and sometimes revolution, it usually ends with the main challengers being reintegrated within the system.[179]

In the case of Bahrain, the latest cycle of contention, which began with King Hamad's liberalising reforms of 2000-2010 and returned to its authoritarian starting point with their post-Arab Spring undoing, was but the most recent in a long history of struggle over the nature of citizens' participation in politics and governance. In Bahrain these cycles are generated by changes in the power dynamics between the regime and various opposition groups, and a shifting political opportunity structure whose volatility reflects the seeming

[177] Coates Ulrichsen, *Bahrain's Uprising*, 1.
[178] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 61.
[179] Tilly, Charles and Tarrow, Sidney., 2015. *Contentious Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 119.

inability (or perhaps unwillingness) of the Al Khalifa regime to subdue its domestic critics. This position sits in sharp contrast to some of the other more stable Gulf states, and can be explained in part by Bahrain's diverse citizen population- unlike some of its more demographically-homogenous neighbours, the Sunni Al Khalifa monarchy has long positioned itself in opposition to its majority-Shi'i subjects in ethnic, religious and class terms. This has engendered a tendency to pursue the politics of divide and rule,[180] which by definition has structured conflict into the political system and has produced cycles of contention whereby "repressive and more liberal phases alternate at short intervals."[181]

The politics of divide and rule typically occur when "a single actor exploits coordination problems among a group by making discriminatory offers or discriminatory threats,"[182] such as an authoritarian regime's selective use of both carrot and stick to subdue opposition to the status quo. Divide and rule acts to stimulate cycles of contention as "conflict can be started strategically by the currently ruling elite in order to affect people's beliefs and to sustain its own power."[183] This is true for both authoritarian regimes and liberalised autocracies, even though the mechanisms used to sustain a divide and rule approach differ according to regime-type. In examining the cycles of contention which have punctuated Bahrain's twentieth-century imperial and post-independence history, this chapter will demonstrate that Bahrain owes much of its volatility to a divide and rule strategy embedded in the Al Khalifa monarchy's approach to governance from as early as its days as a British protected state. Bahrain's most recent contentious cycle, which culminated in the 2011 Arab Spring protest movement, must be understood against the backdrop of a century-long struggle over the nature and extent of popular participation in governance, and the Al Khalifa monarchs' historic use of divide and rule to entrench their position as absolute rulers.

[180] The historical detail and discussion surrounding divide and rule presented in this chapter has been published by the author in the following research paper: Moore-Gilbert, Kylie, 'From Protected State to Protection Racket: Contextualising Divide and Rule in Bahrain,' *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 6:2 (2016): 163-181.
[181] Albrecht, *Introduction*, 10.
[182] Posner, Eric; Spier Kathryn and Vermeule, Adrian, 'Divide and Conquer,' *Journal of Legal Analysis* 2.2 (2010): 418.
[183] Alder, Simon and Wang, Yikai, 'Divide and Rule: An Origin of Polarization and Ethnic Conflict,' *Paper presented at the University of Zurich Working Paper Series*, Zurich, 29 June 2014. Available via: www.econ.uzh.ch/ipcdp/Papers/ipcdp_wp423.pdf, 7.

Imperial Divide and Rule: Sowing the Seeds

The Al Khalifa tribe has ruled Bahrain since 1783, when it conquered the island from al-Zubarah in modern-day Qatar, and later succeeded in consolidating its rule despite attacks from both Oman and Wahhabi-aligned[184] Saudi tribes in the nineteenth century.[185] The Al Khalifa entered into a series of agreements with the British East India Company and British government of India between 1820 and 1892 that gradually transformed Bahrain into a protected state, with its foreign affairs and defence ceded to Britain in exchange for support against various internal and external threats. Britain consolidated its stranglehold on the reins of government in the early 20th century by installing a series of powerful political advisers (*mustashārūn*), who came to wield effective control over all aspects of governance. The most notable was Sir Charles Belgrave, British Adviser to the Bahraini government from 1926-1957, who was effectively the state's de facto prime minister, chief of police and chief judge.[186]

Great Britain's efforts to maintain influence over its protected states in the Gulf- Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the Trucial States (now the United Arab Emirates) typically involved leveraging disputes between various regional monarchs and manipulating the internal dynamics of the royal court. In Bahrain they depended on the Al Khalifa and other largely-Sunni elites to manage the island's day to day affairs, which contributed to the institutionalisation of pre-existing sectarian divides within contemporary Bahrain. British imperial policy tended to favour co-opting local elites, who were often identified on the basis of presumed ethnic cleavages (which reflected a "British structuring of social reality"[187]) and entrenching a stratified social order which was usually more fluid, or may not have existed at all, in pre-colonial times. Blanton et al assert that in this way, "the British structured ethnic conflict into their system,"[188] which meant that

[184] Wahhabism is a fundamentalist reform movement which emerged on the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century. An alliance between Wahhabi religious leaders and the al-Saud tribe led to Wahhabism's adoption as Saudi Arabia's official interpretation of Islam following the founding of the modern Saudi state in 1932.
[185] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 20.
[186] Radhi, Hassan Ali., 2003. *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain: A Historical and Analytical Study*, The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 20.
[187] Polliss, Adamantia. 'Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial Policy: The Case of Cyprus,' *Comparative Politics* 5:4 (1973): 578.
[188] Blanton, Robert; T. David Mason and Brian Athow, 'Colonial Style and Post-Colonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa' *Journal of Peace Research*, 38:4 (2001): 480.

disparities such as class divides inevitably came to be understood through the frame of ethnicity. As such, "colonial rule frequently fostered the conditions for the later eruption of intergroup conflict."[189] Whilst sectarian stratification certainly existed under the Al Khalifa prior to the imperial period, some have argued that "discrimination between the Shias and Sunnis was deliberately intended by the [British] Political Residents."[190]

Divide and rule was in many ways the cornerstone of British policy in governing its protected states, whose administration was typically under-resourced and lacked the manpower to impose imperial authority solely by force.[191] Posner et al note that divide and rule tactics were attractive to the British "because it is cheaper to set factions… fighting among themselves, and if necessary to defeat them piecemeal, than it is to defeat them as a unified enemy."[192] This method was utilised to great effect in British India, to which government the British advisor in Bahrain reported. During the imperial period the Al Khalifa, whilst nominally governing the then-emirate, could be seen to assume the role of a co-opted in-group whose acquiescence was purchased by imperial Britain in exchange for benefits, which included legitimising their claim as Bahrain's hereditary rulers, in spite of the Al Khalifa's mainland tribal origins. Bahraini Shiʿa and non-tribal Sunnis suffered from what Alder and Wang refer to as "dual colonialism,"[193] occupying a space under both the Al Khalifa monarchs and the British imperial administration by virtue of their out-group status. Upon (reluctantly) gaining independence in 1971, the Al Khalifa became the dominant actor and sought to continue imperial methods of maintaining minority rule.

Following their initial conquest of Bahrain, the Al Khalifa swiftly seized and re-distributed agricultural land, dividing the island into a network of *muqaṭaʿāt*, small feudal estates ruled by independent landlords, many of which obtained their holdings through tribal alliances with the Al Khalifa.[194] The Shiʿi peasantry mostly worked as labourers on the various estates and fisheries or in the pearl diving industry, many within a

[189] Polliss, *Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial Policy,* 576.
[190] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 42.
[191] Posner, Spier and Vermeule, *Divide and Conquer*, 450.
[192] Posner, Spier and Vermeule, *Divide and Conquer*, 450.
[193] Alder and Wang, *Divide and Rule*, 9.
[194] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 1.

system of debt servitude known as *sukhra* which some have compared to slavery.[195] AlShehabi has noted that "in the agricultural villages, the beneficiaries of the extracted taxes were members of the ruling family" an arrangement which served to create "a direct link of repression between them [the Al Khalifa] and those in the villages."[196]

Bahrain's Shiʿi community began to find its voice in the 1920s, when Shiʿi notables started petitioning the British advisor to pressure the Emir to introduce reforms to eliminate *sukhra* and discriminatory taxes applied to Shiʿi workers. The British had abolished forced labour in 1904 for Bahraini residents classified as 'foreign,' including ethnic-Persians and Arabs of mainland Arabian origins, all of whom came under British jurisdiction according to the complex system of "co-sovereignty" which existed in Bahrain at the time between the Al Khalifa and their imperial 'protectors.'[197] Gengler asserts that the Shiʿi community's growing involvement in politics arose not out of an inherent opposition to Al Khalifa (or Sunni) rule, but due to their marginalisation within Bahraini society- at this time "Shiʿa political mobilisation had no roots in confessional identity per se."[198] A number of inter-communal skirmishes had broken out in Bahrain during this period, many of which involved raids on Shiʿi villages by the *fidāwī* militias of Al Khalifa-aligned sheikhs.[199] Given this, the Shiʿi notables' decision to present a petition to the British Advisor is arguably an example of what AlShehabi refers to as "protection shopping,"[200] whereby the Shiʿi community sought to improve its lot by exploiting divisions between the British and Al Khalifa rulers.

The practice of presenting a petition had long acted as "the traditional repertoire of contention in the Gulf"[201] and had historically served as a means of bringing grievances to the attention of a ruler whilst maintaining an air of respectful consultation. The Shiʿi notables' petitioning for British support, together with the instability which ensued following the *fidāwī* raids and a general strike staged by workers in

[195] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 1.
[196] AlShehabi, Omar Hesham, 'Contested Modernity: Divided Rule and the Birth of Sectarianism, Nationalism and Absolutism in Bahrain,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43 (2016): 8.
[197] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity*, 5.
[198] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 140.
[199] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity*, 17.
[200] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity,* 13.
[201] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict,* 215.

Manama in 1922, arguably marks the beginning of modern Bahrain's first cycle of contention. The unrest generated by these events contributed to the British government's decision to forcibly abdicate the Emir ʿIsa bin ʿAli Al Khalifa in 1923, who had remained opposed to initiating political reforms including improving the status of Bahrain's Shiʿa.[202] In a strongly-worded letter to the Emir, the British Advisor Colonel Trevor somewhat ironically asserted that "the tyranny and oppression of your island has become a public scandal, and it became necessary for the High Government to take action."[203] This affair indicates that the British no longer considered the structural marginalisation of the Shiʿi community to be in the interests of regime stability, and signalled a move away from the nineteenth century system of tribal/sectarian stratification toward a more nuanced strategy, which recognised that the greatest challenges to Al Khalifa/imperial rule would come from twentieth century ideological movements.

The reforms adopted by the new British-backed Emir Hamad bin ʿIsa Al Khalifa arguably created space for the emergence of organised political activism against British rule in the 1930s, led by Sunni and Shiʿi elites calling for greater political participation, the reform of the judiciary and education systems and the right to establish trade unions.[204] Ironically, the British move to depose Hamad's father in 1923 also contributed to this growing opposition activity in Bahrain, as his son was considered "weak with minimal local allies and many more enemies" and "depended almost entirely on British support for his position,"[205] further exposing the depth of British influence. In 1934 a group of Shiʿi notables petitioned the new Emir, asking with "friendly and loyal language" for Shiʿi representation on municipal councils proportionate to their status as the majority of his subjects, to which they received an unsatisfactory response- likely due to opposition from the British Advisor Charles Belgrave.[206] A confidential British report from 1936 revealed that prominent Sunni and Shiʿi representatives had held several meetings to discuss their demands for a

[202] Al-Mdaiers, Falah, 'Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain' *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 11:1 (2002): 2322.
[203] Al-Tajir, Mahdi Abdalla., 1987. *Bahrain 1920-1945: Britain, the Shaikh and the Administration*, Beckenham: Croom Helm, 63.
[204] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain*, 23.
[205] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity,* 20.
[206] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 53.

legislative committee and the reform of the justice system, at least one of which was attended by the Emir's son,[207] suggesting that the Al Khalifa were at this time open to considering the proposed reforms.

The nationalist movement which emerged during the 1930s on the back of these developments was comprised of politically-engaged Sunni and Shiʿi elites who had joined forces to oppose British influence in Bahrain but "showed no opposition to the ruling government represented by the Ruling Family."[208] This growing cooperation was formalised in 1938, when Sunni and Shiʿi community leaders presented a petition directly to Charles Belgrave outlining demands for a cross-sectarian education council, a cross-sectarian mechanism for liaison with government and a proposal for a mix of Sunni and Shiʿi judges to sit in each of Bahrain's courts. Al-Shehabi notes that even at this early stage, what became known as the 1938 Reform Movement "dared to ask for a representative assembly."[209] The emergence of the 1938 Reform Movement coincided with the publication of a highly controversial article by an anonymous writer in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Rābiṭa al-ʿArabiyya,* which called for the creation of a legislative assembly and an end to British interference in Bahrain's affairs.[210] Anonymous articles and circulars had become one of the only means to air political grievances in Bahrain, and locally-produced leaflets were also circulating calling for rebellion against British rule and "national unity and non-segregation between the Sunnis and the Shias."[211] Belgrave let it be known that he suspected that the Reform Movement was behind these subversive publications.[212]

In order to forestall this emerging cross-ideological, anti-imperial alliance the British adopted a strategy of divide and rule based on splitting the coalition of elites through co-optation. Shiʿi notables were induced to break away from the Reform Movement when the government agreed to implement some of their demands, such as the appointment of Shiʿi judges.[213] A general strike in 1943 by Sunni and Shiʿi oil workers

[207] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 57.
[208] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 57.
[209] Al-Shehabi, Omar. 'Political Movements in Bahrain: Past, Present, and Future ' *Jadaliyya* 14 February 2012, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4363/political-movements-in-bahrain_past-pre
[210] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 23.
[211] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 58.
[212] Al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920-1945,* 238.
[213] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 24.

and an attempt to establish a cross-sectarian insurance scheme called the Cooperative Compensation Society similarly fell victim to imperial divide and rule tactics, with the British co-opting some individuals from within both movements and punishing others, including the insurance scheme's board of directors.[214]

In 1954 a group of Sunni and Shiʿi elites founded the National Union Committee (*Haʾiat al-Itiḥād al-Waṭanī,* or NUC),[215] Bahrain's first official opposition organisation. Formed in response to sectarian clashes which occurred during the 1953 Ashura processions, the NUC "considered the national unity of all Bahrainis the first requirement for their liberation."[216] This perspective reflected the worldview of Bahrain's burgeoning working class, centred on the oil industry, who were ideologically committed to improving working conditions and whose identity was largely "inclusive and nationalistic."[217] One of the NUC's founders, a Sunni businessman called ʿAbdul-Rahman al-Bakr, had been involved in setting up the important independent newspaper *Ṣawt al-Baḥrayn* in 1949, which called for unity based on nationalism and "narrowing the gap between the two sects."[218] Al-Bakr became the subject of harassment, with the government even cancelling his passport. In October 1954 al-Bakr and other Sunni and Shiʿi notables staged a rally in the village of Sanabis, announcing the unilateral formation of a 120-person General Assembly made up of delegates from both sects and lead by an eight member committee.[219] This cross-sectarian movement, which would become the NUC, announced a list of demands including parliamentary elections and the right to establish trade unions, and used popular petitions and gatherings to mobilise support.[220] Following the Emir's rejection of their demands the NUC staged another mass rally in Manama, during

[214] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 25.
[215] Also known by its original name, the Higher Executive Committee (*al- Haʾiat al-Tanfidhiyya al-ʿUlyā*). The group changed its name to National Union Committee in 1955 following negotiations with the government over official recognition.
[216] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 9.
[217] Rabi, Uzi and Kostiner, Joseph, 'The Shiʿis in Bahrain: Class and Religious Protest' in: Bengio, Ofra and Ben-Dor, Gabriel (eds)., 1999. *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 175.
[218] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 25.
[219] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 26.
[220] AlShehabi, *Divide and Rule*, 100.

which thousands of Bahrainis of a variety of ideological and religious persuasions signed a petition pledging their support for the NUC.[221]

Both the Al Khalifa and their British protectors viewed this cross-ideological political movement as a threat to the authoritarian status quo, and initially responded with a similar divide and rule strategy to that employed against the 1938 Reform Movement. Hoping to co-opt the Shiʿi factions within the NUC, the Al Khalifa set up a parallel organisation called the National Convention Committee, comprised of Shiʿi merchants, notables and clergy, with sub-committees designed to represent Shiʿa of Arab and Persian descent.[222] That this initiative met with limited success indicates the strength of Bahrain's growing nationalist movement, which by this point was able to transcend more narrow ethnic and sectarian affiliations. The NUC responded to the Emir's rejection of their petition with a general strike in December 1954, which persuaded the government to enter into talks with the NUC, ultimately extending it recognition and authorising the establishment of a cross-sectarian trade union.[223] AlShehabi notes that the scale of popular support for the NUC left the government with no other option- "the strong momentum and nationwide reach of the movement forced recognition."[224]

The NUC set an important precedent in demonstrating that a cross-sectarian political movement, built on the principles of Bahraini nationalism, was able to effectively negotiate with and win concessions from the Al Khalifa government. The risks this posed for sustaining authoritarian rule, in particular at a time in which the Al Khalifa's British protectors had begun to lose control over other imperial dependencies in Africa and the Indian subcontinent, were keenly understood by Bahrain's ruling elites- indeed one of the NUC's core demands was for the removal of Charles Belgrave, who was publically denounced as a dictator.[225] Radhi refers to the conflict between the NUC and the British Adviser as "a fierce battle," and suggests that Belgrave had long desired to put an end to the organisation,[226] which he saw as a direct challenge not only

[221] Al-Shehabi, *Political Movements in Bahrain*, n.p.
[222] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 9.
[223] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 26.
[224] AlShehabi, *Divide and Rule*, 101.
[225] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 66.
[226] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 67.

to the ability of the Al Khalifa to rule under British patronage, but ultimately to the continued British presence in Bahrain. The British sought to withdraw the official recognition extended to the group by the Al Khalifa government, and in 1956 declared the NUC to be illegal, following mass demonstrations denouncing British involvement in the Suez crisis.[227] The NUC's leadership were expelled from Bahrain and imprisoned on the British-administered island of St Helena.

In a pattern which would be repeated in later cycles of contention, the crackdown on the NUC led to the formation of a Unified-Exclusive Structure of Contestation, featuring clandestine opposition groups excluded from the political system and hostile to both the British administration and Al Khalifa rule.[228] The dominant ideological streams within these splinter organisations were Communism, Baʿathism and Arab Nationalism, and whilst each group had different ideological goals they were all broadly in favour of regime change. These groups formed a leftist-nationalist coalition called the National Front for Progressive Force,[229] which was largely comprised of students and working class Bahrainis of both sects. The group was instrumental in launching a nationwide general strike in 1965, which was triggered by oil workers protesting against mass layoffs. Valeri describes the unrest, which came to be referred to as the March *Intifāḍa,* as "a three month national uprising."[230] Strikes continued until 1968, however the coalition failed to win any meaningful concessions. Following the NUC debacle the government was unwilling to engage with the demands of this cross-ideological coalition, arresting the group's leaders and initiating another period of crackdown.

The government's shift from co-optation to repression resulted in the fragmentation of the NUC into numerous smaller antisystem organisations with differing ideological affiliations, and strengthened regime stability in the short-term. This tactic was repeated in the government's response to the March *Intifāḍa*, and again confirmed the short-term effectiveness of repression against cross-ideological coalitions.

[227] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 10.
[228] Alhasan, Hasan Tariq, 'The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981: The IFLB in Bahrain,' *Middle East Journal*, 65:4 (2011): 604.
[229] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 135.
[230] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 135.

However, while the Al Khalifa and their British protectors were able to use repressive tactics to disband the NUC they were at this point unable to successfully co-opt any of the opposition groups formed by former-NUC supporters, many of which participated in the March *Intifāḍa*. This sustained the Unified-Exclusive Structure of Contestation, and meant that each of these groups continued to maintain a collective interest in uniting their grievances against the government, strengthening their hand and ultimately leading to further contentious cycles of mobilisation and longer-term threats to regime stability.

The Post-Independence Parliamentary Experiment

Bahrain's first years as an independent state were characterised by a new cycle of social and political mobilisation, with a diverse array of interest groups making demands on the Al Khalifa monarchs, who initially appeared to be open to compromise in designing a post-imperial system of government. A UN-administered plebiscite was conducted in 1971 in which the majority of Bahrainis opted for independence under the Al Khalifa, seen as a means of formally rejecting Iran's claim to Bahrain, which had been revived by Iranian nationalists despite previous statements by the Shah relinquishing it.[231] Bahrain's secular-nationalist and Communist opposition groups were bolstered by the British withdrawal, and once again began to agitate for reform, in particular as a window of opportunity had opened when the government announced plans to draft a post-independence constitution. Uniting under a cross-ideological coalition called the Constitutive Committee for the General Federation of Workers in Bahrain (CCGFW), the opposition factions presented the Emir with a petition of over five thousands signatures calling for the legal right to establish a workers union.[232]

The re-emergence of these opposition groups, which ceased their clandestine activities and once again sought both popular and official recognition, marked a return to the cross-ideological coalition politics of the 1950s. The Al Khalifa were now in a weaker position, compared with the NUC era, as they could no longer rely on British support and were still in the process of designing the system of independent

[231] Al-Shehabi, *Political Movements in Bahrain*, n.p.
[232] Al-Shehabi, *Political Movements in Bahrain*, n.p.

governance which would replace the British administration. The CCGFW launched a series of mass demonstrations and general strikes throughout 1972, triggered by the protests of Gulf Air employees who objected to a new policy of importing cheap labour from Pakistan at the expense of the local workforce (a trend which would become a major source of resentment in the decades to come).[233] The CCGFW agitated for improvements to workers' rights, freedom of association and trade unionism, and some scholars have suggested that the resulting unrest spilled over into another popular uprising.[234] The Al Khalifa, at such a critical juncture, were clearly rattled by the re-emergence of a cross-ideological opposition alliance, and after a half-hearted attempt at negotiations failed, launched a military crackdown against the demonstrators. Similar to the British response to the NUC in 1956, the leadership of the CCGFW were imprisoned or exiled.[235] The Al Khalifa however followed this by publicly agreeing to two of the group's core demands: allowing for the formation of trade unions and announcing that provisions safeguarding freedom of association would be included in Bahrain's new constitution.[236]

The unrest brought forward efforts to draft the constitution, a task which was given to a partially-elected group of delegates that also included government ministers and other representatives selected directly by the Emir. The constitution provided for the establishment of a National Assembly, and stated that Bahraini citizens "shall have the right to participate in the public affairs of the State and enjoy political rights, beginning with the right to vote." This however was mediated by the phrase "in accordance with… the conditions and procedures set forth in the law,"[237] which of course could be promulgated unilaterally by royal decree.[238] In addition, the constitution emphasised that "the Executive power shall be vested in the Amir, the Cabinet and the Ministers" who were to be appointed by royal decree rather than sourced from the elected legislature.[239] The National Assembly was further handicapped by a requirement that the Emir

[233] Al-Shehabi, *Political Movements in Bahrain*, n.p.
[234] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 13.
[235] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 13.
[236] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 13.
[237] Article 1(e), Bahrain Constitution of 1973.
[238] Article 35(a) of the Bahrain Constitution of 1973 states that "the Amir shall have the right to initiate laws, and he alone shall ratify and promulgate the laws."
[239] Article 32(b) and Article 33(b), Bahrain Constitution of 1973.

ratify every law it seeks to enact.[240] It is likely that the Al Khalifa designed Bahrain's post-independence political system with the expectation that introducing democratic elements would bolster their popular legitimacy, with the parliament essentially acting as a legislative rubber-stamp. The short-lived National Assembly however has since become a historical rallying point for a diverse array of opposition groups in Bahrain, which link their demands for reform to a return to the 1973 constitution. This is not because the 1973 political system itself was especially democratic, but because the National Assembly came to represent a brief moment in history in which Bahrain experienced genuine and effective parliamentary debate, which for a time appeared to succeed in holding the ruling elite to account for unpopular policies.

The elections of 1973 brought a variety of groups to the National Assembly, a result which was initially interpreted as favouring the maintenance of the status quo. In addition to pro-government independents and the fourteen appointed ministers, eight secular leftist representatives were elected alongside nine conservative Shiʿi Islamists with roots in the Islamic Enlightenment Society (*Jamʿiyyat al-Tawʿiyya al-Islāmiyya* or IES),[241] a group formed in 1972 and led by Sheikh ʿIsa al-Qasim, who would later become Bahrain's principal Shiʿi cleric.[242] Most members of the Shiʿi religious bloc received their education in the seminaries of Najaf, and were seen as being in favour of maintaining what Khalaf refers to as an "ethnically segmented social order"[243] which preserved pre-existing power structures. The government at this point continued to consider the threat from opposition groups primarily on the basis of ideology rather than sect, and the Shiʿi clerical elite in Bahrain similarly feared the expansion of the secular-nationalist and Communist elements which threatened their influence as leaders of the Shiʿi community. Many clerics had backed the government's early divide and rule policies, aware of the opportunity to extend their influence at the expense of the various cross-ideological coalitions, most of which showed little concern for religion. The Shiʿi religious bloc was particularly opposed to Bahrain's Communist movement, which it considered to be dangerous and heretical. Given their mutual opposition to the participation of these ideology-based

[240] Article 42, Bahrain Constitution of 1973.
[241] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 14.
[242] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 28.
[243] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 14.

political societies, the government was able to co-opt parts of the Shiʿi bloc with relative ease, and immediately after the election convinced three of its nine representatives to break away and join the pro-government Independent Middle Bloc (*Kutlat al-Wasīṭ al-Mustaqil*),[244] further reducing the number of opposition parliamentarians.

The independence period coincided with the slow demise of Pan-Arab Nationalism, which had reached its zenith during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Until this point ideological schisms were more likely to act as determinants of political affiliation, and formed the primary basis for Al Khalifa divide and rule tactics. However, the emergence of Bahrain's first cleric-led Shiʿi political organisations, with their emphasis on Shiʿi religious identity, came to challenge the cross-ideological and cross-sectarian cooperation of the earlier Bahraini nationalist movements. Groups including the aforementioned IES and the Islamic Guidance Society (*Jamʿiyyat al-Irshād al-Islāmī*) began to rally young Shiʿi men to their cause, which focused on harnessing the revolutionary potential of Shiʿi Islam to push for social reforms. The Iranian Revolution gave an important boost to these fledgling Shiʿi Islamist movements, in particular the IES which was said to be in contact with Ayatollah Khomeini in Najaf prior to his return to Iran in 1979.[245] It was arguably the rise of political Shiʿism, and the corresponding decrease in popularity of the non-religious ideological streams which had previously dominated Bahrain's opposition movements, that provided the Al Khalifa with the opportunity to craft a divide and rule strategy based on entrenching sectarian divides.

Despite ideological differences which had initially appeared to be irreconcilable, the secular-nationalist and Shiʿi religious blocs eventually came to collaborate on a number of issues, to the dismay of the ruling elites who were watching the parliamentary experiment closely. Khalaf notes that both groups shared similar constituencies of lower-middle and working class Bahrainis, many of whom had long been politically active and had mobilised in favour of reform throughout the colonial period.[246] In presenting their demands constituents would often petition both opposition blocs at the same time, which fostered an understanding

[244] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 30.
[245] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 28.
[246] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 15.

that the Islamists and secular-nationalists shared common interests. The increasing openness of the Shiʿi religious representatives to collaboration with the secular-nationalist opposition indicates the success of the democratic element of Bahrain's new political system, as Islamist delegates ultimately sought to represent the views of their constituents rather than appease the unelected clerical establishment, which remained in favour of the status quo. From 1974 onwards, opposition members appeared willing to reach practical compromises on a number of issues rather than simply promote narrow socio-economic or sectarian interests, and the emergence of a broad parliamentary opposition bloc frustrated government attempts to pass crucial legislation, including the widely unpopular State Security Law of 1974. The National Assembly also criticised the government over the renewal of a contract permitting the American navy to operate out of Bahrain,[247] and tried to introduce measures to make the government's distribution of oil revenues more transparent.[248]

The Al Khalifa initially attempted to retain the new political system's democratic veneer by resorting to the tried and tested divide and rule tactic of co-opting the Shiʿi bloc. In promoting the draconian State Security Law, the government made a direct appeal to the Shiʿi representatives' Islamic values, arguing that the law would protect Bahrain from the threat of Communism by criminalising the "dissemination of heretical principles"[249] and broadening this further by also accusing the secular-nationalist bloc of blasphemy. These efforts however ultimately failed to dissuade the religious representatives from collaborating with secular-nationalist and independent parliamentarians to block the National Assembly's ratification of the law.

Bahrain's 1973-1975 parliament was arguably the country's first experiment with liberalised autocracy, with the regime initially attempting to construct a Unified-Inclusive Structure of Contestation in which all opposition was permitted to participate in a political system structured to favour the government, with divide and rule tactics employed as a means of fragmenting the opposition and maintaining the regime's dominance. The concession the Al Khalifa had offered to the various opposition groups, many of whom had

[247] Alhasan, *The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981*, 605.
[248] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 32.
[249] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics*, 16.

been involved in the 1972 unrest, in the form of a semi-elected parliament appeared to have been too successful in giving an official voice to Bahrain's reformers. Unable to unilaterally pass its own legislation, it was expected that a National Assembly divided between fractious and ideologically-opposed interest groups would function as no more than a symbolic outlet for debate. The formation of a dominant opposition bloc which traversed sectarian, secular-religious and socio-economic lines transformed the National Assembly into a body which more closely resembled a legislative chamber capable of crafting policy, rather than performing what was essentially a consultative role. As in the case of the NUC, the government feared that this popular parliamentary bloc had accrued too much power and posed a direct threat to the monarchy's ability to rule, and moved from a strategy of co-optation to repression. In 1975 the Emir declared a state of emergency and moved to dissolve the National Assembly, abandoning Bahrain's brief experimentation with liberalised autocracy in favour of rule by royal decree.[250] Opposition groups were again forced underground, and the government quickly passed the Security Law, which further enabled it to crack down on internal dissent and hastened Bahrain's return to full-authoritarianism.

The Rise of Political Shiʿism: A New Type of Opposition

The Shiʿi clerical establishment's involvement in Bahraini politics began with clandestine Islamic youth movements established in the 1960s, with individual clerics also involved in the aforementioned reform movements of the 1930s-1950s. Despite the crucial role Shiʿi Islamists played in the short-lived National Assembly of 1973, until the Iranian Revolution of 1979 the majority of politically active Bahrainis mobilised behind cross-sectarian secular-nationalist forces involved in trade unionism and the promotion of workers' rights.[251] The Iranian Revolution also coincided with the rise of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, which took steps to restrict the ability of foreign Shiʿa to study in the seminaries (*ḥawzāt)* of Najaf, the traditional destination for Bahraini theological students.[252] As a consequence the seminaries of the Iranian city of Qom

[250] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 143.
[251] Abdo, Geneive, 'The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shiʿa-Sunni Divide' *Analysis Paper 29*, The Brookings Institution, April 2013, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/sunni-shia-abdo.pdf, 10.
[252] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 31.

increased in popularity, exposing a younger generation of religious students to Iranian revolutionary ideology and Khomeini's reinterpretation of the doctrine of *vilayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist). The revolution re-energised the Shiʿi Islamist elements of the Bahraini opposition, which had been in disarray following the dissolution of the National Assembly and subsequent crackdown in 1975. New clandestine religious groups were formed, and for the first time Shiʿi Islamists began to lead Bahrain's opposition. Some of these groups, such as the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (*al-Jabha al-Islāmiyya li-Taḥrir al-Baḥrayn* or IFLB), openly called for exporting the Iranian Revolution and sought to impose Shiʿi clerical rule in Bahrain.[253] Less radical groups petitioned the government to broaden provisions for Shariʿa law in Bahrain, including imposing gender-segregated education and Islamic dress norms.[254]

Seeking to spread its revolution to the Gulf, the new regime in Iran began broadcasting radio and television programs aimed at mobilising Bahraini Shiʿa in support of an Islamic Republic, and denounced the Al Khalifa government as both illegitimate and anti-Shiʿa.[255] Khomeini renewed Iran's claim of sovereignty over Bahrain and prominent revolutionary figures within Iran called for Bahrain's annexation.[256] Iran actively sought to cultivate a transnational network of "politically conscious Shiʿa as the potential spearhead for future revolutions,"[257] offering various groups training and financial assistance. Despite failing to export its revolution to neighbouring states, Iran's promotion of a revolutionary ideology deeply embedded in the Shiʿi religious-historical narrative, including the refashioning of core tenets of Shiʿi doctrine and practice to reflect many Shiʿi communities' contemporary experiences of oppression, had a profound impact on the political mobilisation of Bahraini Shiʿa. The Iranian Revolution became a "framework for social mobilisation," emboldening Gulf Shiʿa to "assert their communal identity against a long history of marginalisation."[258]

[253] Abdo, *The New Sectarianism*, 10.
[254] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 31
[255] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 24.
[256] Rabi and Kostiner, *The Shiʿis in Bahrain*, 172, 176.
[257] Rabi and Kostiner, *The Shiʿis in Bahrain*, 172.
[258] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 28.

Despite its role in elevating religion as a driver of political mobilisation within the Shiʿi community, the Iranian Revolution did not act as a uniting force among Bahrain's splintered opposition groups, indeed in many ways it divided them further. Unrest erupted in 1979, with groups such as the IFLB openly calling for the fall of the Al Khalifa monarchy for the first time in Bahrain. In addition to challenging the government, this call for Islamic revolution also represented a direct challenge to Bahrain's Shiʿi clerical establishment, most of which disagreed with Khomeini's justification of clerical rule in Iran and followed the more quietist approach of the Najaf-based Ayatollahs.[259] The Shiʿi religious class had traditionally been open to cooperation with the government and had readily participated in the parliamentary process during the 1973-1975 National Assembly. The clerical establishment continued to call for an end to rule by royal decree and the restoration of parliament, and along with the leftist and nationalist groups was largely content to work within the current system. This position was reflected in the formation of a second post-revolutionary youth group, the Bahrain Islamic Freedom Movement (*Ḥarakat Aḥrar al-Baḥrayn al-Islāmiyya* or BIFM), formed by Shiʿi students studying in the United Kingdom, which called for reform within the existing system.[260] These emerging ideological divisions within the various streams of political Shiʿism also reflected ethnic distinctions within the Bahraini Shiʿi community, with Persian Shiʿa more likely to support radical groups such as the IFLB, and Arab Shiʿa more likely to follow the clerical establishment.[261]

The Iranian Revolution was arguably the event which had the single greatest impact on the Al Khalifa's pursuit of divide and rule in Bahrain. Splitting cross-ideological opposition alliances during the imperial and post-independence periods, when the most organised movements were those which appealed to the Sunni and Shiʿi working classes, had shown itself to be a relatively successful strategy only in the short term, and did not eliminate the future threat of opposition coalition-building. The Iranian Revolution, and the prospect that radical Shiʿi groups could attempt to replicate similar unrest in Bahrain, was both a threat and an opportunity for the regime. The rise of religion as the dominant frame through which many Bahraini

[259] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 23-24.
[260] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 29.
[261] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 29.

Shiʿa came to interpret their political and social identities almost inevitably engendered the opportunistic rise of sectarian divide and rule, given the country's demography. In spite of the Shiʿi community's history of involvement in cross-sectarian coalitions and the presence of a sizeable moderate stream which sought to work within the existing political system, the Al Khalifa were able to exploit the fears of Bahrain's Sunni minority surrounding Khomeini-style clerical rule in Bahrain.

These fears were deepened in December 1981 when the IFLB was accused of plotting a *coup d'état*, with the alleged aim of installing an Islamic Republic in Bahrain.[262] Seventy-three Bahraini Shiʿa were arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the Al Khalifa monarchy and the IFLB's Iraq-born spiritual leader Hadi al-Modarresi was stripped of his Bahraini citizenship and deported.[263] Whilst the IFLB were certainly ideologically committed to Khomeini's brand of revolutionary Shiʿism, the extent to which they were able to stage an armed uprising against the government, in terms of both popular support and military capabilities, is unclear. There is widespread disagreement within the academic literature about the significance and level of support for the IFLB in Bahrain in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, and in particular the seriousness of the threat the group posed to Al Khalifa rule during the failed coup attempt. Wehrey comments that "the more violent, radical strain of Shiʿa activism that sought to replicate the Iranian Revolution in Bahrain failed to attract a significant following" and claims that the IFLB was "significantly weakened" after the government launched a crackdown on the organisation in 1981.[264] Khalaf notes that the IFLB "was an unlikely candidate to lead opposition activities"[265] because "it's extremely sectarian and uncompromising rhetoric" alienated "other religionists on either side of the confessional divide."[266] Alhasan however places heavy emphasis on connections between the senior IFLB leadership, including its de facto head al-Modarresi, and Iranian revolutionary figures, asserting that the IFLB was officially affiliated with Ayatollah Khomeini and that its activities were sanctioned by Iran.[267]

[262] Alhasan, *The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981*, 607.
[263] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 45.
[264] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 28.
[265] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 23.
[266] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 24.
[267] Alhasan, *The Role of Iran in the Failed Coup of 1981*, 608-609.

Al-Mdaiers has cast doubt on whether the IFLB actually planned a coup at all, suggesting that the group viewed the accusation as a government excuse to round up the membership of what was a principally religious organisation.[268] Nebil Husayn has questioned the lack of evidence presented in trials of alleged IFLB members, and cites a leaked Ministry of Interior document appearing to show that members of the Al Khalifa family sentenced the defendants rather than the regular judiciary.[269] Husayn claims that the coup provided "a convenient pretext to ignite anti-Iranian sentiment… and repress citizens associated with political activism considered subversive to the monarchy."[270] In contrast to claims about the IFLB's contemporary insignificance, Matthiesen has argued that the group had an ideological presence at the Arab Spring-inspired protests in 2011, with the IFLB's former leader Hadi al-Modarresi making a speech which was broadcast on a screen at the Pearl Roundabout via the *Ahl al-Bayt* television channel.[271] This of course provided the Al Khalifa with a valuable opportunity to link the 2011 uprising with the Iran-backed coup attempt of 1981, despite there being very little evidence to connect the two events.

Irrespective of doubts surrounding the IFLB's intentions and the extent to which the group enjoyed support among Bahraini Shiʿa, the coup-attempt is significant in that it bolstered the government's claims about Iranian interference and enabled it to cast doubt on the loyalty of the Shiʿi community more broadly. The destabilising impact of the Iranian Revolution, together with the rise of political Shiʿism within Bahrain, provided the Al Khalifa with the conditions necessary to develop a sectarian-based model of divide and rule in the 1980s, during which it sought the Sunni minority's political quiescence in exchange for a greater slice of resource revenues, cemented by appealing to fears of an IFLB-style Shiʿi Islamist takeover. Bahrain's Shiʿa increasingly occupied the space of a mistrusted and marginalised out-group, with cross-sectarian co-operation presented as contrary to the Sunni community's economic and security interests, notwithstanding the long history of Sunni involvement in opposition politics and cross-ideological coalitions.

[268] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 32.
[269] Husayn, Nebil, 'Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain' *Arab Studies Quarterly* 37:1 (2015): 45.
[270] Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*, 45.
[271] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 40.

The 1990s: From Stagnation to Mobilisation

In contrast to Bahrain's active Shiʿi Islamist opposition, the country's secular-nationalist and Communist groups experienced a lengthy period of demise following the dissolution of the National Assembly and the government's move to outlaw political parties. Unlike the Shiʿi religious bloc, Bahrain's other opposition streams lacked extra-political institutions around which to mobilise, and were forced to retreat underground and resume their antisystem activities. It was only after the 1990-1991 Gulf War, which ushered in a brief period of greater regional openness, that some of the heavy restrictions on the press and freedom of association were lifted in Bahrain.[272] In spite of growing sectarian stratification, a "new spirit of political activism, a new zeitgeist within civil society"[273] briefly flourished in Bahrain, and encouraged a coalition of notables, including former National Assembly parliamentarians, businessmen, human rights activists and intellectuals, to launch a public call for political reform in what became known as the 1992 Elite Petition.[274]

The Elite Petition was in many ways an attempt to return to the broad cross-ideological alliances which characterised the 1950s and 1970s, but quickly became hamstrung by Bahrain's increasingly sectarian politics. Khalaf has argued that the petition was designed to pre-empt the government's formation in 1993 of a non-elected consultative council (*Majlis al-Shūrā)* which would act in an advisory role only and was to have no legislative powers.[275] The petition called for elections for a new National Assembly and the restoration of the 1973 constitution, as well as an amnesty for political detainees, and was signed by 300 prominent Bahrainis.[276] Following the Emir's refusal to respond to the petition the various secular-nationalist and Shiʿi Islamist streams within the opposition announced that they had formed a new coalition, called the Constitutional Movement (*al-Ḥaraka al-Distūriyya)*.[277] This new coalition had strong

[272] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 26.
[273] Ehteshami, Anoushiravan and Wright, Steven, 'Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies: From Liberalization to Enfranchisement,' *International Affairs* 83: 5 (2007): 913.
[274] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 26.
[275] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 26.
[276] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 34.
[277] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 34.

echoes of the NUC in both its composition and goals, and posed a similar threat to the Al Khalifa's perceived ability to maintain its absolute grip on power. The Constitutional Movement for a time enjoyed broad support among the Bahraini population, and gathered over 25,000 signatures on a second petition demanding an elected parliament, the release of political prisoners, greater civil rights for Bahraini women and significant economic and judicial reforms.[278] After almost two decades of success in preventing the formation of cross-opposition coalitions, the Al Khalifa appeared to be unprepared for the extent to which the Constitutional Movement was able to mobilise popular support. The participation of Shiʿi Islamists in the movement, alongside prominent Sunni secular-nationalists,[279] also indicated that the regime's attempts to position itself as the protector of Sunnis from a Shiʿi clerical establishment beholden to Iranian interests were yet to take root among the political class.

The Al Khalifa again pursued a divide and rule approach in its response to the Constitutional Movement's demands, however its attempts to force a split in the alliance evidenced a greater understanding of the potential for sectarianism to act as the primary driver of social tensions. The government at first sought to delegitimise Sunni involvement in the Constitutional Movement by publically announcing that the group was exclusively Shiʿi in composition. It then moved to shut down initiatives such as a joint sermon in favour of sectarian co-existence, which was to be held in Manama by Sheikh ʿAbdul-ʾAmir al-Jamri, then Bahrain's most-revered Shiʿi cleric, and ʿAbdul-Latif al-Mahmood, a well-known Sunni cleric.[280] The security forces arrested three prominent Shiʿi *ʿulamāʾ* who had lent their voices to the Constitutional Movement's demands, including al-Wefaq's current leader Sheikh Ali Salman.[281] The arrest of these prominent clerics sparked mass protests and rioting among Shiʿi youth and Islamist groups, including some which had declined to participate in the Constitutional Movement.[282] In this sense the Al Khalifa's divide and rule strategy had succeeded in transforming the cross-sectarian opposition movement into one which was

[278] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 34.
[279] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 34-35.
[280] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 27.
[281] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 34.
[282] Lawson, Fred, 'Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain' in: Wiktorowicz, Quintan (ed)., 2004. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 97.

predominantly Shiʿi and Islamist. However, the heavy-handed government response, which included the arrest of up to five thousand citizens in 1994 alone, had the perhaps unintended consequence of sparking Bahrain's first large-scale popular uprising, known as the 1990s *Intifāḍa*.[283]

In many ways the *Intifāḍa* of 1994-1999 can be viewed as a prologue to Bahrain's 2011 uprising, as both involved similar actors and grievances and similar demands for reform. As in 2011, the protesters driving the 1990s crisis were Shiʿi youth, many of whom were unemployed and came from disadvantaged neighbourhoods and villages.[284] Protests were frequently marred by violence, with more radical groups of demonstrators adopting tactics including the arson of public buildings such as banks, post offices and police stations.[285] In 1995 a bomb was detonated in a Manama shopping mall, and in 1996 several of the capital's luxury hotels were targeted.[286] Government forces regularly opened fire on demonstrators and periodically blockaded entire villages perceived as being involved in the unrest, detaining thousands of activists often without charge.[287] High profile Sunni and Shiʿi members of the Constitutional Movement tried to regain the initiative in 1995, denouncing the violence and attempting to rein in the protests and re-unite the opposition behind their demand for an elected parliament.[288] However, in spite of the active leadership of Shiʿi clerics such as Sheikh al-Jamri, the Constitutional Movement was unable to recapture its earlier momentum and re-establish control over the Shiʿi street, nor was it able to reassure Sunnis that they were not the targets of the protests. The *Intifāḍa* marked the zenith of a major cycle of contention in Bahrain, and ultimately had the effect of further entrenching the Al Khalifa's sectarian divide and rule policies, cementing their role as 'protector' of the Sunni community.

The death of the Emir ʿIsa bin Salman Al Khalifa in March 1999 enabled his son and successor Hamad bin ʿIsa Al Khalifa to adopt a more conciliatory tone in dealing with Bahrain's then-protracted situation of civil unrest, which the government had successfully portrayed as a sectarian uprising. Hamad used his first

[283] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 37.
[284] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 32.
[285] Lawson, *Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain,* 98.
[286] Lawson, *Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain,* 100-101.
[287] Rabi and Kostiner, *The Shiʿis in Bahrain*, 180, 184.
[288] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 29.

public address to promise that he "would not tolerate favouritism or discrimination between the country's Sunni and Shiʿi citizens,"[289] and was able to bring the *Intifāḍa* to an end by pledging to reform the political system in consultation with the moderate opposition, promising a new constitution and an elected parliament.[290] King Hamad's succession effectively brought the 1990s cycle of contention to a close, papering over the fissures which had emerged during the *Intifāḍa* and replacing them with a decade of economic and political liberalisation, which was somewhat generously celebrated by the regime and observers alike as setting Bahrain on the path of democratisation.

King Hamad's reforms led to a dramatic shift in the nature of political participation in Bahrain, impacting all of the opposition from regime-loyalists to radical antisystem groups, many of whose leaders were released from prison or returned from exile abroad as a result of Bahrain's new openness.[291] Chapter 5 will examine this period of liberalisation in detail, and will argue that it did not in fact mark a departure from the strategy of divide and rule which had historically characterised the regime's response to opposition demands for broadening the space of political participation. Whilst King Hamad's liberalising reforms successfully re-set government-opposition relations, they also triggered a fresh cycle of contention, which ultimately led the Al Khalifa to fall back on tried and tested means of containing threats to their grip on power, employed during the twentieth century struggles highlighted in this chapter. To summarise, Figure 3 provides an overview of Bahrain's cycles of contention from the 1930's to the present day.

[289] Lawson, *Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain,* 105.
[290] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 37.
[291] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 37.

Period	Opposition Cooperation	Divide and Rule Basis	Mechanism
1820-1971 British protected state	1938 Reform Movement	Ideological	Co-optation of Shiʿa
	1954 National Union Committee	Ideological	Co-optation of Shiʿa → Repression
	1965 March *Intifāḍa*	Ideological	Repression
1970s Independence period	1972 Constitutive Committee	Ideological	Repression
	1973-5 National Assembly	Ideological	Co-optation of Shiʿa → Repression
1979 Iranian Revolution **1981** IFLB coup attempt	Gradual demise of left-wing and nationalist movements Rise of Political Shiʿism		
1990s *Intifāḍa* period	1992 Elite Petition, Constitutional Movement	Sectarian	Repression
1999-2011 National Action Charter period	2002 Electoral Boycott	Ideological/Sectarian	Liberalisation, inclusion of tolerated opposition
2011- present Uprising and aftermath	Pro-democracy demonstrations	Sectarian	Repression

Figure 3: Cycles of contention in Bahrain

Conclusion

In contrast to some of its Gulf neighbours, Bahrain has experienced cycles of political contention throughout the twentieth century, characterised by shifting opposition coalitions and a developing tradition of non-violent dissent, expressed through measures such as petitions and demonstrations. Bahrain's 2011 uprising can be understood as the latest upswing in the country's cyclical contentious politics, and should be accounted for within the context of Bahrain's lengthy history of government-opposition contestation rather than as simply a product of the transnational contagion of the Arab Spring. This chapter has shown that calls for reform and attempts to participate in the political process in Bahrain, dating as far back as the 1920s, have typically involved representatives from a variety of ideological persuasions with roots in both the Sunni and Shiʿi communities. The historical record discussed in this chapter indicates that the development of an effective cross-sectarian and/or cross-ideological opposition movement, with precedence in the fledgling political alliances which most notably emerged in the 1930s,

1950s and 1970s, would put serious pressure on the Al Khalifa monarchy's ability to maintain its absolute grip on power. This is of course understood by the regime, and is reflected in the approach it adopted to both the 1994-1999 *Intifāḍa* and the 2011 uprising (outlined in Chapter 6).

This chapter has charted the course of Bahrain's twentieth-century history of contentious politics, and has argued that the Al Khalifa regime, through a divide and rule strategy, has contributed to fuelling Bahrain's cycles of contention. During the imperial and independence periods, divide and rule was largely practiced along ideological lines, reflecting differing threat perceptions within the ruling regime in which then-popular ideological currents, such as Pan-Arabism, Communism and Baʿathism, were preferred as a basis for forming broad coalitions to challenge the status quo, rather than religious or sect-based movements. The regime shifted from ideological to sectarian divide and rule in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the rise of political Shiʿism, a strategy which has enabled the Al Khalifa to strengthen its grip on power by characterising cross-sectarian coalitions as Shiʿi threats to its Sunni supporters' position and influence.

An awareness of the historical context of government-opposition relations in Bahrain informs both the regime's current response to contemporary opposition challenges, and various opposition groups' approaches to making demands of the government. The timing of Bahrain's cycles of political contention is difficult to predict, and determining where one cycle ends and another begins is of course not an exact science. This chapter however has indicated that rather than viewing a shift from participatory electoral politics to authoritarian repression, and vice versa, as purely a consolidation of the government or opposition's position within an inexplicably volatile political system, we should instead consider these cycles as consequences of a uniquely Bahraini status quo. This chapter has shown that Bahrain's oscillation between opening and crackdown, and liberalisation and authoritarianism, can be conceived of as a regime survival mechanism, fuelled by divide and rule strategies designed to enhance the Al Khalifa's grip on a fractured political system.

Chapter 4: The Foundations of Shiʿi Communal Identity in Bahrain

The legacy of grievances outlined in Chapter 3, stretching back to the arrival of the Al Khalifa in the eighteenth century, has meant that Bahrain's Shiʿi community has developed a strong and distinctive communal identity which in many ways is entirely separate from that of the Sunni community, and should also be distinguished from the relatively recent phenomenon of Bahraini nationalism. This is rooted in the Shiʿa's status as a marginalised majority, with grievances surrounding historic and continuing sectarian discrimination arguably developing into a central component of Shiʿi identity in Bahrain, which has become heavily politicised in recent decades. Whilst it is outside the scope of this thesis to detail every type of structural injustice Bahrain's Shiʿa claim to have suffered, this chapter will examine a number of commonly-cited grievances informed by the researcher's fieldwork interviews: Discrimination in housing, education provision and employment, and the government's naturalisation policies, which arguably amount to sectarian demographic engineering. The rise of political Shiʿism in Bahrain, and with it Shiʿi political activism, has been in part a response to these grievances.

The Communal Identity of a Marginalised Majority

In spite of its distinctive communal identity, Bahrain's Shiʿi community is far from ethnically or indeed confessionally homogenous. Al-Mdaiers divides Bahraini Shiʿa into three separate groups on the basis of ethnicity and history of settlement in Bahrain. The 'indigenous' Shiʿi inhabitants of Bahrain are known as *al-Baḥārna*, and are thought to either have descended from the ancient pre-Islamic trading empire of Dilmun, which encompassed Bahrain, Kuwait, Southern Iraq and parts of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, or to be early Shiʿa of Arabian origin who fled to Bahrain to escape the repression directed against them by the Sunni Umayyad caliphs.[292] At the time of the Al Khalifa's conquest of Bahrain, *Baḥārna* "comprised the overwhelming majority of the rural population"[293] and were largely settled in "agricultural and fishing

[292] Al-Mdaires, *Shiʾism and Political Protest in Bahrain*, 21.
[293] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity,* 8.

villages."[294] A second group of Bahraini Shiʿa consists of Arabs from the Eastern Province who migrated to Bahrain in the nineteenth century due to persecution from the growing Wahhabi movement.[295] In addition, roughly 5% of Bahraini Shiʿa are of Persian origin, and settled in Bahrain from the seventeenth century when Iran's Safavid dynasty incorporated the island into its empire. They are referred to as *al-ʿAjam.* Prior to King Hamad's reforms in the early 2000s many *ʿAjami* Shiʿa were denied Bahraini citizenship and were mistrusted due to their perceived links to Iran, and a number have recently had their citizenship revoked in the wake of the post-Arab Spring crackdown, with some deported to Iran.[296] Bahraini Shiʿa of Arab and Persian origin traditionally tended to avoid mixing or fraternisation,[297] however cooperation between the two communities has increased dramatically, particularly following the 2011 uprising.[298]

The *Baḥārna* narrative, which juxtaposes the Shiʿa as the descendants of a great trading civilisation with deep historical ties to the land with the more recently-arrived Sunnis, who conquered Bahrain by force and brought with them 'backward' Arabian tribal customs, has grown in popularity amongst Bahraini Shiʿa.[299] Gengler argues that the widespread belief that ancient Bahrain was "ruled by enlightened Shiʿa jurisprudents for the sake of its Shiʿa inhabitants and unspoiled by unjust alien intrusion" provides Bahraini Shiʿa with "a common historical and ethical starting point that is both a symbol and a legitimising force for their contemporary struggle."[300] This is in spite of, or perhaps due to, the fact that Bahrain's official history is tightly controlled by the Ministry of Information, with "many historical studies and publications… banned and any counter-narratives silenced."[301] A number of Bahraini Shiʿa interviewed by the researcher identified as *Baḥārna* and drew on elements of this nativist narrative. One, when asked to explain his reasons for getting involved in the 2011 uprising, began his story in "3000BC… when Bahrain was called

[294] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity,* 3.
[295] Al-Mdaires, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain*, 21.
[296] See for example: European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, 'Bahraini Scholar Dr. Masood Jahroomi Forcibly Deported After Citizenship Revocation, as Pattern of Discrimination Continues' 8 March 2016, www.ecdhr.org/bahraini-scholar-dr-masood-jahroomi-forcibly-deported-after-citizenship-revocation-as-pattern-of-discrimination-continues/
[297] Radhi, *Judiciary and Arbitration in Bahrain,* 52.
[298] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 13.
[299] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 31.
[300] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 40.
[301] Khalaf, Amal, 'Squaring the Circle: Bahrain's Pearl Roundabout,' *Middle East Critique* 22:3 (2013): 272.

Dilmun,"[302] another tried to link the Bahraini Shiʿa's situation with that of indigenous Australians, claiming "we are like the Aborigines in our country."[303] A leading Bahraini human rights activist interviewed by the researcher also drew heavily on nativism when discussing the government's policy of citizenship revocation:

I am an indigenous guy, this is my country, my history goes back 600-700 years… The royal family came to Bahrain 200 years ago. And there are people, my colleagues, whose nationality has been withdrawn. And they are here, 600-700 years… they haven't known any other part since Mohammad the Prophet or before him. And this guy who came 200 years ago, decides [to revoke their nationality].[304]

A number of folk tales and stories originating in the more than a century of repression faced by much of Bahrain's Shiʿi community following the Al Khalifa conquest in 1783 also continue to fuel the popular imagination, adding further to the narrative of injustice and dispossession. Khalaf notes that these folk tales "give vivid Shiʿa peasants' accounts of their suffering at the hands of the Al Khalifa fiefs, their slaves, retainers and wazirs… These tales are retrieved and reconstructed with appropriate dramatic elaboration, addition and deletion, and are used as instruments for ethnic mobilisation."[305] Similar narratives resurfaced during the 2011 protests, with slogans such as *intahīt al-zayāra, ʿūdūʾ ʾilā al-zubāra,* "the visit is over, go back to Zubarah" (in Qatar) chanted by protesters,[306] which suggest that the Al Khalifa are occupiers and are not native to Bahrain, unlike the *Baḥārna* Shiʿa. Matthiesen has argued that the promotion of nativist narratives such as this during the 2011 protests alienated many Sunnis who had initially participated in the demonstrations and/or supported political reform, further propelling the conflict into the realm of sectarianism.[307] Nativist narratives also work to strengthen ties with Saudi Shiʿa across the causeway in towns such as Qatif and al-Ahsa, as the Eastern Province is considered to have been part of Ancient Bahrain. Such solidarities arguably contributed to the spread of the Shiʿi-led uprising to Eastern Saudi

[302] Interview with activist 10 September 2015.
[303] Interview with activist 9 September 2015.
[304] Interview with human rights activist 14 December 2015.
[305] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 2.
[306] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.
[307] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 32.

Arabia, which featured chants such as *al-Qaṭīf wal-Baḥrayn shaʿb wāḥid* ("Qatif and Bahrain are one people")[308] and broke out shortly after Bahrain's 2011 Day of Rage.[309] The potential for contagion between Bahrain and the Eastern Province likely also contributed to Saudi Arabia's readiness to intervene militarily in Bahrain in March 2011.

Another much-discussed historical narrative increasingly drawn on within Shiʿi identity politics in Bahrain is the epic of the 680CE Battle of Karbala, which is relived annually through Ashura commemorations. The centrality of the story of the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson and third Shiʿi Imam Hussein has led some to claim that Shiʿism is intrinsically revolutionary, an idea which grew in popularity following the Iranian Revolution.[310] Louër however has argued that "the myth of Karbala was transformed from a ritual relating to fatalism and acceptance of established social order into a ritual of rebellion."[311] Initially conceived of by Shiʿi theologians as a "ritual of repentance for the collective failure of the Shiʿi community,"[312] Imam Hussein's martyrdom has been reinterpreted as a revolutionary act, in which Hussein sacrifices his life in opposing the injustices of the Sunni Umayyad regime. The story of Karbala provides the Shiʿi community with a model in which self-sacrifice is held up as the highest of moral values, and its modern, more politicised interpretations transform resisting oppression into an act akin to a religious duty. Since the 1960s, and certainly in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, Ashura rituals commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at Karbala have become politicised across the Shiʿi world, including in Bahrain. This phenomenon is evidenced in the famous Shiʿi saying popularised by the 'ideologue of the Iranian Revolution,' Ali Shariati: "Every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala," (*Kul yawm ʿāshūrāʾ wa-kul ʾarḍ karbalāʾ*),[313] a well-known phrase in Bahrain.

[308] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 46.
[309] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 24.
[310] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 11-12.
[311] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 11-12.
[312] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 12.
[313] Sachedina, Abdulaziz, 'Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution' in: Esposito, John L. (ed)., 1983 *Voices of Resurgent Islam,* New York: Oxford University Press, 207.

Indeed Bahraini Shiʿa have long drawn parallels between the story of the Battle of Karbala and their contemporary resistance against the Al Khalifa regime, appropriating religiously-inspired narratives of martyrdom and sacrifice to present-day struggles against sectarian discrimination and repression. Gengler observes that "in Bahrain, religious rites and celebrations are replete with allegory and even explicit comparison,"[314] in particular following the aforementioned 1990s *Intifāḍa*, in which a number of prominent Shiʿi protest leaders drew strong parallels between their plight and the narrative of bloodshed at Karbala. For example, Gengler mentions Sheikh Hussein al-Akraf, who was imprisoned for five years in the 1990s for "developing new chants in which he connected the drama of Karbala and that of the Bahraini martyrs, Hussein's fight against (the Umayyad Caliph) Yazid and the Bahrainis' fight against the Al Khalifa."[315] The sectarian dimension behind this parallel is both clear to all and highly potent, given the crucial significance of Karbala in cementing the Sunni-Shiʿi schism and the Bahraini Shiʿi community's lengthy history of oppression at the hands of the Sunni Al Khalifa monarchs. The popularity of the Karbala narrative as a tool of political mobilisation appears to have only increased following the 2011 uprising, particularly on social media, with some opposition sites for example referring to King Hamad as "the Yazid of our time,"[316] and describing themselves as "seekers of (Hussein's) vengeance, continuing his line through fighting oppression."[317] The extent to which this historical narrative has taken on a political and arguably, sectarian bent in Bahrain is illustrated by the following comment by veteran protest leader Abdul-Wahhab Hussein, currently in prison: "The history of Shiʿism is the history of opposition against Sunni powers."[318] The researcher's interviews with the Bahraini Shiʿi grassroots evidenced similar views, for example the mother of a young 'martyr' killed in the 2011 uprising stated that:

[314] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 148.
[315] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 67.
[316] See for example the following post by the February 14 Youth Coalition on Ashura 2015: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1043844785666552&id=178269738890732
[317] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1044101792307518&id=178269738890732
[318] Quoted in Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 25.

The regime in Bahrain is unjust… they are outsiders, it's us, the people, who are the origin and we should protect the country by sacrificing like Imam Hussain, peace be upon him, when he sacrificed himself for Islam in Karbala.[319]

One activist proudly announced that "fighting for our rights is in our blood," and criticised the Sunni Umayyad caliphate responsible for Karbala, whose leaders only "claim to be Muslim." Drawing a parallel with the present day, he argued that "the beheading of Hussein was like ISIS."[320] Another interview subject acknowledged the impact such narratives have on exacerbating sectarian tensions, stating that "when the Mahdi will come, it means the Shiʿa will achieve their rightful place in power. This is why the Sunnis are afraid, they hear what the Shiʿa are saying in their sermons and their prayers."[321]

Indeed the role of Shiʿi religious institutions such as mosques, maʾtams[322] and charity funds has come under increasing scrutiny in Bahrain in recent decades, in particular due to the growing involvement of the clerical class in politics. Maʾtams in particular play an important and varied role, especially within Bahrain's Shiʿa villages, and facilitate a range of activities of a religious and/or community-based nature. Bahry estimated that as of 2000 there were roughly four hundred maʾtams in Bahrain, each with its own charter and elected board of directors,[323] involved in commemorating religious festivals, religious education, mourning the deaths of community members and providing a platform for debate and discussion about local issues of a political or religious nature. One interview subject described the maʾtam as "where the political discussions take place" because maʾtams are seen as "the one safe space that exists where you can't be called up or get into trouble legally for voicing your political opinions."[324] Kinninmont indeed notes that "the social

[319] Interview with martyr's mother 17 December 2015.
[320] Interview with activist 27 September 2015.
[321] Interview with activist 25 December 2015.
[322] Often translated as 'mourning houses,' although they fulfil a much broader function. Another commonly-used term for maʾtam is *ḥusayniyya.*
[323] Bahry, Louay, 'The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain' *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11:3 (2000): 135-6.
[324] Interview with activist 17 June 2015.

infrastructure of maʾtams… used for social and sometimes political or para-political gatherings, has helped to create strong networks of community solidarity."[325]

Most maʾtams also run their own charity fund (*ṣundūq khaīrī*) which collects donations to distribute to poorer members of the local community.[326] Given the government's poor service provision within many Shiʿi neighbourhoods and villages, these charity funds provide an important safety net. The growing social role of local religious charities is part of a wider trend in Bahrain in which government neglect has resulted in increasing community self-reliance. The years following the 2011 uprising in particular have seen the establishment of underground clinics in villages as alternatives to hospitals for treating injured protesters, and the organisation of local community fundraising drives to support workers who were fired during the mass lay-offs of 2011, or to send injured protesters overseas for surgery.[327] The government has attempted to regulate maʾtam charity funds, mandating that all donations be formally disclosed, along with the names of donors and recipients.[328] This was likely motivated by concerns surrounding the increasing involvement of Shiʿi religious institutions in politics, including assistance provided to the families of 'martyrs' killed in clashes with security forces and allegations that some institutions receive funding from abroad.

Clerics enjoy considerable influence within Bahrain's Shiʿi community, in particular a handful of senior clerics who are consulted widely on matters of religious doctrine as well as on subjects of a social or political nature. Many are officially or informally involved in politics, for example Bahrain's then most revered cleric Sheikh ʿAbdul-ʾAmir al-Jamri was a prominent opposition leader during the 1990s *Intifāḍa*, and the country's current top cleric and spiritual leader of the al-Wefaq party, Sheikh ʿIsa al-Qasim, was elected to Bahrain's first parliament in 1973. A number of tolerated and antisystem Shiʿi political societies during the 2000s were headed by clerics, such as al-Wefaq's ʿAli Salman, Haqq's Hussein Mushaimaʿ and Wafaʾ's ʿAbdul-Wahhab Hussein, all of whom are currently political prisoners. The clerical establishment is widely respected by Bahraini Shiʿa in part because it is financially independent from the state, with most

[325] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 125.
[326] Bahry, *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition,* 136.
[327] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 118.
[328] Bahry, *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition,* 136.

clerics refusing the government stipends available to them and instead choosing to support themselves through *khums* (a religious tithe) paid to them by their followers.[329]

A 2008 US diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks titled *The Shiʿa Clerical Hierarchy in Bahrain* provides further insights into Bahrain's clerical establishment, listing the most influential scholars in order of rank, influence and level of religious scholarship, with ʿIsa al-Qasim topping each category.[330] Concurring with most scholars in suggesting that the majority of Bahraini clerics refer to Najaf-based *marājiʿ* (sources of emulation), and in particular Grand Ayatollah ʿAli Sistani, the cable observes that only two of the ten most-influential clerics turn elsewhere for guidance, with one looking to Grand Ayatollah Fadlallah in Lebanon (now deceased) and the other to the clerics within the Iranian religious centre of Qom. The embassy document concluded that "during Saddam Hussein's regime, Bahraini clerics shifted their studies from Najaf to Qom out of security concerns"[331] however this did not include a shift in allegiance- the majority of Bahrain's Shiʿi public and clerical class continue to refer to Najaf. This appears to contradict the Bahraini government's frequent criticism of the Shiʿi clerical establishment of being in thrall to Iran and subscribing to Khomeini's reinvention of the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, which is rejected by Sistani and most Najaf-based *ʿulamāʾ*.[332]

In spite of frequent assurances from clerics such as al-Wefaq's ʿAli Salman that the moderate clerical elites support democracy and reject any form of Iranian-style theocratic rule, suspicion of the motives behind clerical involvement in politics persists in Bahrain. Schmidmayr has noted that the adoption of the rhetoric of democratisation by Gulf regimes has led various Islamist opposition groups in the region to develop a similar vocabulary,[333] while the commitment of both to democratic principles remains suspect. As a result, the true intentions of Islamist opposition groups are frequently called into question, due to this prevailing

[329] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 118.
[330] US Embassy Manama, 'The Shiʿa Clerical Hierarchy in Bahrain' *WikiLeaks*, 7 August 2008, Accessible via: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/bahrain-wikileaks-cables/8334568/THE-SHIA-CLERICAL-HIERARCHY-IN-BAHRAIN.html
[331] US Embassy Manama, *The Shiʿa Clerical Hierarchy in Bahrain*, n.p.
[332] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 133.
[333] Schmidmayr, *Islamist Engagement in Contentious Politics*, 167.

"dichotomy between façade and reality"[334] often necessitated by the need to appeal to international backers such as the United States, who condition their support on ideological moderation. Such concerns about the Shiʿi Islamist opposition were regularly voiced by Sunni Bahrainis interviewed by the researcher, but also by a number of Shiʿi Bahrainis, and in particular by younger activists who were not necessarily aligned with any one activist movement. Sunni interview subjects would bemoan that "the religious people are not able to say anything without going to consult *marāji'*"[335] and that the Shiʿa "treat the clerics as powerful individuals and will trust their word on anything."[336] One Shiʿi professional voiced a similar distrust of clerics, remarking that "you can't rule countries by religious values… you can't rule as Shiʿites. We don't want clerics to come to power. They (Sunnis) have the right to be afraid. They are afraid when we go to Iran, to Iraq" (for pilgrimage).[337] Even one long-standing member of al-Wefaq confessed to the researcher that he is sceptical of ʿAli Salman's democratic credentials- "He is a religious man. When he talks about democracy it doesn't match,"[338] another experienced Shiʿi activist furthered this- "ʿAli Salman is Islamic, but is trying to be a liberal… (but) in our religion, if you want to be a leader, you need to get approval from an Ayatollah… ʿAli Salman has it from ʿIsa Qasim."[339] Others however were supportive of the involvement of clerics in politics. According to one young activist, "they understand what we need- a civilian state, not an Islamic state. Bahrain is multicultural, we can't handle an Islamic state."[340] Another dismissed concerns as "an invention of the regime," stating that "none of the opposition groups want Islamic government in Bahrain."[341]

Indeed it is the transnational nature of Shiʿism, particularly in a tiny country such as Bahrain which typically outsources clerical instruction to more established seminaries abroad, which engenders such suspicion from both the monarchy and Sunni community. The nature of the Bahraini Shiʿa's transnational links is

[334] Albrecht, *Political Opposition and Arab Authoritari*anism, 23.
[335] Interview with community leader 24 December 2015.
[336] Interview with activist 13 May 2015.
[337] Interview with activist 25 December 2015.
[338] Interview with al-Wefaq member 11 September 2015.
[339] Interview with activist 29 September 2015.
[340] Interview with activist 9 December 2015.
[341] Interview with activist 10 September 2015.

often misunderstood, and is presented as an impediment to securing the loyalty of the country's Shiʿi citizens.[342] Bahrain's Shiʿa however appear to be caught in a catch-22 style predicament, in that their lack of political influence and the government's reluctance to promote independent domestic Shiʿi religious institutions increases the appeal and attractiveness of sending trainee clerics abroad to more prestigious institutions free from government interference. However, the fact that so many Bahraini clerics (and clerics-cum-politicians) train abroad, as well as the frequent religious pilgrimages made by pious Bahraini Shiʿa to sites in Iraq and Iran, acts to call their loyalty into question, and as such further marginalises the Shiʿi community from political influence. This relationship is also complicated when foreign Shiʿi clerics are seen to interfere in Bahraini politics, for example in 2006 when the usually quietist Ayatollah Sistani voiced a preference for al-Wefaq's participation in elections, causing the group to end its electoral boycott (see Chapter 5).[343] During the 2011 uprising Sistani formally endorsed the protests, as did firebrand Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who urged thousands of his supporters to demonstrate on the streets in support of Bahrain's Shiʿa.[344] This, combined with ill-timed pronouncements by Iranian politicians about the unrest in Bahrain, allowed the Al Khalifa to claim that the 2011 protests were directed from abroad, promoting the narrative that the mostly Shiʿi pro-democracy protesters were disloyal citizens who sought to install Shiʿi theocratic rule in Bahrain.

The social and political marginalisation of Bahrain's Shiʿi community, which is in part fuelled by suspicion as to their loyalties and the intentions behind Shiʿi clerical involvement in politics, is compounded by the fact that Bahrainis can readily identify each other's sectarian affiliation in public spaces and social encounters. Cues such as names, dress and dialect act as clear indicators of sect in Bahrain, as can one's residential address. Davidson notes that Bahraini Shiʿa increasingly avoid wearing national dress, seen as a symbol of the Al Khalifa regime, and that during the 2011 uprising the white *thawb* was burnt as an effigy in some protests.[345] The Bahraini Shiʿi dialect of Arabic is distinct from that of the Sunni community, for instance the

[342] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 8.
[343] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 133.
[344] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 83.
[345] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*, 62.

letter *kaf* is pronounced 'ch,' for example the Shiʿi village of Dar Kulaib is referred to by residents as "Dar Chulaib," and fish is rendered "samach" rather than *samak*. One interview subject boasted to the researcher that "I can tell out of a hundred persons who I have never seen before, 'this is Sunni, this is Shiʿi.' And if they start talking I can give you 100% which one's Shiʿi and which one's Sunni!"[346] Popular Shiʿi names are often religiously inspired, for example Hussein, ʿAli, Zainab, Jaʿfar etc., as are many Sunni names, and as such the individual's sect is often instantly identifiable. According to one activist who complained of employment discrimination, "it's so obvious from a person's name what religion they are… Straight away when you're applying for a job they know your religion."[347] Sunni and Shiʿi homes can sometimes be identified from the street, as Sunni houses often fly the Bahraini flag and some Shiʿi houses feature flags or posters bearing religious slogans or the name of Imam Hussein, as is also the case with some cars.[348] Inside the home too there are indications. One Shiʿi opposition leader commented that "in my home, go anywhere, you will never find three pictures: the King, the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince," claiming that images of the Al Khalifa monarchs can be found in the home of every Sunni.[349] Instead, Shiʿi homes often feature posters or framed pictures of revered local clerics or foreign *marājiʿ* such as Sheikh ʿIsa al-Qasim or Ayatollah Sistani.

Given the prevailing suspicions surrounding a "Shiite fifth column"[350] and the ease with which it is possible to distinguish citizens on the basis of sect, it is not altogether surprising that Bahraini Shiʿa complain of an entrenched culture of sectarian discrimination, linked to government divide and rule policies which act to head off pressure for political reform (see Chapter 3). Davidson has argued that the Shiʿa have been "relegated to second class citizenship,"[351] and Gengler refers to "tiers of citizenship"[352] constructed through deliberate policies such as electoral district gerrymandering and the mass naturalisation of foreign Sunnis, aimed at diluting the Shiʿi majority's demands for a fairer distribution of Bahrain's resource wealth and

[346] Interview with community leader 16 December 2015.
[347] Interview with activist 7 June 2015.
[348] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 64.
[349] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.
[350] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 88.
[351] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*, 112.
[352] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 26.

representation in politics. The following section will explore the various major domestic grievances highlighted in the literature and through the researcher's fieldwork interviews in Bahrain, which act to foster resentment within the Shiʿi community and were instrumental in triggering both the 1990s *Intifāḍa* and the 2011 uprising.

Core Grievances: Discrimination in Housing, Education and Employment

Aside from broader rights-based concerns which also impact Sunni citizens, such as restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of speech, Bahraini Shiʿa regularly complain of systemic disadvantage in a number of domestic policy areas which many have argued are determined on a sectarian basis.[353] The next section will discuss some of the most commonly-cited concerns, including unequal access to public housing and discrimination in education and employment. The section following this will examine the Bahraini government's involvement in demographic engineering, including the issues of migrant workers, naturalisation and citizenship revocation, which are frequently cited as core grievances by Bahraini Shiʿa and interestingly, a growing number of Bahraini Sunnis.

Housing

The provision of housing is popularly viewed as a key government responsibility across all of the Gulf states, and GCC governments have adopted a variety of distributive policies ranging from subsidising the purchase of land to providing complete housing packages to citizens. Bahrain's combination of declining oil wealth and rapidly growing population has meant that its poorer constituents, which tend to be Shiʿi, often languish for decades on public housing waiting lists. Luciani singles out real estate and the issue of land usage and zoning in particular as major factors exacerbating socio-economic divides in Bahrain, which typically (but not always) correlate with sectarian divides. This is due to the fact that "very powerful interests are involved, including frequently those of members of the ruling families," interests which

[353] See for example: Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 12; Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*, 112; Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 26.

contribute to "the seeming inability of the state to provide housing for poor nationals."[354] The issue of fairness was frequently cited by Bahrainis interviewed by the researcher, which appeared to be a greater source of grievance than the length of waiting time involved. Davidson notes that "some 50,000 Bahraini nationals (are) estimated to be on waiting lists to receive affordable housing" and "in some cases Bahraini nationals have had to wait over twenty years before being properly housed."[355] The government however is frequently accused of placing new recruits to the security services and their families, most of whom are foreign, at the top of the waiting list at the expense of the mostly-Shiʿi local poor or unemployed.[356] This policy was criticised by a considerable number of interview respondents, both Sunni and Shiʿi, all of whom resented what they took to be queue-jumping by foreign workers and newly-naturalised Bahraini citizens (an issue which will be expanded upon in the next section). This policy disproportionately affects the Shiʿa as their economic marginalisation has meant that Shiʿi citizens are overrepresented among the unemployed, and are more likely to live in impoverished conditions or be in need of housing assistance. For example a Shiʿi fisherman living in Sitra, one of the most economically deprived areas of Bahrain, told the researcher that:

The government has built only 106 houses for the people of Sitra, but the population is 120,000. There is not enough houses for people to get married, as there is often no space to bring the wife to live with the groom's parents and there are not enough new houses for them to move into.[357]

Whilst a number of Sunni respondents interviewed by the researcher were strongly critical of the prioritisation of naturalised citizens in the provision of public housing, most acknowledged that it was relatively easy for Sunnis to secure housing assistance in Bahrain. Some of this may be due to sectarianism, but it is also likely due to connections (*wāsṭa*). As Sunnis tend to work in the public sector, they are often able to utilise their contacts within the bureaucracy to access benefits faster. One Sunni interviewee even

[354] Luciani, Giacomo, 'On the Economic Causes of the Arab Spring and its Possible Developments' in: Selvik, Kjetil and Utvik, Bjorn Olav (eds)., 2016. *Oil States in the New Middle East,* London: Routledge, 197.
[355] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*, 131.
[356] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 31.
[357] Interview with fisherman 19 December 2015.

told the researcher that his family had rejected the first house they were offered, and obtained an audience with the Minister of Housing in order to demand another.[358] Some Sunni respondents also complained about the nature of the public housing being built- "they're so ridiculously packed together, you're packing human beings together like they're sardines in a tin can,"[359] and objected to sharing their neighbourhoods with the newly-arrived foreign workers housed in them. One self-described "moderate, secular Sunni" termed the government's public housing policy "a disaster" and "the perfect environment for something to explode or erupt" due to the placement of poor Bahraini Shiʿi families in dense public apartment blocks alongside naturalised members of the security forces:

Bahrainis who have been waiting on the housing list for 20 years, you're giving them a tiny flat, moreover you're putting all the people that you brought from Pakistan and Yemen to fill your police force, you're putting them in the same place!... You're putting together two conflicting groups in a tight space, they're economically in trouble, socially they don't get along… the people you're bringing over aren't doing any job, they're doing the job that nobody really likes in Bahrain, they're doing the police jobs. The ones going into Bahraini homes and pulling people out. And you're putting them with the people who are protesting![360]

Perhaps recognising the combustive potential of such a melting pot, it appears anecdotally at least that the government tends to prefer to house naturalised citizens and foreign workers in Sunni neighbourhoods, mixed areas or built-for-purpose standalone suburbs. Most of Bahrain remains relatively segregated along sectarian lines, with the exclusively Shiʿi neighbourhoods and villages suffering from low levels of government and municipal investment, not only in housing but in infrastructure and the provision of basic utilities.[361] Access to public housing, as well as housing affordability in general, was a major grievance cited by activists during the 2011 uprising, and forms one of the sharpest fault lines within Bahrain today, indicating socio-economic and to a large extent, sectarian social divisions.

[358] Interview with student 20 December 2015.
[359] Interview with activist 15 December 2015.
[360] Interview with professional 13 May 2015.
[361] Rabi and Kostiner, *The Shiʿis in Bahrain*, 173.

Education

Education is another major grievance of Bahrain's Shiʿi community which is curiously rarely mentioned in the academic literature. The researcher interviewed a number of Bahrainis involved directly in the education sector, including teachers and former members of the now-dissolved Bahrain Teachers Union, officials affiliated with the Ministry of Education, academics and university students. Bahrainis of both sects were broadly in agreement that the standard and quality of education in Bahrain has declined following the 2011 uprising, in no small measure due to government attempts to purge the school and university systems of individuals sympathetic to the protesters, hastily replacing them with unqualified loyalists. This is in addition to the large number of university students who were expelled from their courses for participating in the uprising, including following violent clashes between students and plainclothes thugs which occurred on the campus of the University of Bahrain in March 2011.[362] Indeed, one Sunni public official indicated to the researcher that, following the uprising, "the Ministry of Education is repressing talented students because their families are not loyal. The development of people is not a priority in Bahrain right now."[363]

Prior to the 2011 uprising the Shiʿi community's primary complaints about Bahrain's education system centred on the absence of Shiʿi-specific religious education or history in the school curriculum, large class sizes and a lack of investment in Shiʿi-majority government schools, and discrimination in awarding university places and merit scholarships. Most children of the middle and upper classes attend non-governmental private or international schools, which encompasses the majority of Bahraini Sunni children, the children of well-off Shiʿi families as well as those of Bahrain's sizeable Western expat community. Working class and poorer Bahrainis, many of whom are Shiʿi,[364] send their children to government-run schools, which are often overcrowded and in many areas are effectively segregated on the basis of sect.[365]

[362] Bassiouni, Mahmoud Cherif et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 23 November 2011. Accessible via: www.bici.org.bh/BICIreportEN.pdf, 355-357.
[363] Interview with public servant 26 December 2015.
[364] Bengio, Ofra and Ben-Dor, Gabriel, 'The State and Minorities Toward the Twenty-first Century: An Overview' in: Bengio, Ofra and Ben-Dor, Gabriel (eds)., 1999. *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*. London: Lynne Rienner, 193.
[365] Interview with former education volunteer 29 April 2015.

One former Ministry of Education employee, who used to perform inspections in government schools, noted that in many of the poorer areas Shiʿi students were sharing classrooms with the children of migrant workers or naturalised Bahraini citizens, many of whom did not speak Arabic:

There were so many issues with having all these kids who had come from Pakistan, not Arabic speakers, crowding them in classrooms with Bahrainis. Teachers would find themselves completely unable to teach, like this child doesn't speak even a word of English, there is no support for them, there is no extra second language dimension or whatever in schools… There were just fights all the time. In the boys schools which we used to see there were literally fights with weapons between these Shiʿi boys and these boys from Pakistan… You're causing all this resentment, you're packing like thirty-five kids in a classroom, the kids who are obviously Bahraini they're already stuck in a crappy system, but now it's getting even more crappy because there are all these kids who need to be dealt with, so what are your chances of ever improving your standard of living?[366]

Some Shiʿi interviewees told the researcher they attended school in mixed areas, and studied alongside Bahraini Sunnis. Whilst some formed friendships, most noted that even in primary school they were aware of the sectarian divides within the classroom. One reported that "even from a young age I knew… I am second class, he is first class."[367] Another told the researcher:

When I was in primary school I was remembering how my Sunni friends, sometimes they point at us, at the Shiʿas, 'oh you need to struggle a lot, you need to find a job, you're not like us you can't get recruited so easily.'[368]

One Shiʿi Bahraini, who described himself as coming from a wealthy family, recounted his first day at a private American-run school in which many of his classmates were Sunnis. When he first arrived in grade four his class pointed at him and called him "Baḥārna" and "Shiʿa," and he didn't know what these words

[366] Interview with former public servant 13 May 2015.
[367] Interview with activist 11 September 2015.
[368] Interview with activist 29 June 2015.

meant. Later on, he remembered a Sunni kid telling him about "how the Shiʿa are tortured in prison."[369] In spite of incidents such as this, it is arguably valuable in terms of social cohesion for Sunni and Shiʿi students to continue to study alongside each other, however most interviewees involved in the education sector acknowledged that, following the uprising, attempts at further segregating Bahraini schools on the basis of sect intensified. One former principal, active in the teachers union, even claimed that the Ministry of Education had an official policy of creating a completely segregated schooling system, which it attempted to enact throughout 2011 and 2012 by transferring teachers to schools which corresponded with their sect. She noted however, that this policy ultimately failed due to a shortage of Sunni teachers, as most of the workforce of government-employed teachers were Shiʿa.[370]

When the uprising broke out on 14 February 2011 Bahrain's teachers and students were on vacation, and the Bahrain Teacher's Association, a non-political society established out of the National Charter era reforms (expanded on in Chapter 5), requested that the Ministry of Education postpone the beginning of the new school term due to the unrest. When this request was declined, the Association, headed by Madhi Abu Deeb, held a series of teachers' sit-ins and strikes with participation from a remarkable 90% of government schools.[371] The first sit-in was held on 20 February, and afterwards roughly nine thousand teachers marched from their schools to the Pearl Roundabout, where the Teachers' Association had erected its own tent. Students also organised protests both within and outside of school grounds, and in some areas large numbers of students did not attend school due to their involvement in demonstrations.[372]

Following a three day teachers' strike, the Ministry of Education announced a new policy, in which any 'loyal citizen' could volunteer to teach in Bahrain's government schools, regardless of their qualifications. Around six thousand signed up during the strike, ranging from teenagers to the elderly, for what was initially intended to be a temporary placement. When the teachers returned after the strike, they were forced to train the volunteers, who in many cases would become their replacements. During the post-

[369] Interview with activist 27 September 2015.
[370] Interview with education union official 23 December 2015.
[371] Interview with education union official 23 December 2015.
[372] Interview with education union official 23 December 2015.

uprising crackdown, more than five thousand teachers were summoned before Ministry of Education disciplinary boards, and faced punishments ranging from criminal prosecution and prison to salary cuts and suspensions. The Ministry began hiring thousands of foreign teachers from countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, who along with the unqualified volunteer recruits were to replace the then largely Shiʿi workforce.[373]

Prior to 2011, the Ministry of Education had been considered a 'Shiʿi-friendly' ministry, in part because teachers in government schools were often poorly paid, and as such teaching in the public system was not seen as a particularly attractive employment prospect for Bahraini Sunnis.[374] According to one teacher interviewed by the researcher, "the thing that's really hard is that Bahraini Shiʿa are not being employed in the Ministry of Education," noting that since 2011 over two thousand new education graduates have been unable to find a job in spite of the continuing teachers' shortage- "Because they are Shiʿa… the sectarian issue is very, very clear. Even the blind can see that."[375] The removal of such a large number of experienced teachers in 2011 has led to a dramatic fall in education standards, and some Sunni parents have begun calling for their reinstatement. The former teachers' union member claimed that the loyalist volunteers "don't do anything other than spy on the teachers and students. They tried sending some of them to university to gain a teaching qualification, but more than 75% failed the course."[376] There is also dissatisfaction with the newly recruited foreign teachers, whose different culture and approach to teaching has led to conflict with parents- "Now a number of Sunnis are raising their voices, they want the Bahrainis back to teach their kids."[377]

The university sector has also been the subject of allegations of discrimination by the Bahraini Shiʿi community. For several decades prior to the uprising, the Shiʿa have complained that government provision of undergraduate scholarships, which are supposed to be based on merit and awarded to students who

[373] Interview with teacher 24 December 2015.
[374] Interview with former public servant 11 September 2015.
[375] Interview with teacher 24 December 2015.
[376] Interview with education union official 23 December 2015.
[377] Interview with education union official 23 December 2015.

score highly in their matriculation exams, have been awarded on the basis of loyalty. According to one activist working on the subject more than 90% of merit scholarships are awarded to Sunni students:

A scholarship comes from five different institutions in Bahrain: The police, the army, the royal court, the Crown Prince or Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Education. All of these institutions that provide scholarships, they don't employ Shiʿa. They give them (scholarships) *to their staff, or the children of their staff. Even scholarships which are part of the Ministry of Education, Shiʿa will not get.*[378]

Government scholarships had been one of the only ways Bahrainis from poorer backgrounds had been able to afford to enter university, and many respondents claimed that the proportion awarded to Shiʿi students has dropped dramatically following the 2011 uprising. One Bahraini journalist remarked to the researcher that the student who achieved the highest grade in the country's 2015 matriculation exams did not even receive a merit scholarship- "It's a big blow. People would study all their lives, get top grades… and they took that away from them. Just because they are from the wrong sect."[379] Several interview subjects mentioned that they believed the government has a policy of trying to reduce the number of Shiʿi professionals employed in some sectors, such as health and education, which had traditionally employed large numbers of Shiʿi Bahrainis. One al-Wefaq supporter who works in the health industry commented that:

The government… want to drop the percentage of Shiʿa in the health profession, so are not allowing Shiʿa students to study medicine. They are interfering in scholarships to prevent Shiʿa from studying. There is also a 3-4 year wait for Shiʿa graduates of medicine and nursing to find a job, despite a shortage of nurses. Sunnis receive a monthly salary during their studies and are recruited directly after graduation.[380]

A former Ministry of Education employee told the researcher that following the 2011 uprising, the government announced that it was changing the merit scholarship application process. Where scholarships

[378] Interview with human rights activist 14 December 2015.
[379] Interview with journalist 24 December 2015.
[380] Interview with nurse 14 December 2015.

were once awarded ostensibly on the sole basis of the student's GPA, the new system assesses students on a combination of their GPA and their performance in an interview. The interview was allegedly used as "a means of assessing loyalty to the government."[381] In addition, thousands of students were expelled from Bahraini universities in 2011 due to their involvement in the protests, and hundreds had their scholarships withdrawn.[382] The government also began revoking its recognition of qualifications from certain foreign institutions, such as universities in India and Hong Kong, which had been popular with Bahraini Shiʿi students unable to gain access to local universities and unable to pay for tertiary courses in the West.[383]

A number of interview respondents noted that Bahraini students studying abroad were also being monitored by the government, and were told that their scholarships would be cancelled if they engaged in political activity. This claim is corroborated by the independent report commissioned by the government following the 2011 uprising, which states in its findings that 97 overseas scholarship recipients had had their funding cancelled, and later reinstated.[384] One Bahraini who had studied in New York mentioned that some students were issued with Bahraini passports valid for one year only, to give the government leverage over them as they had to apply for a new passport for each year of their course.[385] Another mentioned that Bahrainis studying overseas were encouraged to film and report instances of other Bahraini students engaged in anti-government activism on their university campuses.[386] The researcher even heard stories of Bahraini students studying in other parts of the Arab world who had their passports cancelled and/or citizenship revoked due to their anti-government activities, and had been essentially rendered stateless and trapped abroad, knowing that if they were to return to Bahrain they would be imprisoned. The situation of secondary and tertiary education in Bahrain is in many ways a corollary of longstanding discrimination against the Shiʿa in the workforce, which dates back to the imperial period and is manifest in both the public and private sectors. The following section will discuss this issue in greater detail.

[381] Interview with former public servant 23 December 2015.
[382] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 118.
[383] Interview with human rights activist 14 December 2015; interview with activist 27 December 2015.
[384] Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 357.
[385] Interview with student 27 September 2015.
[386] Interview with student 9 September 2015.

Employment

The 1970s oil boom led to increasing segmentation within Bahrain's labour market, in which citizens largely came to be employed in the public sector and what Louër refers to as the "semi-private sector,"[387] which includes state-owned companies, with expats occupying private sector roles. When oil production peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, the government adopted a policy of "almost guaranteed public employment for male citizens, especially those who hold degrees,"[388] however the oil price stagnation of the 1990s, combined with population growth generated by a high birth rate and the government's naturalisation policies,[389] meant that the public sector could no longer provide employment for all of Bahrain's educated citizen population. As such, Bahrainis' "high expectations toward the state's capacity to provide social well-being and, in particular, to provide job opportunities"[390] and the government's inability to meet these expectations has engendered a decades-long employment crisis.

Labour market reform has been attempted on a number of occasions, most notably following King Hamad's rise to power in 1999, when moderates within the royal family proposed disincentivising the hiring of expatriates and migrant workers in order to integrate more citizens into the private sector.[391] However, vested interests, particularly within a rival faction of the Al Khalifa family led by the Prime Minister, acted to scuttle these reforms.[392] Bahrain's unemployment crisis has only been exacerbated by the exorbitant promises made by the Al Khalifa in 2011, largely to placate the demands of increasingly vocal Sunni activist groups, which whilst affirming their loyalty to the state demanded a greater share of Bahrain's dwindling rentier wealth in exchange for their support.[393] For example, in 2011 the government announced it was

[387] Louër, Laurence, 'Activism in Bahrain: Between Sectarianism and Issue Politics' in: Khatib, Lina and Lust, Ellen (eds)., 2014. *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 180.
[388] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain,* 180.
[389] According to official government figures, as of 2014 Bahrain's population growth rate was 7.4%. See: Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Information Affairs, 'Population and Demographics' 2 September 2014, www.mia.gov.bh/en/Kingdom-of-Bahrain/Pages/Population-and-Demographic-Growth.aspx
[390] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain,* 180.
[391] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain,* 180-181.
[392] Gengler, Justin, 'Royal Factionalism, the Khawalid and the Securitization of 'the Shiʿa Problem' in Bahrain,' *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3:1 (2013): 69.
[393] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict,* 231.

creating twenty thousand new public sector positions in the Ministry of Interior, a department which has historically been off-limits to Bahraini Shiʿa. The funds to pay for this however came from the US$10 billion emergency aid package which the wealthier GCC states provided Bahrain in order to stave off dissent.[394] Bahrain currently appears to be on the brink of a period of acute economic crisis, triggered by record low oil prices, unsustainable government spending and a crippling budget deficit,[395] and it is unclear how the government will continue to maintain high levels of public sector employment, seen by Sunni Bahrainis and many Shiʿa to be an "expected right of citizenship."[396]

Bahry has argued that Bahraini Shiʿa mostly did not benefit from the 1970s and 1980s oil boom, and that even during this period of relative prosperity the Shiʿi community suffered from high levels of unemployment.[397] Wright has cast doubt on Bahrain's official employment statistics, suggesting that unemployment levels are unevenly distributed between various sectors of society, and that "unemployment and underemployment are disproportionately higher amongst the Shiʿa community when compared with the national average."[398] In a 2011 opinion piece written for the *Washington Times*, King Hamad stated that his "most important priority is job creation for all Bahrainis."[399] However, prior to the 2011 uprising a report suggested that due to population increase, "real GDP growth rates at upwards of 10% per year were required to create enough new jobs in the labour market,"[400] a prospect made doubly unrealistic in light of the country's post-2011 economic challenges. Most scholarly evidence points to the fact that the Shiʿi community has so far borne the brunt of Bahrain's unemployment woes, which intriguingly now appear to be affecting some segments of the Sunni community too, despite of the Al Khalifa's 2011 stop-gap measures. The perception among Bahraini Shiʿa that their community has suffered from decades of employment discrimination, particularly in the public sector, was a crucial motivating

[394] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 22.
[395] Kinninmont, *Bahrain; Rentierism and Beyond,* 117.
[396] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 33.
[397] Bahry, *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition,* 137.
[398] Wright, *Fixing the Kingdom*, 10.
[399] Al-Khalifa, King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman, 'Stability is Prerequisite for Progress: Extremists Impede Bahrain's Headway Toward Political Reform and Job Creation' *The Washington Times,* 19 April 2011, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/apr/19/stability-is-prerequisite-for-progress/
[400] Wright, *Fixing the Kingdom*, 11.

factor behind the popular uprisings in both the 1990s and 2011. The academic literature as well as interview data collected by the researcher overwhelmingly indicates that accusations of sectarian discrimination are broadly justified, and that the situation has only worsened following the 2011 uprising.

Gengler has noted that in many ways Bahrain defies the internal logic of the rentier state model, which for example typically treats the mass employment of citizens in the public sector as a vehicle for political co-optation. Conversely, in Bahrain "it is not public-sector employment that secures political allegiance; rather it is political allegiance that tends to secure public-sector employment."[401] Indeed Gengler's 2009 political opinion survey of Bahrain revealed that "a Sunni Bahraini is 56 percent more likely to be employed in the public sector" than "a Shiʿi of identical employment-relevant attributes."[402] The survey showed that there was little difference between highly educated Sunni and Shiʿi citizens when it came to employment prospects in the public sector, however less-educated Sunnis were much more likely to secure public sector work than less-educated Shiʿa.[403] When coupled with the growing discrimination in access to education highlighted in the previous section, these figures seem to demonstrate that Bahraini Shiʿa do indeed need to work much harder to attain secure employment in the public sector in contrast to their Sunni compatriots.

While government employment is used to incentivise political quiescence in wealthier Gulf states, Bahrain's exclusion of its Shiʿi majority from the rentier bargain (which appears to extend to the Sunni community alone) has resulted in a situation in which the very grievances such a system was designed to alleviate are instead exacerbated. The link between loyalty to the regime and public sector employment was further entrenched in the wake of the 2011 uprising, after which thousands of government employees were fired

[401] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 59.
[402] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 111.
[403] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 116.

for taking part in protests or strikes[404] and calls emerged from Sunni protest groups to reduce the number of Shiʿi employees in ministries not already considered off-limits to them.[405]

Discrimination against Bahraini Shiʿa in public sector employment is widely acknowledged in Bahrain, including within the Sunni community. According to one Sunni professional interviewed by the researcher:

It's systematic discrimination. It's not encoded necessarily- it doesn't have to be written down anywhere that some people can't do some jobs, and some people will automatically get some positions- but it happens. And everybody knows that it does happen…. Obviously I do think that there is a much greater level of discrimination against Shiʿa. It's become a lot more apparent since 2011, it become somehow more socially acceptable to say 'no, they're Shiʿa, I don't want them.' Whereas before it was unsaid, but it was clear that it happened.[406]

Much of this discrimination is rooted in the fact that due to concerns surrounding their loyalty, Bahraini Shiʿa have traditionally been restricted from employment in 'sensitive' ministries including Defence, Foreign Affairs, Interior and Justice, as well as in the security services.[407] While much of the literature claims that virtually no Shiʿa work within these sectors,[408] the researcher interviewed a number of individuals who prior to the 2011 uprising were employed by, for example, the Ministry of Justice, the military and the police force. Aside from unimportant clerical positions within these ministries and more minor security roles such as traffic police, it appears that prior to 2011 it was still possible for educated Shiʿi public servants with the right connections to obtain work in the more sensitive ministries. The uprising however led the government to increasingly view the presence of Shiʿi employees in some ministries as a potential

[404] Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen, 'Introduction' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising* London: Zed Books, 8.
[405] Interview with nurse 14 December 2015.
[406] Interview with professional 17 June 2015.
[407] Bahry, *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition,* 133.
[408] See for example, Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 149; Rabi and Kostiner, *The Shiʿis in Bahrain*, 173.

security threat. According to one former al-Wefaq MP, "before it was only sensitive areas, now it is all areas- Education, Health, Municipality- everywhere. Shiʿi is not welcomed."[409]

The picture is less clear in the private sector, and very much depends on the industry and whether or not a company has close ties with government. Kinninmont argues that "Bahrain's successful and privileged merchant families include both Sunni and Shiʿa families of both Arab and Persian descent,"[410] and that a history of support for the government is more likely to define the relationship between a private company and the regime rather than the sect of its owners and employees. Despite this however, Gengler's survey also concluded that "Bahrain's executive, supervisory and professional classes are disproportionately occupied by the nation's Sunnis,"[411] with Shiʿi employees of private companies often filling semi-skilled roles or positions requiring manual labour, which forces them to compete for jobs with foreign migrant workers.[412] The situation at state-owned companies is similarly precarious, with the independent report commissioned in the wake of the 2011 uprising demonstrating that Shiʿi employees were more likely to be fired than Sunni employees.[413]

Employment within Bahrain's security services was frequently mentioned in fieldwork interviews as a major source of grievance. Shiʿi Bahrainis complained that they weren't trusted by the government to work in the police or military, and both Sunni and Shiʿi interview subjects were unfavourable toward the high numbers of foreign recruits which dominate the military in particular. Khalaf indeed claims that the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) was the first sector to cease recruiting Shiʿi Bahrainis, following the IFLB coup attempt in 1981, resulting in an "ethnically cleansed workplace."[414] Gengler's survey did not unearth a single example of a Shiʿi Bahraini employed in the police or military, in contrast to 13% of the Sunni households he surveyed.[415] The BDF plays an important role in shoring up the regime's grip on power, and unlike most Western armies

[409] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.
[410] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 116.
[411] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 115.
[412] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 28.
[413] Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 354.
[414] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 25.
[415] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 114.

which tend to have their own independent leadership and institutional hierarchies, Bahrain's military is widely considered to be loyal to the monarchy rather than to the country itself.[416] This is in part due to its role in maintaining the "balance of forces within the ruling family"[417] which has resulted in the duplication of various bodies "which do not always clearly fulfil a specific task but reflect the power of one particular dynastic faction who wishes to endow itself with a security arm."[418] However, in spite of the clear link between the security services and loyalty to the Al Khalifa monarchy, it appears that some recruitment of low-ranking police and soldiers among the Shiʿi population did continue,[419] with one interview subject confirming that "some Shiʿa were able to get jobs in the military and police before 2011, however they could only take on minor and unimportant roles."[420] This was backed up by a confidential report leaked by the Bahrain Center for Human Rights in 2009, which revealed that 4% of national security employees were Shiʿa.[421]

Utilising the snowballing technique, the researcher was able to gain access to a number of Shiʿi former security service personnel, most of whom were police officers during the uprising and many of whom technically remained employed in the police force at the time of their interview, despite not having worked since 2011. One policeman told the researcher that he had been recruited along with several other Shiʿa for the police force because he had a high school diploma, which many of the Sunni recruits lacked. He estimated that there were several hundred Shiʿi policemen in Bahrain before the uprising, and that Shiʿi policemen still exist in the country today, but that "they are given dangerous jobs."[422] He claimed that two days before the protests began in February 2011 all Shiʿi policemen were ordered to hand in their radios and service weapons. When the uprising was underway Shiʿi policemen who had not resigned were stationed at checkpoints outside their own neighbourhoods or villages, and were sometimes ordered to

[416] Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain,* 41.
[417] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 11.
[418] Louër, *Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,* 253.
[419] Louër, *Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,* 249.
[420] Interview with former policeman 17 December 2015.
[421] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 57.
[422] Interview with former policeman 17 December 2015.

beat people who tried to enter or exit the checkpoint- "if they refused, they would go to jail for disobeying orders, but if they complied they would be kicked out of their villages."[423]

Several policemen interviewed by the researcher attended the protests at the Pearl Roundabout, some of them even wore their police uniforms. One told the researcher that he went up on stage at the Roundabout and showed the crowd his gun, announcing that "this weapon is to protect us not to kill people."[424] He was fired on the second day of the uprising and fled to a safe house to escape arrest. He was later caught and charged by a military court with a number of offenses including disrespecting his uniform and refusing to follow orders.[425] Another told the researcher that he worked in crime scene investigation, and had attended the Pearl Roundabout protests in plain clothes, but was still identified as a police officer and arrested.[426] A third policeman recounted that he had participated in demonstrations with eight police colleagues, all of whom resigned following the first protester deaths and all of whom were eventually caught and sentenced to prison time.[427] Another police employee told the researcher that he continued to show up for work at his station in Rifaʿ, a Sunni stronghold, and would attend the Pearl Roundabout at night after his shift. He rather touchingly said that some of his Sunni colleagues knew he was attending the demonstrations and protected him, and later requested to be transferred to border security on the Bahrain-Saudi border to avoid putting down the protests. He decided to resign after some of his friends were arrested and brought to his police station, and he unsuccessfully intervened in an attempt to secure their release. He claimed the Ministry of Interior called him and threatened that something would happen to him if he didn't return to his job.[428]

These examples in many ways validate the security argument behind the Bahraini government's reluctance to employ Shiʿa in the police and military, as according to those interviewed, the vast majority of Shiʿi security service employees either resigned or refused to follow orders during the 2011 uprising. If the

[423] Interview with former policeman 17 December 2015.
[424] Interview with former policeman 23 December 2015.
[425] Interview with former policeman 23 December 2015.
[426] Interview with former policeman 23 December 2015.
[427] Interview with former policeman 23 December 2015.
[428] Interview with former policeman 19 December 2015.

makeup of security service employees had have reflected the country's true demographic distribution, it is possible that the police and military might have reacted in a similar fashion to that of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings in refusing to fire on protesters. Interviewees also mentioned that a number of Bahraini Sunni security force employees were also reluctant to attack unarmed compatriots- "Bahrainis will not go into a Bahraini's home and use force... We are a very small community, and often here everybody knows everybody else, and socially that would be unheard of."[429] One Sunni army officer, Muhammad al-Buflasa, famously attended the Pearl Roundabout protests and gave a speech on stage calling for national unity.

The Al Khalifa's solution has been to import the bulk of its security services from abroad, whose "presence is calculated to create as wide a gap as possible between police and people on the street, even in terms of language."[430] This practice has its roots in Bahrain's years as a protected state, with the British establishing a police force in Manama as far back as 1919 "staffed exclusively by Persians" and headed by "a notable merchant… 'Persian' under British protection."[431] As in the imperial period, many foreign members of the police and military, referred to as *murtaziqa* ('mercenaries') by opposition activists, owe their citizenship and livelihoods to the royal family, and are aware that these benefits are conditional upon their absolute loyalty to the monarchy. A number of interview subjects claimed to the researcher that these foreign recruits are deliberately sourced from populations with anti-Shiʿi tendencies, including tribal areas in Pakistan and the Deir ez-Zor region of Syria.[432] Louër even claims that former members of Saddam Hussein's Baʿathist Republican Guard have joined the BDF.[433] By tightly restricting Shiʿi employment in the security services, and populating these bodies instead with large numbers of loyal foreign recruits who are often distinct from the Bahraini population in ethnicity, language and even religion, the Al Khalifa are able to ensure they maintain a monopoly on the use of force in the event of social unrest. The following section will expand on this phenomenon further to examine Bahrain's migrant worker and naturalisation policies,

[429] Interview with activist 13 May 2015.
[430] Shehabi, Alaa 'Red Lines and Human Rights: An Evaluation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry Report,' *Jadaliyya* 8 December 2011, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3453/red-lines-
[431] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity,* 14.
[432] Interview with activist 9 September 2015.
[433] Louër, *Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain,* 249.

which extend well beyond the security services and, whilst arguably having a greater impact on the Shiʿi community, are an often-cited source of grievance shared by both Sunni and Shiʿi Bahrainis.

Demographic Engineering

Bahrain's 2010 census reported that less than half of the country's total population held Bahraini citizenship- 568,399 people out of a total 1,234,571, or around 46%.[434] The proportion of Bahrain's residents who are citizens has roughly halved in the decades since the 1970s oil boom,[435] and according to the Ministry of Information almost 30% of Bahrain's population is non-Muslim,[436] up from 20% in 2001.[437] The challenges surrounding such rapid demographic change form a significant and growing source of discontent among Bahrain's citizens of both sects and were frequently highlighted in the researcher's fieldwork interviews. Shiʿi Bahrainis typically resent migrant workers for driving down wages and entrenching unemployment among local unskilled workers, and accuse the Al Khalifa of masterminding a secretive plan to rebalance the country's sectarian divide by naturalising foreign Sunnis *en masse* from both Arab and non-Arab backgrounds. Sunni Bahrainis typically worried about the cultural impact of such large numbers of foreign workers, and were concerned about the strain the growing pool of naturalised citizens was placing on government services and the allocation of state-funded benefits.

In the GCC countries, including Bahrain, the presence of high numbers of migrant workers serves two functions. The first is economic- they give rentier states access to a seemingly endless supply of cheap labour, unrestrained by the strict controls surrounding minimum wage and working conditions that apply to citizens.[438] The second relates to what Mehlum, Moene and Østenstad have termed "the add and rule strategy," a "special variety of divide and rule"[439] which acts to block support for democracy among

[434] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 88.
[435] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 2.
[436] Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Information Affairs, *Population and Demographics*, n.p.
[437] Georgetown University Berkley Centre, *Resources on Faith, Ethics and Public Life*, Accessible via: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/
[438] Bahry, *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition,* 138.
[439] Mehlum, Halvor; Moene, Kalle and Østenstad, Gry 'Guest Workers as a Barrier to Democratization in Oil-Rich Countries' in: Selvik, Kjetil and Utvik, Bjorn Olav (eds)., 2016. *Oil States in the New Middle East,* London: Routledge, 58.

citizens, who "prefer to be the privileged among the oppressed rather than being free and at par with the rest of the workers."[440] In importing hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, a government reduces the attractiveness of democracy, at least in the eyes of the citizen constituency which benefits most from the state's allocation of oil rents, and exists in a position of "besieged empowerment."[441] Mehlum et al indeed demonstrate that citizens will prefer non-democratic rule "as long as the ruler does not appropriate a share of the rents that is larger than what all the migrants would have gotten in the case of inclusive democracy."[442]

Bahrain is an interesting case however, as unlike some other GCC countries, its sectarian divide has complicated the effectiveness of 'add and rule' as a regime survival mechanism. Unlike the Sunni population, which has the most to gain from excluding migrant workers from the country's rentier wealth, large segments of Bahrain's Shiʿi community did not benefit from the oil boom, and as such continue to view democracy as a means of gaining equitable access to Bahrain's resources rather than as a risk to their privileged status as citizens. This is one explanation for the government's naturalisation policies, which contradict the logic of the 'add and rule' theory in that they enable some foreign workers to access the benefits of citizenship, thereby forcing the largely-Sunni elites to share their slice of the rentier pie. However, naturalising foreign citizens has enabled the government to dilute the appeal of democratic reforms within the Shiʿi community by threatening their majority status, which coupled with electoral district gerrymandering has ensured that the Shiʿa have been unable to win a majority of seats in parliament in spite of their demographic dominance. The government's naturalisation policies hence threaten the position of both the Sunni and Shiʿi communities in Bahrain, which oppose it for different reasons but are united in viewing it as disadvantageous to their interests. In the words of one former al-

[440] Mehlum et al, *Guest Workers as a Barrier to Democratization,* 67.
[441] Okruhlik, Gwenn and Tetreault, Mary Ann 'Juxtapositions and Sticking Points' in: Tetreault, Mary Ann; Okruhlik, Gwenn and Kapiszewski, Andrzej (eds)., 2011. *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition,* Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 296.
[442] Mehlum et al, *Guest Workers as a Barrier to Democratization,* 63.

Wefaq MP: "On the one hand it's putting the Sunnis on notice. If they don't toe the line they can be replaced. And it's a strong message to the Shiʿas- that life will go on with or without them."[443]

Known as *al-tajnīs*, Bahrain's mass naturalisation policy is thought to have begun in the 1990s, when the Al Khalifa granted citizenship to roughly ten thousand Sunni families, amounting to between forty and fifty thousand people, most of whom were employed in the security services and originated from countries including Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Syria and Pakistan.[444] In 2002, prior to Bahrain's first elections under King Hamad's new constitution (see Chapter 5), around twenty thousand members of the Sunni al-Dawasir tribe were granted citizenship, and were allegedly brought into Bahrain from Saudi Arabia by bus in order to vote in the elections.[445] Salah al-Bandar, the author of a controversial report on the sectarian dimension to the naturalisation policy, estimated in 2015 that "the Royal Court of the Al Khalifa family may have naturalized 50,000 Sunnis per annum since 2006."[446] Most opposition groups' estimates are more conservative than this, however still assert that from 2000 to 2010 between 65,000 to 100,000 Sunnis have been naturalised.[447]

The fieldwork interviews the researcher conducted with a diverse range of Bahrainis largely supported the assumption that Sunnis tend to view naturalisation as a cultural threat, whereas the Shiʿa view it in terms of a demographic threat. Bahrainis of both sects also highlighted concerns about the economic implications of absorbing such large numbers of new citizens. For example, according to one pro-government journalist:

Even the fanatical Sunnis regret ever supporting the naturalisation policy, which they did at the beginning for sectarian reasons. A lot of views have been changing in the Sunni sector since 2011. Two years ago Sunnis began removing their children from schools in which they had to mix with naturalised citizens' kids-

[443] Interview with opposition leader 16 May 2016.
[444] Bahry, *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition,* 134.
[445] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 45.
[446] Jones, Marc Owen, 'Saudi Intervention, Sectarianism, and De-Democratization in Bahrain's Uprising,' *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, 39 (2016): 257.
[447] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*, 141.

in 2011 they weren't even prepared to discuss this situation. The Sunnis are realising that they made a mistake.[448]

One Shiʿi former public servant referred to the naturalisation policy as "putting a rotten apple in a barrel of good apples," lamenting the fact that the government did not at least bring skilled Sunnis to Bahrain in their attempt to redress the sectarian balance- "why not bring the educated ones who can give something to Bahrain rather than just take money from the Ministry?"[449] Another interviewee described the background of those being naturalised as "the worst in the world… Sunni fanatics, poor and uneducated… Just imagine what will result from that."[450] One activist even went as far as to claim that the naturalised are selected on the basis of their anti-Shiʿi sentiments, and that new migrants from religiously diverse countries such as Yemen and Syria need to bring a certificate from a cleric proving they are Sunni before they are granted citizenship.[451] Interviewees of both sects accused the naturalised of taking benefits away from local Bahrainis, and also alleged that the process of granting citizenship to migrants, particularly those employed in the security services, was corrupt. One young professional interviewed by the researcher, a member of the secular-nationalist Waʿad society, claimed that the majority of naturalised Bahrainis have received their citizenship illegally, because the law states that an Arab migrant must reside in Bahrain for fifteen years, and a non-Arab for twenty-five years, before becoming eligible for citizenship.[452] Most naturalised Bahrainis do not meet these requirements. Another interviewee, a Sunni former soldier, claimed that a foreigner could buy Bahraini citizenship for just US$15,000.[453]

The Bandar Report

The government's policy of mass naturalisation first came to light in 2006 in a report leaked by British-Sudanese strategic advisor Salah al-Bandar, who was employed in the Cabinet Affairs Ministry.[454] What

[448] Interview with journalist 26 December 2015.
[449] Interview with former public servant 12 December 2015.
[450] Interview with activist 11 September 2015.
[451] Interview with activist 9 September 2015.
[452] Interview with professional 21 December 2015.
[453] Interview with former soldier 22 August 2015.
[454] Wright, *Fixing the Kingdom*, 6.

came to be known as the Bandar Report detailed a secretive strategy of marginalising Bahraini Shiʿa in public life, deliberately exacerbating sectarian tensions and naturalising large numbers of foreign Sunnis in order to alter Bahrain's demographic balance.[455] The report identifies the Minister for Cabinet Affairs Ahmed bin Atiyatallah al-Khalifa as the policy's mastermind, and "documents bribes and payments totalling more than one million Bahraini dinars dispersed among various members of an electronic group, a media group, an intelligence team, a newspaper, and other para-governmental organisations funded under the initiative."[456] Among the most serious revelations contained in the report were that the government sought to interfere in the results of parliamentary elections (which were to be held just after the report's release in 2006), that the Cabinet Affairs Ministry had paid media outlets to publish anti-Shiʿa stories, that a secret program existed for converting Shiʿi citizens to Sunnism, and that the government was spying on Shiʿi civil society organisations at home and abroad.[457] Al-Bandar also leaked evidence backing up the claims made in the report, including photocopies of cheques, receipts and bank statements to show how the program was funded.[458] Gengler claims that the report was based on an earlier study called *A Proposal to Promote the General Situation of the Sunni Sect in Bahrain*, written by an Iraqi academic who "compared Bahrain's situation with that of post-Saddam Iraq, in which an ascendant Shiʿa majority threatened the influence of the Sunni minority and the country's overall national security."[459] The policies outlined in the Bandar Report appear to be an attempt to prevent such a situation from emerging.

One of the report's most interesting revelations involved the lengths to which the government was prepared to go to prevent Shiʿi political societies from capturing a majority of seats in the newly-inaugurated parliament, which was in any case largely symbolic as it was unable to pass legislation on its own (see Chapter 5). As illustrated by the aforementioned naturalisation of the al-Dawasir tribe prior to the 2002 elections, activists had claimed for some time that elections were stacked against the Shiʿi majority,

[455] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 63-4.
[456] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 47.
[457] Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain,* 35-36.
[458] Wright, *Fixing the Kingdom*, 7.
[459] Gengler, *Royal Factionalism*, 70.

which was one of the primary justifications for an electoral boycott between 2002 and 2005. A number of scholars have demonstrated that Bahrain's electoral system is gerrymandered in favour of Sunni constituents, for example Ehteshami and Wright have calculated that "in some districts there were as few as 500 registered voters, compared with others amounting to over 10,000," with these differences corresponding to sectarian demography.[460] In the 2010 elections, Gengler showed that "the mean Shiʿi district represented 9,533 electors… the average Sunni district 6,196."[461] A senior leader of the al-Wefaq society also told the researcher that al-Wefaq would typically win its seats by a large majority of votes, sometimes by up to eighty or ninety percent, whereas some pro-government candidates won their seats by the slimmest of margins, which appeared to him to be suspect.[462] The Bandar report provides material evidence in support of the opposition's claims that Bahrain's much-trumpeted democratic veneer is indeed tarnished by structural factors designed to keep the Shiʿa from attaining too much power.

Wehrey describes the Bandar Report as a "watershed event in Bahraini politics,"[463] as it provided concrete proof for the first time that the Al Khalifa were engaged in sectarian divide and rule tactics, and confirmed the long-suspected sectarian basis of the naturalisation program. The report provoked considerable anger, particularly within Bahrain's Shiʿi community, and antisystem movements such as the Haqq society staged protests and even attempted to bomb regime targets in response.[464] A petition was signed calling for an official investigation,[465] and after entering parliament in the 2006 elections the al-Wefaq society attempted to table a motion summoning Ahmed bin Atiyatallah al-Khalifa for questioning before a parliamentary committee, but were thwarted by opposition from regime-loyal parliamentarians.[466] The Chamber of Deputies voted against investigating the report's allegations in 2007,[467] and so far the only individual called to account has been Salah al-Bandar himself, who was charged with the theft of government documents

[460] Ehteshami and Wright, *Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies*, 920.
[461] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 101.
[462] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[463] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 63.
[464] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 66.
[465] Wright, *Fixing the Kingdom*, 7.
[466] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 68.
[467] Parolin, *Reweaving the Myth of Bahrain's Parliamentary Experience*, 38.

and deported.[468] The Bandar report was widely cited by the interview participants the researcher encountered during her fieldwork, almost ten years after its publication. According to one, it marked the moment in which the Al Khalifa "began building a wall between the two main sects in Bahrain,"[469] and another acknowledged that it "affected relations between the royal family and the people, who lost all belief in the royals after the release of the report."[470]

Citizenship: A Test of Loyalty

Unlike most Western countries, in which citizenship is seen as a right, Gulf monarchies tend to view citizenship as a privilege which can be bestowed or removed according to the will of the ruler. Okruhlik describes citizenship in the Gulf as a "commodity" which "provides economic privileges" and is granted by rulers in exchange for loyalty.[471] As such, citizenship can also be revoked to punish disloyalty, including for anti-government activities deemed treasonous. According to the exiled Bahraini academic Abdul Hadi Khalaf:

Incidents of collective naturalization, along with cases of collective revocation of citizenship, resemble an official declaration of the idea that the ruling families do not consider citizenship to be a right for citizens… but rather they consider it a gift that they bestow upon the people. The ruling family reserves the right to grant or revoke this gift at any time.[472]

The issue of the role of citizenship in Bahrain is at the heart of the Sunni and Shi'i communities' grievances surrounding the government's naturalisation policy, and can also be seen in the growing trend of citizenship revocation, which has escalated following the 2011 uprising. The Al Khalifa inner circle's ability to bestow or revoke citizenship by decree has given them enormous leverage over their domestic political opponents, who risk being rendered stateless if convicted of charges including treason, inciting inter-

[468] Toumi, Habib, 'Ex-Consultant Charged with Stealing Government Files,' *Gulf News,* 4 October 2006, http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/ex-consultant-charged-with-stealing-government-files-1.259049
[469] Interview with activist 21 December 2015.
[470] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.
[471] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 25.
[472] Khalaf, Abdel Hadi, 'GCC Rulers and the Politics of Citizenship' *Al-Monitor,* 26 December 2012, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/12/gcc-rulers-use-citizenship.html#ixzz3nq5kaouS

communal hatred and terrorism. It also gives the monarchy considerable leverage over Bahrain's growing population of naturalised migrant workers, who owe their "entire economic and political livelihood to the state"[473] and understand that their continued loyalty to the Al Khalifa regime is a requirement of maintaining their privileged position. This could be seen during the 2011 uprisings, when the Al Khalifa were accused of coercing migrant and/or naturalised workers to attend pro-government rallies.[474] The direct link between loyalty and citizenship also means that the newly naturalised have a personal interest in maintaining the current status quo, as their situation would be precarious indeed if opposition groups succeeded in toppling the monarchy.

Whilst the practice is certainly not new, the Bahraini government began revoking the citizenship of mainly-Shiʿi dissidents in large numbers following the 2011 uprising. In 2012 the Interior Minister stripped thirty-one Bahrainis of their citizenship for "causing damage to state security,"[475] and in 2013 the King issued a decree extending the government's powers to strip citizenship from individuals who "help or serve a foreign country" (likely aimed at Iran) or who "endanger state interests."[476] A new nationality law was passed in 2014 which enabled the government to revoke citizenship by decree, including from naturalised citizens and Bahrainis who obtain the citizenship of a non-GCC country without permission from the Interior Ministry,[477] which appears to be targeting refugees and exiled dissidents. In 2016, Shehabi noted that "the Bahraini regime has revoked the citizenship of nearly 150 persons over the past three years. In January 2014 alone, the Bahraini regime revoked the nationality of seventy-two citizens for the 'illegal act' of 'defaming the image of the regime, (and) inciting against the regime.'"[478] Perhaps the most well-known case of citizenship revocation is that of Bahrain's leading Shiʿi cleric ʿIsa al-Qasim, who was stripped of his citizenship in June 2016 due to accusations of using "the religious pulpit for political purposes to serve

[473] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 154.
[474] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 26.
[475] Khalaf, *GCC Rulers and the Politics of Citizenship*, n.p.
[476] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 154.
[477] Trade Arabia, 'Bahrain King Ratifies New Nationality Law,' 8 July 2014, www.tradearabia.com/news/LAW_ 261586.html
[478] Shehabi, Ala'a, 'Inviolable Sheikhs and Radical Subjects: Bahrain's Cyclical Sovereignty Crisis' *Arab Studies Journal* 24:1 (2016): 238-9.

foreign interests," encouraging "sectarianism and violence" and "continuous communication with hostile foreign organizations and parties,"[479] presumably Iran although no evidence has been presented. As Sheikh al-Qasim was born in Bahrain and does not appear to hold any other citizenship his exact fate is unclear. Stateless Bahrainis who remain in the country lose their identity papers, and with them a swathe of rights including access to education and healthcare and the ability to hold a drivers' license and open a bank account.[480] According to one human rights activist, "when you revoke nationality from a man, it means you're punishing his children who cannot go to school, cannot go to hospital, they don't have a card."[481] In this sense citizenship revocation is also a form of collective punishment.

Shehabi has remarked that "elsewhere people change their government, but in Bahrain the government changes its people,"[482] and indeed the combination of mass naturalisation, revealed to be a sectarian strategy in the Bandar Report, and citizenship revocation does suggest that an ambitious project of demographic engineering is underway in Bahrain, with regime survival at its core. The Bahraini Shiʿi community is aware of this and in its own way, is attempting to fight back. One prominent journalist told the researcher:

The Shiʿa keep saying that they are the majority, the royal family is afraid of this, and according to their tribal way of thinking their reaction is 'this majority should be a minority'… Some families are deliberately having more children to combat this.[483]

Another Bahraini mother, who described the hijab as "too much trouble" and identified as a secularist, recounted the impact the 2011 uprising had on her relationship with religion: "My son is three now and he takes part in the rituals- Muharram et cetera." Despite declining to practice these religious rituals herself, she now views them as a political act- "they can't take it away from us. We will pass it on to the next

[479] Bahrain News Agency, 'Citizenship Revoked for Creating Extremist Sectarian Environment,' 20 June 2016, www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/733106
[480] Bowler, Natasha, 'When Bahrain Says You're Not Bahraini Anymore' *Foreign Policy,* 18 August 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/18/when-bahrain-says-youre-not-bahraini-anymore/
[481] Interview with human rights activist 14 December 2015.
[482] Shehabi, *Inviolable Sheikhs and Radical Subjects,* 238-9.
[483] Interview with journalist 25 December 2015.

generation."[484] Like some of the deeper-rooted historical grievances mentioned earlier, including discrimination in housing, education and employment, the issue of naturalisation and citizenship has become an integral part of the fabric of post-2011 Shiʿi communal identity.

Conclusion

This chapter considered a number of factors which distinguish Bahrain's Shiʿi community from Bahraini society more broadly, and inform its status as a marginalised majority. It examined popular historical and religious narratives which act to strengthen inter-communal solidarity and serve as a frame through which many Bahraini Shiʿa view their current relationship with the Al Khalifa regime. These included nativist narratives, which juxtapose the indigenous *Baḥārna* Shiʿa with the newly-arrived Sunni Al Khalifa tribe, and the contemporary politicisation of Shiʿi religious narratives, including the re-interpretation of Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala as a revolutionary act, replicated across Bahrain in annual Ashura processions. Challenges concerning the relatively recent phenomenon of direct clerical involvement in politics were examined, including suspicions surrounding transnational Shiʿi networks, foreign interference and the clerical establishment's commitment to democratic principles.

This chapter argued that a shared history of sectarian discrimination has become a marker of Shiʿi identity in Bahrain, and drew on the researcher's fieldwork interviews to unpack some of the grievances which underpin the Shiʿi community's claims of unequal treatment at the hands of the government. These included discrimination in housing provision and investment in Shiʿi-majority villages and neighbourhoods, discrimination in the public school system and in the allocation of scholarships and university places, and the difficulties experienced by Bahraini Shiʿa in obtaining public sector employment. This chapter also discussed the challenges introduced by the government's policy of *al-tajnīs*, or the mass naturalisation of mostly-Sunni foreigners, which is opposed by some Sunnis as a cultural threat and but is perceived as a demographic threat by most Bahraini Shiʿa. The existence of this program, revealed in the Bandar Report, together with the growing trend of citizenship revocation, further inform the broad sense within the Shiʿi

[484] Interview with activist 5 January 2016.

community that the Al Khalifa regime is seeking to adjust Bahrain's sectarian demography in its favour. Understanding the distinct position of the Shiʿi community in Bahrain, and the extent to which the development of Shiʿi communal identity is rooted in historic and contemporary grievances and experiences of sectarian discrimination, is key to this thesis's analysis of Shiʿi political participation and government-opposition relations both prior to and following the 2011 uprising.

Chapter 5- Shiʿi Opposition in the National Action Charter Era: Political Participation under Liberalised Autocracy

The death of Bahrain's Emir ʿIsa bin Salman Al Khalifa in 1999, and the subsequent elevation of his son Hamad bin ʿIsa Al Khalifa, gave rise to a ten-year period of economic and political liberalisation which had a dramatic impact on the nature of Shiʿi political participation in Bahrain. In a departure from the more hawkish governance of his father, who after dissolving parliament in 1975 had come to rely heavily on repression, Hamad sought to bring an end to the civil unrest of the 1990s *Intifāḍa* by introducing a more inclusive system of government. This took the form of a new package of economic and political reforms called the National Action Charter (*Mīthāq al-ʿAmal al-Waṭanī* or NAC) which was announced in 2000.[485] This chapter will critically assess the emergence of Shiʿi opposition societies[486] during the NAC era, drawing on the concept of liberalised autocracy outlined in Chapter 2 and incorporating Lust-Okar's Structures of Contestation model[487] as a means of analysing the shift in Shiʿi political participation during this period. In particular, this chapter will focus on the then-legal Shiʿi opposition society al-Wefaq and the radical Shiʿi antisystem opposition group Haqq. Other NAC-era groups will also be discussed, including the secular-nationalist Waʿad society, which formed a surprisingly robust coalition with al-Wefaq. An understanding of the relationship between the tolerated and antisystem Shiʿi opposition groups which emerged during the NAC era, and of the opposition's relationship with the government more broadly, is key to conceiving of how this critical decade, which was supposed to liberalise Bahrain's politics, ultimately led to the uprising of February 2011.

[485] Ehteshami and Wright, *Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies*, 919.
[486] Bahrain's political parties are referred to as 'societies' however the difference is little more than semantic. A leaked US Embassy cable notes that: "Although political parties remain, strictly speaking, illegal, the 2005 Political Societies Act allows for the formation of registered 'political societies,' which function for all intents and purposes as political parties." US Embassy Manama, 'A Field Guide to Bahraini Political Parties,' *Wikileaks* 4 September 2008, Accessible via: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/wikileaks-files/bahrain-wikileaks-cables/8334582/A-FIELD-GUIDE-TO-BAHRAINI-POLITICAL-PARTIES.html
[487] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 75.

The National Action Charter

Trejo has argued that, when faced with existential challenges, authoritarian regimes often "introduce limited power-sharing agreements to stay in power," which can come in the form of "legislatures, subnational governments… (and) political parties, and consent to government-controlled elections."[488] While Bahrain's government was unable to eliminate the unrest of the 1990s *Intifāḍa* through repression alone, Hamad's ascent to the throne in 1999 enabled the regime to recalibrate its approach to the protests. The NAC reforms saw the government agree to a number of longstanding opposition demands, including releasing political prisoners and allowing political exiles to return to Bahrain, lessening restrictions on freedom of speech and permitting the formation of political and civil society organisations.[489] In addition Hamad abolished the unpopular State Security Law, which had triggered the dissolution of Bahrain's first National Assembly in 1975 (see Chapter 3). The NAC also mandated the establishment of two houses of parliament, a Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shūrā*) and a Council of Representatives (*Majlis al-Nuwāb*).

Most opposition groups initially refused to endorse the reforms over concerns about the division of powers between each parliamentary chamber,[490] however they relented after the Emir publically announced that the Council of Representatives would be fully elected and would enjoy legislative powers, with the unelected Consultative Council to perform an advisory role only.[491] The NAC was overwhelmingly endorsed in a referendum held on 14 February 2001 with 98.4% voting in favour.[492] However, hopes that the Charter would transform Bahrain into a constitutional monarchy were short lived. On the first anniversary of the referendum the Emir unexpectedly released the draft of what would become Bahrain's new constitution, revealing his design for a reformed political system which was markedly different to what had been promised. The 2002 Constitution created an appointed Consultative Council with legislative powers alongside an elected Council of Representatives, with the unelected president of the Consultative Council

[488] Trejo, *The Ballot and the Street*, 334.
[489] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 37.
[490] Al-Mdaiers, *Shiʿism and Political Protest in Bahrain,* 37.
[491] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 43.
[492] Ehteshami and Wright, *Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies*, 919.

wielding the deciding vote in the case of legislative deadlock.[493] Bahrain was transformed from emirate into kingdom, and the now-King Hamad retained the power to appoint government ministers by decree and crucially, to veto legislation.[494] The constitution was promulgated unilaterally and without consultation with opposition groups, who were outraged that the King had reneged on his promised political reforms. In addition to this, the division of electoral districts also appeared to unfairly disadvantage the opposition, in particular as the demographic distribution of electoral boundaries ensured that the tolerated opposition societies would be unable to secure a parliamentary majority.[495]

Echoing previous contentious cycles in Bahrain's twentieth century history, the 2002 Constitution should be seen as an attempt to safeguard the Al Khalifa's grip on power, whilst paying lip service to principles of democracy and popular consultation. Taking King Hamad's 2001 NAC and 2002 constitutional reforms together, it appears that rather than being on a much-lauded path to democratisation, Bahrain was instead transforming into a liberalised autocracy. Referring to the aforementioned concept of *makrama*, Sadiki argues that the Al Khalifa and other Gulf ruling families "look upon electoralism as being a resource to contain pressure from within and without to reform. They confer it upon their societies, and they see it more or less as a 'gift.'"[496] The top-down nature of the reforms, which crucially do not allow for an elected executive, indicate that whilst the structure of the political system itself allows for greater participation, power is still concentrated in the hands of Bahrain's ruling family.

Recalling Chapter 2's discussion of liberalised autocracy, we can see that the bicameral parliament instated by the 2002 Constitution is set up to facilitate the type of "contested, yet fully managed elections"[497] which characterise liberalised-autocratic regimes. The elected chamber is subordinate to the appointed parliamentary upper house, and the King retains the right to rule by decree. Ministers are also appointed, with the important ministries typically headed by unelected members of the Al Khalifa family. In addition,

[493] Ehteshami and Wright, *Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies*, 919.
[494] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 32-33.
[495] Ehteshami and Wright, *Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies*, 920.
[496] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 81.
[497] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 130-131.

Niethammer has noted that "a number of political and civil freedoms guaranteed by the constitution are actually limited by law and can be restricted by ill-defined references to national cohesion and traditional or religious values."[498] As such, the institutional structures behind the liberalisation process act to preserve the authoritarian status quo, in spite of the veneer of democratisation apparent in holding parliamentary elections. From the tactical design of electoral districts, which ensured that Shiʿi opposition candidates were unable to capture more than 50% of the vote despite making up roughly 70% of the population,[499] to restrictions on the elected parliament's ability to legislate, King Hamad's reforms can be seen as marking the point in which Bahrain shifted from authoritarianism to liberalised autocracy.

Al-Wefaq and the Boycott Coalition

As part of the NAC reform process the government announced an amnesty for political exiles expelled from Bahrain during the 1990s *Intifāḍa*, and in 2001 a number of these returned exiles joined together with other *Intifāḍa*-era activists and prominent clerics to establish the National Islamic Accord Society (*Jamaʿiyyat al-Wifāq al-Waṭanī al-Islāmiyya*), known as al-Wefaq.[500] Sheikh ʿAli Salman, an *Intifāḍa* leader and former exile described by American diplomats as a "midlevel cleric,"[501] became al-Wefaq's General Secretary, with fellow *Intifāḍa* veteran Hasan Mushaimaʿ elected as his deputy. The aforementioned Sheikh ʿIsa al-Qasim, whilst not officially affiliated with al-Wefaq, is widely considered to act as the group's spiritual advisor, and according to Louër, "his endorsement is a significant element of al-Wefaq's legitimacy."[502] Gengler's 2009 demographic survey of Bahrain reported that 55% of Shiʿi respondents who disclosed their political preferences supported al-Wefaq,[503] and the group is estimated to have around 70,000 members.[504] A number of Bahraini Shiʿa interviewed by the researcher expressed tacit support for

[498] Niethammer, Katja, 'Stubborn Salafis and Moderate Shiites: Islamic Political Parties in Bahrain' *Paper presented at the International Studies Association 48th Annual Convention*, Chicago, 28 February 2007. Available via: http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/8/1/4/3/p181437_index.html, 2.
[499] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 31.
[500] Niethammer, *Stubborn Salafis and Moderate Shiites*, 5.
[501] US Embassy Manama, 'Rivals for Bahrain's Shi'a Street: Wifaq and Haq,' *Wikileaks,* 4 September 2008, Accessible via: http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/973
[502] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 32-33.
[503] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 131.
[504] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 43.

al-Wefaq, with several noting that the group was particularly dominant in the Shiʿi villages, as opposed to Bahrain's more diverse metropolitan areas, as "because they are Islamic-based the conservative villages tend to support them."[505]

Al-Wefaq is associated with the politically quietist Shiʿi clerical establishment in Najaf centred around Grand Ayatollah Sistani (see Chapter 4), and has distanced itself from Iran on a number of occasions, sensitive to the Al Khalifa's fears about Iranian influence in the Bahraini Shiʿi community. ʿAli Salman completed his religious education in the Iranian city of Qom, but has taken pains to emphasise that he looks to Ayatollah Sistani as his *marjaʿ*. Rabi and Kostiner have claimed that Salman was "exposed to Iranian indoctrination" during his studies, and that as such, he is fond of "spicing his rhetoric with a heady dose of Shiʿi revolutionary fervour."[506] There is little evidence for this however, as Salman has denounced Iranian meddling on a number of occasions and is widely considered to be a moderate voice within al-Wefaq, who has been accused by some al-Wefaq members of adopting an overly-conciliatory approach in parliamentary clashes with the government.[507] In spite of its spiritual association with Najaf, al-Wefaq has indeed been careful to assert its independence and its Bahraini nationalist credentials, and has routinely emphasised its commitment to democracy and rejection of sectarian politics.[508]

Viewed by many as representing the moderate majority of Bahraini Shiʿa, al-Wefaq can be conceived of as broadly Shiʿi-Islamist,[509] however its support encompasses an array of factions within the Shiʿi community, including Islamists from the differing Daʿwa and Hezbollah streams[510] and more left-wing or secular-minded Shiʿa who are less trusting of clerical involvement in politics.[511] Perhaps due to the diversity of views among both al-Wefaq's leadership and rank and file, scholars tend to disagree as to the extent to which Islamist ideas factor into al-Wefaq's political objectives. Louër for example emphasises the group's status as a "Shiʿa

[505] Interview with activist 27 September 2015.
[506] Rabi and Kostiner, *The Shiʿis in Bahrain*, 180.
[507] Khatib, Lina and Lust, Ellen, 'Reconsidering Activism in the Arab World' in: Khatib, Lina and Lust, Ellen (eds)., 2014. *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 7.
[508] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 55.
[509] Ehteshami and Wright, *Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies*, 920.
[510] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 45.
[511] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 43.

identity movement" which promotes "a revival of Shiʿa religious identity" and expresses "deep resentment toward what they saw as the Sunni domination of Bahrain's political institutions and economic resources."[512] Wehrey however has argued that in spite of al-Wefaq's Shiʿi support base, and the presence of clerics among its leadership, the group has a "strong class-based agenda" and its stated goals are largely secular and centre on political and economic reform.[513] Schmidmayr's research into Islamist opposition movements suggests that groups such as al-Wefaq adopt democratic discourse partially in response to the fact that incumbent regimes are increasingly couching their activities in the language of democracy, a common phenomenon in liberalised autocracies.[514] This however does not necessarily mean their commitment to democracy is suspect, particularly as many Islamist groups would stand to benefit from participating in democratic politics.

A number of Bahrainis interviewed by the researcher were sceptical about al-Wefaq's democratic principles and questioned whether an organisation headed by a Shiʿi cleric would eschew religious law in favour of secular legislation if it ever came to power. One al-Wefaq supporter said of ʿAli Salman, "he is a religious man. When he talks about democracy it doesn't match," and recounted how, upon meeting Salman, he impressed upon him that al-Wefaq needs to "take legitimate means to confirm that they seek liberal democracy."[515] Others however defended al-Wefaq, and stated that there is no evidence to support the claim that the group favours a more theocratic mode of governance. One seasoned activist told the researcher: "What the Shiʿa learnt from the Arab Spring is that there is no way that they will come to power as Shiʿites. They will come to power as democrats."[516]

In the aftermath of King Hamad's shock revision of the Constitution in 2002, which saw him renege on assurances he had given the Shiʿi community regarding the strength of the NAC's democratic reforms,[517] al-Wefaq announced its intention to boycott the 2002 elections in coalition with a number of other newly-

[512] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 175.
[513] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 44.
[514] Schmidmayr, *Islamist Engagement in Contentious Politics*, 167.
[515] Interview with activist 11 September 2015.
[516] Interview with activist 25 December 2015.
[517] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 32-33.

formed groups. The 2002 Constitution "safeguarded the traditional rule of the Al Khalifa"[518] and effectively undid many of the NAC's proposed reforms which had advanced Bahrain in the direction of constitutional monarchy.[519] Al-Wefaq's boycott was motivated by pressure from the grassroots, as the broader Shiʿi community felt betrayed by the government's lack of consultation on the new Constitution. There was also considerable anger surrounding measures approved in 2002 to apply the amnesty granted to political exiles to government officials accused of committing crimes against detainees and protesters during the 1990s *Intifada*.[520] Al-Wefaq's spiritual leader ʿIsa al-Qasim was apparently in favour of participating in the elections,[521] but following a vote on the issue by two hundred al-Wefaq delegates, support for a boycott among the group's Shiʿi base prevailed.[522]

Al-Wefaq formed a coalition with two secular-nationalist groups, the aforementioned National Democratic Action Society (*al-ʿAmal al-Waṭanī al-Dīmuqrāṭī,* which would become known as Waʿad from 2006) and the Baʿathist National Democratic Assembly (*al-Tajamuʿ al-Qawmī al-Dīmuqrāṭī),* and was also joined by the Shiʿi-Islamist Islamic Action Society (*Jamʿiyyat al-ʿAmal al-Islāmī*), known as Amal and considered to be the ideological heir of the IFLB.[523] According to Louër, this essentially single issue-based coalition "did not intend to undermine the regime in general. They emphasised that their decision did not mean a rejection of the regime but rather was simply a tactic to bring about the implementation of the reforms announced in the National Action Charter."[524] Crucially, the boycott alliance did not disavow the political process itself- "they wanted to be seen as a legal opposition."[525] The coalition's key demands included a return to the parliamentary system set out in the NAC, a review of the 2002 Constitution in consultation with opposition

[518] Ehteshami and Wright, *Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies*, 919.
[519] Parolin, *Reweaving the Myth of Bahrain's Parliamentary Experience*, 32.
[520] US Embassy Manama, *Rivals for Bahrain's Shiʿa Street*, n.p.
[521] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 140.
[522] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[523] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 46.
[524] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 177.
[525] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 177.

groups, greater transparency in government, the re-drawing of electoral boundaries and justice for victims of human rights abuses during the 1990s.[526]

In refusing to participate in Bahrain's new electoral system, this coalition of largely moderate opposition groups threatened the liberalisation project itself, which required some measure of genuine opposition within the sphere of formal politics. The presence of a small number of regime-loyal opposition groups in the 2002 parliament arguably did not enable the Al Khalifa regime to construct an effective system of liberalised autocracy, including the Divided Structure of Contestation necessary to balance the tolerated and antisystem opposition and ensure regime stability (see Chapter 2). At this early stage the legal position of the boycott coalition was unclear, which Niethammer asserts was the result of a deliberate strategy on the part of the regime to increase the government's leverage over the opposition groups participating in the boycott.[527] Because the majority of Bahrain's opposition groups effectively retained their antisystem status, the boycott created a Unified-Exclusive Structure of Contestation which had more in common with a fully-authoritarian political system than it did with the liberalised autocracy King Hamad was attempting to build. It was therefore in the interests of the regime to bring some of the boycotters into the formal political sphere, whilst resisting their demands for meaningful reforms which would take Bahrain in the direction of a constitutional monarchy.

The boycott did not ultimately achieve any meaningful political gains, as the 2002 elections went ahead as scheduled and the petitions and rallies organised by the boycott coalition did not persuade the government to return to the more open system initially proposed by the NAC.[528] This is largely because, in spite of the rhetoric surrounding the liberalisation process, the Al Khalifa never seriously entertained the idea of transferring power from the executive to the parliament. As Sadiki has commented, "royalty may look more enlightened. But it is not about to share, much less surrender, power, or subject itself to rational laws and

[526] Niethammer, *Stubborn Salafis and Moderate Shiites,* 5-6.
[527] Niethammer, Katja, 'Opposition Groups in Bahrain' in: Lust-Okar, Ellen and Zerhouni, Saloua (eds)., 2008. *Political Participation in the Middle East*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 147.
[528] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 140.

democratic scrutiny through parliamentary checks and balances."[529] The regime was willing to compromise on smaller single-policy issues in order to encourage some of the boycotters to participate in the elections, but was unwilling to make deeper structural reforms which would threaten its stability.

Given the nature of the deadlock, a number of al-Wefaq rank-and-file members arrived at the view that the group could better tackle some of the issues outlined in Chapter 4, including unemployment and disadvantage in the Shiʿi community, from within the system if it accepted the government's rules of the game.[530] Al-Wefaq's leadership however remained split as to the utility of rescinding the boycott. Two factors ultimately led to al-Wefaq members voting to participate in the political process. The first was the government's introduction of legislation in 2005 legalising the formation of political societies, but mandating that all opposition groups register with the Ministry of Justice. A number of conditions were attached to the registration process, including restrictions on funding and on the nature of a society's political activities.[531] One senior al-Wefaq leader interviewed by the researcher voted in favour of the group's participation in politics, noting that not officially registering meant "dismantling ourselves." He told the researcher that the Political Societies Act of 2005 committed registered societies to standing for parliament, and also required recognition of the 2002 Constitution. He claimed that King Hamad met with ʿAli Salman and persuaded him to support al-Wefaq's participation in the 2006 elections, assuring him that "the Constitution was not set in stone."[532] The second factor involved the aforementioned intervention by Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf, who let it be known that he was in favour of al-Wefaq's joining the political process (see Chapter 4). Al-Wefaq leaders who wanted to rescind the boycott used Sistani's preference, which the Ayatollah was later forced to clarify was a personal view and not a *fatwa*, to appeal to the religious sensibilities of al-Wefaq members.[533] In October 2005 al-Wefaq held an assembly of delegates to discuss the boycott, and 88% voted in favour of entering parliament.[534]

[529] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 81.
[530] Interview with opposition leader 7 January 2016.
[531] Parolin, *Reweaving the Myth of Bahrain's Parliamentary Experience*, 36.
[532] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[533] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, 133.
[534] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.

The affair surrounding al-Wefaq's decision to break its boycott and participate in the political system according to the government's rules of the game illustrates the utility of liberalised autocracy in strengthening a regime-dominated status quo. Gandhi and Lust-Okar note that "holding elections and setting rules regarding the legal eligibility of candidates and parties" is a typical mechanism for constructing a Divided Structure of Contestation, as it splits political participation into "outsiders who are not allowed to compete and insiders who become more invested in the regime."[535] The Bahraini government engineered the structure of the political system, through the 2002 Constitution and the 2005 Political Societies Act, to force opposition groups such as al-Wefaq to choose between the chance to further their policy interests from parliament, accepting that they are operating within a system stacked in favour of the regime, and the status of an illegal opposition group subject to repression but free to determine an antisystem policy agenda.[536] Weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of formal participation likely also played a major role in Ayatollah Sistani's pragmatic decision to advise al-Wefaq to join the political process.

It is impossible to know definitively whether the Al Khalifa calculated that forcing al-Wefaq to choose between formally participating in the political system or joining the ranks of the antisystem opposition would result in the group's split into rival factions. It is however clear that the outcome of al-Wefaq's decision to end their boycott created a Divided Structure of Contestation advantageous to the regime, which would act to stabilise the status quo of Bahraini politics until external forces, in the form of the Arab Spring, acted to dramatically shift the power balance between the government and the antisystem opposition.

Haqq and the Antisystem Opposition

One of the consequences of al-Wefaq's decision to join the formal political system was the formation of antisystem opposition groups which split from al-Wefaq and refused to register under the Political Societies Act. Wehrey suggests that the split grew out of tensions between al-Wefaq's *Intifāḍa*-era activists and the

[535] Gandhi and Lust-Okar, *Elections Under Authoritarianism,* 405.
[536] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 143.

clerical leadership,[537] and the dispute over the electoral boycott ultimately led to a number of senior leaders breaking away and forming the Movement for Liberty and Democracy (*Ḥarakat al-Ḥuriyya wal-Dīmuqrāṭīyya*), known as Haqq. Haqq was established in November 2005 by al-Wefaq's former deputy leader Hasan Mushaimaʿ, with the tacit support of prominent cleric and *Intifāḍa*-era political prisoner ʿAbdul-Wahhab Hussein (who would later lead a similar antisystem group known as Wafaʾ). Other prominent opposition leaders joined Haqq, including ʿAli Rabiʿa, a Sunni left-wing veteran of the 1973 parliament, and ʿAbdul-Jalil al-Singace, a former engineering professor and well-known blogger.[538]

Haqq arguably began as a cross-sectarian antisystem movement, as it absorbed parts of Shiʿi al-Wefaq alongside disaffected members of other political societies which had also decided to participate in the elections, including the Sunni-dominated secular Waʿad society. Haqq initially attempted to court working class Sunnis as a means of distinguishing itself from al-Wefaq,[539] however "later experienced an evolution towards more Shiʿi radicalism"[540] which resulted in the loss of much of its secular and/or Sunni support. This radicalism increased as Haqq entrenched itself as an underground antisystem movement, and adopted tactics which appealed to Shiʿi constituents who were unhappy with al-Wefaq's performance in parliament. Wehrey even suggests that Haqq came to see Lebanese Hezbollah as a model, particularly following the group's 2006 war with Israel which greatly boosted its popularity among Bahraini Shiʿa.[541]

According to Gengler's 2009 demographic survey of Bahrain, 20% of Shiʿi respondents willing to disclose their political preferences supported Haqq. Gengler also notes that there appeared to be no distinguishable difference in economic status between supporters of al-Wefaq and Haqq, which suggests that Haqq supporters chose a "stance of deliberate disenfranchisement from the regime" as a consequence of their political convictions.[542] Haqq started out with a strong focus on promoting constitutional monarchy, and even took its campaign to the UN where it tried to gather support for formally calling on Bahrain to hold a

[537] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 49.
[538] Wright, *Fixing the Kingdom*, 8.
[539] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 51.
[540] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 143.
[541] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 51.
[542] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 131-132.

referendum on the 2002 Constitution.[543] However as Haqq increasingly came to identify as a Shiʿi-Islamist movement it began to position itself as a champion of the more marginalised Shiʿi villages, and shifted its focus to combatting the poverty, unemployment and discrimination experienced by many Bahraini Shiʿa.[544]

In spite of Haqq's appeal to the Shiʿi grassroots, it was unable to attract the level of support enjoyed by al-Wefaq, in part due to the latter's close affiliation with prominent clerics both nationally and in Najaf. Ayatollah Sistani's approval of al-Wefaq's decision to stand for election lent considerable legitimacy to al-Wefaq's position, and Haqq was reluctant to openly disagree with a religious scholar of Sistani's stature and influence.[545] Haqq however secured the religious sanction of a high-ranking local Shiʿi cleric, Sheikh Mohammed Sanad, in an attempt to counter ʿIsa al-Qasim's support for al-Wefaq. In contrast to al-Qasim, Sheikh Sanad refers to senior *marājiʿ* in Qom, where he resided for most of the year teaching seminary students, an arrangement which limited his influence in Bahrain.[546] Haqq's profile was boosted shortly after its formation when Sheikh Sanad was arrested at Muharraq airport after arriving from Iran, weeks after he had released a statement questioning the legitimacy of the Al Khalifa monarchy, an event which provoked violent protests.[547]

Haqq's growing radicalism meant that the group was increasingly unable to appeal to the majority of more moderate Shiʿa who made up al-Wefaq's core support base. It did however garner a significant following among Shiʿi youth, many of whom favoured unauthorised street activism over efforts to promote change from within the formal political system. A leaked diplomatic cable from the US embassy in Manama in 2008 made the following observation about the al-Wefaq-Haqq rivalry:

Haq and Wifaq [sic] *compete for Shiʿa support against a background of real frustration on the Shiʿa street. When Wifaq is perceived as ineffective in parliament, Haq gains more adherents for its strategy of extra-*

[543] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 50.
[544] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 49.
[545] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 77.
[546] US Embassy Manama, *The Shi'a Clerical Hierarchy in Bahrain*, n.p.
[547] Rabi, Uzi, 'Kuwait and Bahrain' in: Moghadam, Assaf (ed)., 2012. *Militancy and Political Violence in Shiism: Trends and Patterns,* Oxford: Routledge, 214.

parliamentary opposition. When Wifaq can show that its cooperation with the government has produced jobs, housing or more political representation for Shiʿa, support for Haq's radical message subsides.[548]

The competition between al-Wefaq and Haqq for support within the Shiʿi community is an example of precisely the sort of divisions encouraged by a Divided Structure of Contestation within the broader framework of liberalised autocracy. Rather than attempting to moderate groups with more radical policy platforms, as in a situation in which all opposition parties participate in the formal sphere of politics, the government actually has an interest in allowing antisystem groups such as Haqq to operate, in order to balance them against the tolerated opposition (in this case al-Wefaq and the smaller included opposition societies). In encouraging the al-Wefaq-Haqq rivalry, the government used divide and rule tactics to minimise the ability of both groups to extract concessions. Lust-Okar identifies this as a common strategy within liberalised autocracies, because "fostering opposition groups with divergent and incompatible ideological preferences… reduces the likelihood that each side chooses to confront the regime."[549]

The level of ideological radicalism within an antisystem group's policy demands does not necessarily ensure its exclusion from the system- the Salafi group al-Asalah for example is essentially part of the regime-loyal opposition in spite of its fundamentalist Sunni-Islamist leanings.[550] Rather, liberalised-autocratic regimes tend to view radicalism in terms of the distance between an opposition group's demands and the status quo, or in other words "the extent to which a group is radical is simply the amount of change it demands in the present system."[551] The Al Khalifa sought to manage rather than eliminate antisystem groups such as Haqq, Wafaʾ and other banned political and human rights organisations, which continued to reject the status quo and demand structural changes to the political system itself. This was typically achieved through selective repression- not so much that the groups would disappear altogether, along with their useful

[548] US Embassy Manama, *Rivals for Bahrain's Shi'a Street*, n.p.
[549] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World,* 155.
[550] Niethammer, *Stubborn Salafis and Moderate Shiites,* 3-4.
[551] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 75.

ability to keep the tolerated opposition on its toes, but enough to restrict their activities and prevent them from mounting a serious challenge against the regime.[552]

Haqq's threat to al-Wefaq's support base can be seen in a number of cases in which the antisystem group employed tactics such as street protests and civil disobedience to pressure al-Wefaq to harden its position on government policies which it may have otherwise supported. For example, Haqq launched protests in response to al-Wefaq's vote in favour of levying a 1% income tax in Bahrain during the 2006 parliament, mobilising poorer Shiʿi constituents who would have been most affected by this change. Al-Wefaq was forced to back down, and ʿIsa al-Qasim later issued a *fatwa* against income tax.[553] In a liberalised-autocratic system al-Wefaq's position on income tax would likely have had little impact on the government's policy decisions, given the elected lower house of parliament is unable to legislate. However, divisions between al-Wefaq and more radical antisystem groups are advantageous to the regime, as they act to reduce the influence of both groups on government policy.

The ultimate example of the antisystem groups' ability to challenge the tolerated opposition is arguably reflected in al-Wefaq's response to the outbreak of unrest in February 2011, which brought an end to Bahrain's period of political liberalisation (discussed further in Chapter 6). While Haqq, Wafaʾ and unaffiliated youth activists were heavily involved in the initial phase of Bahrain's Arab Spring-inspired protests, al-Wefaq did not formally endorse the protests for a number of days, and continued to call for dialogue with the government within the framework of the existing political system, until events escalated and its status quo position became politically untenable.[554] This example fits with Lust-Okar's observation that during periods of political crisis, "the emergence, or strengthening of radical opposition groups may make [tolerated] opposition forces less willing to stimulate popular unrest even if it is easier for them to do so."[555]

[552] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 6.
[553] Parolin, *Reweaving the Myth of Bahrain's Parliamentary Experience*, 38.
[554] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 78.
[555] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 26.

It would be overly simplistic however to view al-Wefaq and the other opposition groups which decided to participate in the NAC-era liberalised autocracy as being essentially co-opted by the government. In contrast to the regime-loyal opposition, which in the case of Bahrain consisted of Sunni parties whose involvement sits outside the scope of this study, the participation of tolerated opposition groups such as al-Wefaq is contingent upon the government making some concessions to their policy platform, in order to keep them within the system. In other words, some form of trade-off is required between the government and the tolerated opposition in order to ensure that it remains in the interests of the opposition to cooperate, rather than join the antisystem groups in opposing the liberalised-autocratic political system itself.[556] Whilst acknowledging that some tolerated opposition groups do risk becoming wholly co-opted by governments, Albrecht refers to groups such as al-Wefaq as "societal stakeholders"[557] within a government-administered reform process. In a liberalised-autocratic system, which typically relies on cosmetic democratisation to bolster legitimacy, it is in the interests of both the government and the tolerated opposition that the latter is not seen to be co-opted. Indeed Valeri has observed that "the legal opposition under Hamad has constantly had to balance the contradictory necessities of securing political survival, while resisting co-optation by the current system."[558] The following section will discuss this contradiction in examining the political participation of Bahrain's tolerated opposition following its decision to break its electoral boycott and enter parliament.

Formal Political Participation during the NAC Era

Al-Wefaq ended its electoral boycott in 2005 alongside the aforementioned Waʿad society, and the two groups formed a somewhat incongruous alliance which survives to this day. The participation of Sunni-dominated Waʿad in the 2002-2005 boycott had enabled al-Wefaq and the other Shiʿi societies in the bloc to deflect attempts by the Al Khalifa to depict the boycott as sectarian,[559] and when Waʿad members decided to join al-Wefaq in standing for the 2006 parliament the two groups formalised their cooperation

[556] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 42.
[557] Albrecht, *Introduction*, 6.
[558] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 143.
[559] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 47.

with a "cross-ideological electoral alliance."[560] Al-Wefaq and Waʿad had calculated that as a coalition they could work within the existing system to potentially capture a majority of seats in parliament, which would enable them to advance common aims such as fighting corruption and promoting transparency in government.[561] They developed an electoral strategy which saw both groups support each other at campaign rallies with an understanding that they would not field candidates to compete for the same seats.[562]

According to Waʿad leaders interviewed by the researcher, the majority of the group's membership is Sunni, however its secular democratic platform also enjoys support from liberal Shiʿi constituents, particularly from more metropolitan parts of the country.[563] Gengler's 2009 survey indeed reported that 10% of Shiʿi respondents who disclosed their political views supported Waʿad.[564] A member of Waʿad's leadership described the group in the following terms:

Waʿad is like a pool of mixed groups- businessmen, feminists, religious, communists, nationalists- what joins us together is the policy program of Waʿad - constitutional monarchy, economic freedom with social responsibilities- we believe in free education, healthcare, providing public housing. We believe that men and women are equal.[565]

Given Waʿad's progressive platform, its coalition with cleric-led, Shiʿi-Islamist al-Wefaq appears all the more discordant. Indeed, Valeri claims that "some al-Wefaq backing Shiʿi clerics, such as Isa al-Qasim, viewed any cooperation with secular forces with disapproval."[566] However, the alliance appears to have been strengthened by both groups' shared history of opposition activism, stretching back to the Islamist/secular nationalist issue-based cooperation in the 1973 parliament (discussed in Chapter 3), and the similar experiences of exile and imprisonment both groups' leadership underwent during the 1990s *Intifāḍa*. Al-

[560] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 141.
[561] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 177.
[562] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 141.
[563] Interview with group of Waʿad members 21 December 2015.
[564] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 131.
[565] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.
[566] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 141.

Wefaq leader ʿAli Salman is said to have an excellent personal relationship with ʾIbrahim Sharif,[567] Waʿad's figurehead and leader from 2005-2011, and both groups were able to utilise the alliance to their tactical advantage while avoiding issues of potential conflict.

Whilst broadly encouraging the electoral participation of both opposition groups, the government viewed the al-Wefaq-Waʿad alliance as a significant threat to its control of the lower house of parliament and the political narrative it sought to present. ʾIbrahim Sharif, a Sunni whose wife is a prominent Shiʿi member of Waʿad, was viewed as particularly dangerous due to his cross-sectarian appeal. Sharif is considered to be one of the few opposition politicians capable of uniting Bahrain's disparate political groups against the regime, "behind whom a mass-based political alternative might emerge."[568] ʾIbrahim Sharif is revered by Shiʿi youth in particular for his role in leading the protests at the Pearl Roundabout in 2011, where he was "carried along by the thronging crowds like a groom on his wedding night,"[569] and was widely praised for his robust defence of his principles during his trial on charges of plotting to overthrow the monarchy, for which he is currently in prison.[570] Youth activists interviewed by the researcher, including those aligned with more radical Shiʿi Islamist movements, described Sharif in terms such as "the Guevara or Gandhi of Bahrain,"[571] and claimed that "they jailed ʾIbrahim Sharif… because he pledged to build bridges between Sunni and Shiʿa."[572]

Recognising that the al-Wefaq-Waʿad tactical alliance could actually achieve its aim of capturing more than 50% of lower house seats, in spite of an electoral system which had ostensibly been structured to prevent this, the government sought to break the alliance by targeting Waʿad in both the 2006 and 2010 elections in an effort to ensure its candidates did not win seats. In doing so, the government undermined faith in the democratic process and stood accused of "utilising election fraud,"[573] for example by mobilising security

[567] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 141.
[568] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 147.
[569] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 4.
[570] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 227-8.
[571] Interview with activist 5 January 2016.
[572] Interview with activist 21 December 2015.
[573] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 141.

services personnel to vote for pro-government candidates in districts in which Waʿad was standing.[574] Such underhand tactics on the part of the government are likely responsible for Waʿad's failure to win any seats in the 2006 and 2010 parliaments. Al-Wefaq was unable to win a majority of the 40 lower house seats on its own, securing 17 in 2006 and 18 in 2010.[575] The frustration of the al-Wefaq-Waʿad coalition is a clear example of the ways in which liberalised-autocratic regimes are able to utilise institutional structures to maintain power, in spite of the existence of liberalising reforms that are paradoxically designed to encourage opposition participation in the political system.

Al-Wefaq's five years as Bahrain's largest parliamentary opposition group has been a popular subject of debate within Bahrain's Shiʿi community, particularly following the 2011 uprising, which many saw as repudiation of al-Wefaq's efforts to achieve meaningful reform by engaging with the regime. The researcher was able to access a number of senior al-Wefaq leaders and former parliamentarians prior to the group's forced dissolution in June 2016, most of which defended al-Wefaq's achievements in parliament and continued to call for dialogue with the government as the only real solution to the country's ongoing political crisis. Socio-economic reforms were commonly cited as examples of al-Wefaq's success in parliament, including measures to improve the Shiʿi community's standard of living such as a pay rise for teachers and an increase in pension payments to individuals on low incomes.[576] Al-Wefaq's efforts to expose public and private sector corruption were also appreciated, even though little was done to address the issue, largely because such cases typically involved members of the Al Khalifa family or other highly-connected individuals.[577] One al-Wefaq aligned Shiʿi cleric told the researcher that he would regularly receive phone calls from Sunnis wanting to complain about corruption, for example involving their employment conditions. He would suggest that they contact their local MP, however they would respond by saying that they "only trust al-Wefaq on matters of corruption."[578]

[574] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 143.
[575] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 64.
[576] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[577] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 24.
[578] Interview with opposition leader 2 January 2016.

Most al-Wefaq members interviewed by the researcher expressed frustration with the group's seeming inability to advance its policy platform in the face of concerted opposition from regime-loyal parliamentarians. One former MP commented:

We wanted parliament to achieve something tangible for the people, but it was almost impossible to get legislation through if the government opposes it. We were 17 MPs, versus 23 loyalists. We couldn't get the backing of our loyalist colleagues to vote against the government.[579]

He told the researcher that when al-Wefaq first entered parliament one of their objectives was to make changes to the Constitution in order to strengthen the elected lower house at the expense of the appointed upper house. Al-Wefaq MPs attempted to reason with their loyalist colleagues- "We said, 'you are the majority! If the parliament is stronger, you will be in command of it!'"[580] However they were unable to win sufficient backing. Policies aimed at strengthening the lower house were interpreted by the government as attempts to change the rules of the game, a red line for liberalised-autocratic regimes which structure the political system so as to cement their grip on power. The government was able to utilise the framework of political participation it had constructed, which favoured regime-loyal groups over the tolerated opposition in parliamentary elections, to prevent any change to the political rules of the game. This became a prominent source of grievance for al-Wefaq MPs, who accused their parliamentary colleagues of essentially being puppets of the government. According to one:

In the [2010] *parliament, we were 18 members and the Sunnis were 22. When we say we want to do something, everyone says 'yes, we agree with you!' Because it's not related to the ruling family or something, it's economic. Something related to the budget, something related to social services in health or education. Everybody will say 'yes, we are with you!' But when it comes to a vote, the same people will say 'oh I can't, I can't.'*

'Why?'

[579] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[580] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.

'I received an SMS.'

I swear to God! If you want I can give you names. ʿAbdul-Hadi al-Murad, he's an MP now, he said 'we can't vote with you, because we received an SMS.' Please just imagine- an SMS![581]

One policy area in which al-Wefaq felt it was particularly stonewalled was in addressing the structural discrimination experienced by Bahraini Shiʿa in the workforce (discussed in Chapter 4). Al-Wefaq used its position in parliament to try to investigate sectarian discrimination in public sector appointments, as it had done with some success in exposing corruption. One MP noted that the loyalists' response was that: "This subject should never be raised… you will open the gates of hell if you talk about discrimination."[582] Al-Wefaq shifted tack and presented its investigation as seeking to achieve "equal opportunity for every citizen" and aimed to minimise sensitivities by beginning with an audit of the more minor Shiʿi-led ministries to ensure that the correct recruitment processes were being followed.[583] This proposal was however also defeated in parliament. Al-Wefaq even requested a meeting with the Prime Minister and Crown Prince to discuss discrimination, but were told that the matter was a non-issue in the public sector. According to the same former MP:

If the government really wanted to put an end to it, they would stop this discrimination. We knew this was something agreed. They wanted it to be that way… We wanted success in making this country deal with all its citizens equally. We didn't even get near to it. According to the constitution all citizens are equal, but in practice all Shiʿas know they are not equal.[584]

In spite of al-Wefaq's obvious frustration at failing to advance much of its agenda in parliament, another former al-Wefaq MP complained to the researcher that Bahrainis were too quick to judge al-Wefaq as ineffective, and didn't fully appreciate the extent to which the group had to struggle to make its voice heard, or the historic nature of its participating at all:

[581] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.
[582] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[583] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[584] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.

As I told my constituents when I was getting into the parliament for the first time, this experiment, you have to give it time. You cannot judge our performance after only four years. You need a much longer time… Given the reality we have, the makeup of the society, the ruling family, there's never been democracy really, ever. We have to be realistic about what can and cannot be achieved. In fairness… the Sunni pro-government [MPs]*, they tell me that what al-Wefaq has achieved in four years is something exceptional. You know we touched on a number of issues, you know all these dealings- the royal family people putting their hands in certain areas, financial mishappenings, administrative shortcomings, also redistributing some money to the people, the most needy people. I think really, in fairness, some people are really just not appreciative enough of what al-Wefaq has done. I think now some people are slowly realising 'wow, what a difference al-Wefaq was in the parliament.' Now they hardly have access to these people* [government officials]… *We would meet people, have office hours, we tried very hard, and a number of people were satisfied*.[585]

Whilst the al-Wefaq leadership certainly considers itself to have been a legitimate and independent parliamentary opposition, the group's arguably marginal influence on policy, as well as its conciliatory approach to the government and general willingness to compromise, have led some scholars to argue that al-Wefaq "accepted the premise of playing by the rules of the co-optation game."[586] Valeri for example claims that al-Wefaq's 2005 decision to participate in parliamentary elections structured to favour the government "has slowly transformed the society into a society of professional politicians, living off politics, and with a conciliatory socioeconomic and political agenda towards the regime."[587] Such a perception among al-Wefaq's Shiʿi base has arguably "weakened its political credibility and deprived the society of any capacity to embody an alternative to Hamad's regime."[588]

It is important to note however, that within a system of liberalised autocracy the government has an interest in enabling al-Wefaq to present itself as a legitimate opposition, and its outright co-optation would

[585] Interview with opposition leader 16 May 2016.
[586] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 173.
[587] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 142.
[588] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 143.

not have enabled the government to balance al-Wefaq with the antisystem opposition groups as a means of stabilising threats to the status quo. The government required al-Wefaq to participate according to its own rules of the game, providing it did not cross red lines involving challenging the structure of the political system itself, but in exchange for this allowed al-Wefaq to make some policy demands and be involved in the governance process. Al-Wefaq was free to criticise individual government policies, and pursue for example, its anti-corruption agenda, with the unspoken understanding that targeting members of the royal family was off-limits. According to Lust-Okar, "included opponents are allowed to challenge the regime… However, in return for this privilege, their demands are constrained."[589]

If al-Wefaq had been entirely co-opted its participation would have more closely resembled that of the regime-loyal political societies mentioned earlier, who according to al-Wefaq MPs were prepared to reverse their support for particular issues on the instructions of the government. The crucial difference between regime-loyal and tolerated opposition groups is that the former typically aims "to gain access to the political arena, either to realise material gains or to challenge particular policy areas."[590] The regime-loyal opposition is largely preoccupied with winning concessions for narrow policy interests, and their interactions with the regime typically resemble that of a patron-client network rather than a conventional government-opposition relationship.

The constant need to balance the opposition within a Divided Structure of Contestation reflects al-Wefaq's predicament in entering the formal political system- in spite of the limited concessions it would expect to win due to its involvement, its acceptance of the government's rules of the game inevitably lead to a growing perception within its support base that it has been co-opted. As such, in a liberalised-autocratic system "included opponents often have weaker relations with the masses than the excluded elites,"[591] which could eventually lead the regime to attempt to entice some (but not all) of the popular antisystem groups into the political system to become the 'new' tolerated opposition. Such an outcome of course

[589] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 68.
[590] Albrecht, *Introduction*, 7.
[591] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 79.

would not be in al-Wefaq's interests, and as such the group had to walk a very fine line between adhering to the institutional rules of the political system, and affirming its position to supporters as a critical opposition better capable of winning concessions from within the formal political sphere than their antisystem competitors.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the dramatic shift in political participation which occurred as a result of King Hamad's attempt to liberalise Bahrain's authoritarian politics in the decade following his ascent to the throne. In adopting a democratic façade, including permitting both parliamentary elections and the formation of legal opposition societies, King Hamad transformed the relationship between the regime and its citizens and broadened the space within the political system for the Shiʿi community's involvement in politics. This chapter has argued however that rather than heralding a new period of democratisation, the National Action Charter effectively established a system of liberalised autocracy in Bahrain, designed to strengthen the Al Khalifa's grip on power and control of the political rules of the game. Political participation during the National Action Charter era came to exist within a Divided Structure of Contestation, which enabled the regime to balance tolerated and antisystem opposition groups as a means of forestalling meaningful reform and strengthening the status quo. As such, the rivalries which emerged within the Shiʿi opposition between groups such as al-Wefaq and Haqq benefited the regime.

Al-Wefaq remained in parliament until the 2011 outbreak of Arab Spring-inspired protests in Bahrain, which with the help of both regional events and an emboldened antisystem opposition fundamentally altered the relationship between the tolerated opposition and the Al Khalifa regime.[592] The literature remains divided as to the long-term stability of liberalised autocracies, with some arguing that "even cosmetic reforms may have unintended consequences" as they "raise expectations of further opening, limiting the ability of regimes to push back to square one as cheaply and unobtrusively as they might have

[592] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 172.

done without them."[593] Indeed even largely symbolic parliaments do provide a limited space for criticism of the government which may have not been tolerated under full-autocracy.[594] Without the unprecedented external momentum of the Arab Spring igniting some of the deep-rooted grievances discussed in Chapter 4, it is impossible to know how long Bahrain's liberalised autocratic system would have continued, and what form it may have taken in response to future contentious cycles. It seems however that the post-2011 political system in Bahrain is in the process of undergoing another dramatic transformation, which this thesis will argue amounts to a dismantling of liberalised autocracy and a return to full-authoritarianism. Chapters 6-9 of this thesis will focus on changes in Shiʿi political participation in the post-Arab Spring era, as Bahrain's contentious politics completes its latest cycle from authoritarian repression to liberalisation and reform, and back again.

[593] Tetreault, Okruhlik and Kapiszewski, *Twenty-First-Century Politics in the Arab Gulf States*, 10.
[594] Okruhlik and Tetreault, *Juxtapositions and Sticking Points*, 303.

Chapter 6: Navigating the Arab Spring

The carefully balanced system of liberalised autocracy constructed by King Hamad during the NAC era relied on incorporating tolerated opposition groups into the parliamentary system, where they accrued political influence and limited policy concessions in exchange for their acceptance of the regime's rules of the game. Antisystem opposition groups, which sought to reform the political system itself, were repressed but not completely eliminated, as the threat they posed to the tolerated opposition's popular legitimacy and support base enabled the regime to utilise divide and rule tactics to maintain its grip on power. This Divided Structure of Contestation ensured that the regime enjoyed relative political stability and boosted Bahrain's legitimacy among Western allies and donors, as introducing parliamentary elections enabled the Al Khalifa to depict Bahrain as being on the path to democratisation.

The Arab Spring, which arrived in Bahrain on 14 February 2011, radically disrupted King Hamad's liberalised autocracy, upsetting his previously successful attempts to balance the tolerated opposition group al-Wefaq with their antisystem opponents and shifting the balance of power within the regime itself away from the reform-minded camp, which had instigated Bahrain's transition from authoritarianism in 2000. Regional events had greatly emboldened the antisystem opposition, which had already witnessed the previously unthinkable fall of Tunisia's Ben Ali and Egypt's Mubarak, and were able to gain the upper hand over their tolerated opponents, who rather than seeking to replicate Arab Spring protests in Bahrain continued to call for reform from within the system. This shift in the power dynamic within Bahrain's opposition led to the breakdown of the Divided Structure of Contestation, which had proven durable during Bahrain's 2006 and 2010 parliamentary elections but could not survive the dramatic rise of the antisystem opposition, whose Arab Spring-inspired activism was informal, street-driven and existed outside the control of both the regime and the tolerated opposition. The sudden empowerment of antisystem groups at the expense of opposition societies willing to work with the regime, and the corresponding rise of hardliners within the monarchy at the expense of the Al Khalifa's moderate faction, ultimately led to the breakdown of Bahrain's liberalised autocracy. Chapters 6-8 of this thesis will explore the first five years of this new era with the aim

of examining how Bahrain's authoritarian transition has impacted Shiʿi political participation. This chapter will begin by outlining the events of Bahrain's Arab Spring-inspired uprising and the resulting crackdown, and will discuss the implications of the rise of antisystem groups for Bahrain's tolerated Shiʿi opposition and King Hamad's liberalising project. It will conclude with a discussion about the role of social media and online methods of political participation in Shiʿi opposition politics in Bahrain moving forward.

Bahrain's 2011 Uprising

Given Bahrain's lengthy history of popular mobilisation and political unrest, it is reasonable to assume that the 2011 arrival in Bahrain of the revolutionary sentiments sweeping the region did not necessarily catch the regime by surprise. Two factors in particular indicate that the government anticipated that contagion from the Arab Spring would spread to Bahrain: A royal decree was issued on 12 February 2011 granting each Bahraini family a sum of one thousand dinars[595] (ironically, it was ostensibly to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the NAC), and representatives from al-Wefaq were suddenly summoned for negotiations. These talks quickly floundered over al-Wefaq's demand that the King dismiss his uncle, the unpopular Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, known as "Mr fifty percent"[596] for his allegedly corrupt financial practices, and famous for being the world's longest serving Prime Minister.[597] The government wanted assurances that the opposition would call off any Arab Spring-inspired protests, however it is unlikely that tolerated opposition societies such as al-Wefaq held sufficient sway over the anonymous activists whose plans for popular demonstrations were swiftly gaining momentum online.

Discussion surrounding the prospect of launching a protest movement in Bahrain began on the popular forum *Bahrain Online* during the January 2011 Egyptian revolution. One user suggested 14 February as a suitable date for Bahrain's Day of Rage, because it was "the day that promises were broken and the constitution was overturned,"[598] referring to the anniversary of the NAC. The choice of 14 February for

[595] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 110-111.
[596] Interview with student 20 December 2015.
[597] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 76.
[598] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 1.

Bahrain's Day of Rage amounted to an explicit rejection of the NAC reforms, and the system of liberalised autocracy which developed out of them. Kinninmont succinctly explains why 14 February is such a "deeply contested date:"

It marked a struggle between different narratives of history, one broadly depicting Bahrain as gifted with a magnanimous ruler who had of his own accord brought reforms to his people as part of a progressive and evolutionary development path, and the other speaking of a politically progressive people burdened by rulers who were refusing them their rights and setting back the cause of democratic participation."[599]

Following the selection of this highly symbolic date, a group called the February 14 Youth Coalition formed on *Bahrain Online*, and called for suggestions from users as to an appropriate location for what they hoped would become a Bahraini version of Cairo's Tahrir Square. The Pearl Roundabout, an important junction feeding into Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman highway on the outskirts of the capital Manama, was chosen due to "its accessibility, centrality and proximity to villages."[600] At this time its only point of strategic importance was its role as a key traffic thoroughfare, built with a distinctive white monument at its centre to commemorate a 1982 Gulf Cooperation Council summit. The symbolic irony of such a location would emerge later- it was at this 1982 summit that the GCC Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) was formed, and the causeway connecting Bahrain to the Saudi mainland was inaugurated.[601] Images of PSF tanks rolling across the causeway from Saudi Arabia to put down the uprising would later be among the most iconic of the Arab Spring.

Tens of thousands of Bahrainis participated in the Day of Rage protests on 14 February 2011, most of which took place outside the capital in villages such as Sitra, al-Diraz and al-Nuwaidrat.[602] The demonstrations were unauthorised and were met by riot police who succeeded in dispelling protesters with teargas and rubber bullets. The death of ʿAli Mushaimaʿ, an unarmed youth who was shot in the back whilst protesting

[599] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond*, 114.
[600] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 4.
[601] Khalaf, *Squaring the Circle*, 267.
[602] Brownlee, Jason; Masoud, Tarek and Reynolds, Andrew., 2015. *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 87.

in the village of al-Daih, energised the nascent protest movement which until this point was largely confined to the Shiʿi villages. A spontaneous demonstration erupted in the carpark outside Salmaniyya hospital where Mushaimaʿ's body was taken, and the Ministry of Interior was forced to release a statement promising an investigation into his death.[603] News about Mushaimaʿ's death spread quickly, and thousands of Bahrainis gathered outside the hospital and in al-Daih for the funeral procession on 15 February. Riot police attacked the mourners with teargas and birdshot, known in Bahrain as *shozen*. A second youth, Fadhel al-Matrook, was shot at close range by riot police, and Mushaimaʿ's funeral procession quickly swelled in numbers and became a protest march. Mourners spontaneously decided to march on foot from al-Daih to the Pearl Roundabout, where some began to erect semi-permanent structures with the intention of turning the traffic junction into a protest camp.[604]

Realising the mobilising effect the security forces' heavy-handed tactics had on protesters, the majority of whom were politically-unaffiliated youths, King Hamad took the unusual step of giving a nationally-televised address on the evening of 15 February, expressing regret for the deaths of Mushaimaʿ and al-Matrook and promising an immediate investigation.[605] Security forces were instructed to allow protesters to occupy the Pearl Roundabout, which was swiftly becoming the focal point of the protests. On 16 February the numbers at the Roundabout swelled further, and the atmosphere became almost festive, with music, speeches and donations of food and drink, and many families and young children in attendance. Protesters were buoyed by the King's seemingly moderate response in calling off the security forces, and were aware that the world's media was now fixed on Bahrain as the next potential venue for Arab Spring unrest.

In the early hours of 17 February security forces launched a sudden assault on the Pearl Roundabout protest camp, where around 1,500 protesters had remained overnight. The purpose of the raid appeared to

[603] A translation of the statement can be found here: Calderwood, James 'Bahrain's King Expresses Regret for Deaths,' *The National,* 16 February 2011, www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/bahrains-king-expresses-regret-for-deaths#full
[604] CNN, 'At Least 2 People Dead After Police Move on Protesters in Bahrain,' 17 February 2011, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/02/16/bahrain.protests/
[605] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 190.

be to clear the camp entirely, and security forces employed a range of heavy-handed crowd control techniques, including the use of standard riot equipment such as shields and batons, but also tear gas, sound bombs and stun grenades.[606] Four protesters were killed, reportedly as a result of live fire.[607] The security forces succeeded in razing the camp, and encircled the Pearl Roundabout with barbed-wire fencing. Protesters attempted to march once more toward the Roundabout, but were thwarted by police, who shot and killed an elderly demonstrator. Military checkpoints were set up across Manama and further clashes erupted near Salmaniyya hospital, where hundreds of injured protesters had been taken.[608] Funeral processions for the four protesters killed on what would come to be referred to as 'Bloody Thursday' were held on 18 February, and drew a combined crowd of over 50,000 mourners, many of whom marched toward Manama that afternoon.[609] They were once again met with teargas and live fire, in which one further protester was killed. Al-Wefaq MPs resigned from parliament *en masse* in protest at the crackdown, and the General Federation of Workers Trade Union announced a general strike.[610]

On 19 February the government made another abrupt about-turn in its efforts to constrain what had arguably at this point transitioned from a protest movement into an uprising. Some have suggested that this reflected a power struggle within the Al Khalifa ruling family between moderates and hard-liners,[611] a prospect which will be discussed later in this chapter. The Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad made a televised appearance to announce that security forces would be withdrawn, protesters would be permitted to return to the Pearl Roundabout and peaceful demonstrations would be allowed. He also appealed to the

[606] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 16.
[607] Al Jazeera, 'Clashes Rock Bahraini Capital' 17 February 2011, www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121714223324820.html
[608] Slackman, Michael and Landler, Mark, 'Bahrain Turmoil Poses Fresh Test for White House' *New York Times* 17 February 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/18bahrain.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
[609] Chulov, Martin, 'Bahrain Protest: The Regime Must Fall, and We Will Make Sure it Does' *The Guardian* 19 February 2011, www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/18/bahrain-protests-regime-fall
[610] Ahmad, Abdallah, 'Politics Impede Bahrain's Labor Movement' *Al Monitor,* 27 January 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/01/bahrain-labor-movement-weak-politics.html
[611] See for example: Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 51; Peterson, JE. 'The GCC States: Participation, Opposition, and the Fraying of the Social Contract,' Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, *London School of Economics and Political Science*, December 2012, www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/kuwait/research/papers/politicalParticipation.aspx, 22.

tolerated opposition groups to engage in dialogue with the government in order to resolve the crisis.[612] The Pearl Roundabout protest camp was re-established, and by 22 February some estimates put the number of protesters at 100,000.[613] On 25 February, an official day of mourning for Bahrainis killed during the unrest of the previous week, upwards of 200,000 Bahrainis took to the streets after Friday prayers, almost 20% of the country's citizen population.[614] Pro-government protests were also launched at the Sunni al-Fatih mosque in Manama from 21 February, led by ʿAbdul-Latif al-Mahmood, a reform-minded Sunni politician turned government loyalist, under the banner of the National Unity Gathering. These counter-protests drew tens of thousands, however some have alleged that non-Bahraini migrant workers were coerced into participating to boost numbers.[615] The King announced further concessions, including the release of political prisoners and allowing prominent exiles to return from abroad without fear of prosecution.[616]

Protesters began to stage large demonstrations in front of important government installations, including the parliament building, Salmaniyya hospital, the state television headquarters, the Ministries of Justice, Interior and Education and the office of the Prime Minister. Attempts were made to march on Manama's financial harbour, the Royal Court in Rifaʿ and the King's palace in Safriyya.[617] On 4 March al-Wefaq announced that the group was prepared to negotiate with the government, demanding the dismissal of the Prime Minister, the abrogation of Bahrain's 2002 Constitution and the establishment of a fully-democratic parliament based on a system of constitutional monarchy.[618] Other groups active at the Pearl Roundabout however went further, and began to call for the fall of the Al Khalifa monarchy itself, effectively dividing the protest movement into two camps: Constitutional monarchists largely aligned with the tolerated opposition, and antisystem republicans who rejected the political system itself.[619] As the protests escalated

[612] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 36.
[613] Slackman, Michael and Audi, Nadim, 'Protesters in Bahrain Demand More Changes' *New York Times* 25 February 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/world/middleeast/26bahrain.html?_r=2
[614] Coates Ulrichsen, Kristian, 'Bahrain's Aborted Revolution' in: Kitchen, Nicholas (ed)., 2012. 'After the Arab Spring: Power Shift in the Middle East?' *London School of Economics IDEAS Report*, www2.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/Home.aspx, 29.
[615] Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*, 26.
[616] Reuters, 'Shi'ite Dissident Returns to Bahrain from Exile,' 26 February 2011, www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-government-idUSTRE71P1A720110226
[617] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 221.
[618] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 191.
[619] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 225.

the more radical antisystem groups, including the unaffiliated youth who had come together under the banner of the February 14 Coalition, appeared to be driving the opposition movement, posing a significant threat to the stability of the regime. On 13 March the security forces were once again ordered to crack down on protesters camped out in the Pearl Roundabout and Manama's financial district. Clashes erupted between protesters and pro-government vigilantes at the University of Bahrain, riot police were mobilised and many students were arrested.[620] The Crown Prince continued to push for dialogue, and outlined a seven-point plan for his negotiations with the tolerated opposition.[621] However, on 14 March the government announced that it had appealed for assistance from the GCC in managing the unrest, and 1,200 Saudi troops along with six hundred Emirati police entered Bahrain from Saudi Arabia via the King Fahd causeway.[622] It is unclear as to whether the concurrence of the Crown Prince's pursuit of negotiations and the authorisation for GCC troops to enter Bahrain to forcibly put down the uprising reflected divisions within the Al Khalifa family, or was part of a deliberate strategy.

The Peninsula Shield Force's arrival in Bahrain in March 2011 was the first time the GCC military alliance had been evoked within an internal domestic context, indeed the mandate of the PSF expressly states that its forces exist to counter external threats.[623] GCC soldiers and police were ostensibly present to assist their Bahraini counterparts in guarding key government installations, however Saudi soldiers in particular have been accused of suppressing demonstrations, rounding up protesters and even participating directly in the interrogation of prisoners and detainees.[624]

King Hamad declared a three month 'State of National Safety' on 15 March, effectively imposing martial law and strengthening the legal basis for the regime's actions during the crackdown.[625] Protesters marching on the Saudi embassy were fired upon, as were demonstrators in the Shiʿi village of Sitra. The number of

[620] CNN, 'Witnesses: King's Supporters Confront Bahrain Students' 13 March 2011, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/13/bahrain.protests/
[621] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 79.
[622] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 90.
[623] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 35.
[624] Jones, Toby Craig, 'Saudi Arabia Versus the Arab Spring,' *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 31:2 (2011): 43.
[625] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 226.

protesters at the Pearl Roundabout dropped as many had returned to their villages to defend them against attack, and on 16 March security forces, backed by tanks and helicopters, stormed the Roundabout and succeeded in clearing the site.[626] Clashes broke out at Salmaniyya hospital, where most of the wounded had been taken, and security forces established control over the facility, preventing injured protesters from receiving treatment and impeding the activities of medical staff.[627] A twelve hour curfew was announced, and all public gatherings were banned. By 17 March over one thousand protesters had allegedly been arrested, including the leaders of all of Bahrain's major opposition societies with the exception of al-Wefaq.[628] On 18 March the distinctive white monument at the centre of the Pearl Roundabout was demolished, a highly symbolic act which according to Diboll, marked "an expression of the power of a state that is prepared to destroy even its own national monuments to cling on to power."[629]

Protesters attempted to launch a second Day of Rage on 25 March as a means of propelling the demonstrations, which had been continuing in the Shiʿi villages, once again into the nation's public spaces, however they were thwarted by security forces. Funerals became one of the only remaining avenues for mass mobilisation, and activists took to less orthodox methods of protest such as the coordinated chanting of *Allahu Akbar* from rooftops and tooting the horns of their cars to the distinctive beat of the popular protest chant *yasquṭ Ḥamad* (down with Hamad).[630]

The state of emergency was officially lifted on 1 June, by which time the Al Khalifa, with the help of GCC troops, had succeeded in re-establishing control over the country to the extent that the fall of the monarchy no longer seemed imminent. The consolidation of the Al Khalifa's position over the preceding three months was marked by an unprecedented crackdown, involving mass arrests and widespread

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[626] Chulov, Martin, 'Bahrain Unleashes Forces on Protesters' Camp' *The Guardian* 16 March 2011, www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/16/bahrain-protesters-military-operation-manama

[627] Law, Bill, 'Bahrain Hospital on the Front Line' *BBC News* 30 March 2011, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12899617

[628] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 142.

[629] Diboll, Mike. *Narrative and Impunity: An Ethnography of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (unpublished), 8 June 2014, https://mikediboll.wordpress.com/2014/06/08/dr-mike-diboll-back-again-with-new-research-on-bahrain/

[630] Horne, John, '*Tn Tn Ttn* and Torture in Bahrain: Puncturing the Spectacle of the 'Arab Spring'' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising,* London: Zed Books, 154.

allegations of torture and the mistreatment of detainees and a severe curtailment of freedom of speech and association.[631] State media shrilly promoted the narrative that the uprising was a sectarian conflict, and that Shiʿi protesters were backed by Iran and sought to install cleric-led Shiʿi theocracy in Bahrain.[632] Citizens were encouraged to identify anti-government protesters, whose images were published on social media and state TV, and entire programs, most prominently the chat show *al-Rāṣid* (the Watcher), were dedicated to naming and shaming individuals who belonged to professions seen as especially disloyal, including athletes, doctors, teachers and journalists.[633] Forty-seven medical professionals, most of them staff at Salmaniyya hospital, were arrested and accused of complicity in the uprising on account of their treatment of injured protesters.[634] Thousands of public sector employees were fired from their jobs, as were staff at a number of private companies including Gulf Air, due to their participation in the protests or their absence from work during the general strike.[635] Thirty five Shiʿi mosques and maʾtams were destroyed in April during the crackdown, among them several of historic importance including one which pre-dated the Al Khalifa's arrival in Bahrain.[636] King Hamad made a fresh call for national dialogue the day before the state of emergency was lifted, however the negotiations quickly fell apart over accusations that the King had sought to marginalise the tolerated opposition by inviting hundreds of pro-government NGOs and other regime-loyal groups to participate alongside them.[637]

Under pressure from key Western allies including the United States, King Hamad agreed to establish an independent inquiry into the events of the uprising, which aimed to foster a successful post-conflict transition and develop "mechanisms designed to prevent the recurrence of similar events."[638] The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (*al-Lajna al-Baḥrayniyya al-Mustaqila li-Taqaṣī al-Ḥaqāʾiq* or BICI) was

[631] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 21.
[632] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 86.
[633] The first episode of *Al-Rāṣid* can be viewed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLg_HJ1huSA&index=1&list=PL50D4177C0326628B
[634] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 192.
[635] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 8.
[636] Law, Bill, 'Razed Mosque Symbol of Divided Bahrain' *BBC News,* 27 March 2014, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26721084
[637] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 89.
[638] Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, Article 10, Royal Order No. 28 of 2011. Accessible via: http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Bahrain-Royal-Decree-28-Independent-Invesitation-Committee.pdf

set up on 29 June and was headed by the respected Egyptian professor Mohamed Cherif Bassiouni. BICI commissioners were given wide-ranging powers to investigate the government's response to the protests, including the role of the security forces, and were to make recommendations which would be made public in a report released on 23 November.[639] The report was highly critical of the government, accusing the police of using unnecessary force and criticising the practice of arbitrary detention and the widespread use of torture in prisons.[640] The BICI stated that there was no evidence of Iranian involvement in the protest movement, and argued that "the continued marginalisation of the Bahraini Shiʿa and the stalling of political reform were radicalising larger segments of the Shiʿa populace."[641] The BICI report also criticised the opposition movement for not trying hard enough to pursue dialogue with the government in order to negotiate an end to the crisis.[642] Whilst the report provided some discussion as to the historical background of the uprising, it did not examine the merits of the protesters' grievances and demands for reform, nor did it investigate the high level decision-makers who were arguably ultimately responsible for the human rights violations committed by security forces. In addition, the BICI's mandate was restricted to examining the role of local actors only, and as such it was not able to investigate the activities of the GCC PSF troops which are widely considered to have played an important role in implementing the government's crackdown.[643]

The King accepted the BICI's recommendations and committed the government to implementing them by a self-imposed deadline of February 2012. While most opposition groups welcomed the report, pleased that it was genuinely independent and did not attempt to exonerate the government, some attacked it for not going far enough to address "the naturalising, and therefore legitimising, function of structural violence"[644] in Bahrain, with one prominent dissident declaring that "the report effectively turns the issue of human rights violations into a police training problem."[645] These sentiments were magnified when the government's self-imposed deadline for implementation passed with seemingly very little progress

[639] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 91.
[640] Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 166-167, 416-418.
[641] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 91.
[642] Bassiouni et al, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 168-169.
[643] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 70.
[644] Diboll, *Narrative and Impunity,* n.p.
[645] Shehabi, Alaa, *Red Lines and Human Rights*, n.p.

achieved toward addressing the BICI's recommendations. Indeed, it appears that "acceptance in itself was seen as a major achievement by the government, while actual implementation was neglected."[646] The government appears to have selectively adopted the reforms suggested by the report, and only at a superficial level.[647] A number of human rights organisations monitoring the implementation of the BICI have in fact stated that even the small number of recommendations which the government was seen to have implemented have since been violated in subsequent years.[648] Diboll has suggested that "it is quite likely that as of June 2011 some kind of decisive UN action on Bahrain was on the cards" and as such, the Al Khalifa sought to develop "a framework in which an adaptation of the British 'independent inquiry' model would forestall a more formal UN intervention."[649] Others saw the BICI as nothing more than a sophisticated PR exercise, designed to placate Bahrain's Western allies and rehabilitate the country's reputation internationally.[650] Professor Bassiouni himself has since criticised the government's implementation of the BICI report and the lack of reform of the political system in Bahrain.[651]

Al-Wefaq's Role: Too Little Too Late?

The arrival of the Arab Spring in Bahrain was perhaps an unwelcome development for Bahrain's main tolerated Shiʿi opposition group al-Wefaq, which had increased its seats in parliamentary elections only the previous year and was undoubtedly caught in a bind over whether or not to participate in the protest movement. While there was broad community support for peaceful protests, al-Wefaq did not want to jeopardise its participation in the system of liberalised autocracy set up by King Hamad, from which both the party and its individual members and parliamentarians had benefited. Joining the Arab Spring-inspired

[646] Ali, Ahmed, 'Bahrain Government Crackdown Hinders Dialogue,' *Al Monitor,* 7 April 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/bahrain-khalifa-protest-revolution-crackdown-rights.html#ixzz2yNXaLyy1
[647] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 92.
[648] For example: Bahrain Watch and Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain. Diboll, *Narrative and Impunity,* n.p.
[649] Diboll, *Narrative and Impunity,* n.p.
[650] Abdo, Geneive, 'Talking about Reform in Bahrain,' *Foreign Policy,* 10 April 2013, http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/04/10/talking_about_reform_in_bahrain
[651] Issa, Antoun, 'Bassiouni: Bahrain's Progress Limited by 'Piecemeal' Approach to Reforms,' *Al Monitor,* 13 June 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/cherif-bassiouni-bici-bahrain-uprising-violations.html #ixzz44qMuhLEm

protests was a risky move as it would likely be interpreted by the regime as violating the rules of the game. Al-Wefaq had agreed to participate in the parliamentary system, enjoying a degree of influence within the government, in exchange for its implicit agreement not to cross a number of red lines, such as opposing the regime or the political system itself. Louër has argued that al-Wefaq from the outset did not believe the protest movement would be able to mount a serious challenge to the regime, mainly due to the fact that unlike in the case of other Arab Spring countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, the largely-foreign security forces in Bahrain would remain loyal to the government.[652] Nonetheless, not joining the protests was also inherently risky, in part as a result of the Divided Structure of Contestation which had developed during the NAC era, in which the regime allowed antisystem groups limited scope to operate in order to challenge the tolerated opposition. This kept al-Wefaq in the government's orbit whilst enabling the regime to split the broader Shiʿi opposition. These antisystem groups, both experienced and newly-formed, were responsible for initiating Bahrain's Arab Spring unrest, and the initial success of the protests positioned them as a significant threat to al-Wefaq's status and support base within the Shiʿi community. Given the overwhelming support for the protest movement amongst Shiʿi Bahrainis at this time, not participating risked accusations that al-Wefaq had been co-opted by the regime, calling into question the group's status as a genuine opposition society representing the Shiʿi community's interests. A former al-Wefaq MP interviewed by the researcher outlined the group's dilemma:

A lot of people said to us 'why did you refuse to start [protesting] *on 14 February as the opposition?' First of all, we shared the policy of the authorities, we were a part of the legislative council, we were MPs at that time. On the other hard… To oppose the authorities, to make some demands, to protest peacefully- this is their right, no one can prevent them* [from] *doing this. So we did not call* [for protests], *but we expressed our view clearly.*[653]

[652] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 183.
[653] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.

When protests broke out on 14 February 2011 al-Wefaq's initial response was to refrain from publically endorsing the demonstrations, however it did not seek to prevent its members from participating.[654] This early attempt to remain in the grey area so as to avoid angering both the government and its constituents quickly became untenable following the first violent crackdown and the first deaths of peaceful protesters. The King's conciliatory speech, followed by the dramatic rise in numbers at the Pearl Roundabout on 16 February, made it clear that the crisis was not going to fade away, and forced al-Wefaq to declare its hand. Given that at this point the reformist wing of the Al Khalifa monarchy appeared to be in control, it is possible al-Wefaq judged that it could continue to work with the regime whilst supporting the peaceful protests. More likely however is that al-Wefaq realised that, with an unprecedented number of Bahrainis on the streets, not joining the protests posed a grave risk to the group's legitimacy and support base. The widespread shock and anger at the sudden crackdown on 17 February, in which more protesters were killed and the Roundabout was violently cleared, left al-Wefaq with no choice but to resign from parliament.[655]

Al-Wefaq sought to present itself as the responsible opposition during the protests, and tried to focus the protest movement's demands on calling for constitutional monarchy, modifying the most well-known Arab Spring slogan to "the people want the reform of the system"[656] (*al-shaʿb yurīd islāḥ al-niẓām*). Al-Wefaq also emphasised its moderate approach by engaging the regime in dialogue on a number of occasions during the protests, and prominent al-Wefaq leaders and affiliates, including General Secretary ʿAli Salman and spiritual guide Sheikh ʿIsa al-Qasim, made public statements opposing sectarianism and upholding the rights of Sunni Bahrainis.[657] One al-Wefaq supporter told the researcher that for al-Wefaq, calling for the fall of the regime was both unrealistic and dangerous: "People have the right to say they want the fall of the regime, but are you able to do it? Are you strong enough to control what happens because of that, are you able to survive?" According to this supporter, al-Wefaq tended to view the status quo as preferable to

[654] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 77.
[655] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 13.
[656] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 183.
[657] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 224.

navigating the geopolitical consequences of ousting the Al Khalifa: "We are economically dependent on the GCC, our oil is divided between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain- we don't even have water to drink without Gulf co-operation!"[658] For al-Wefaq, reforming the system from within was preferable to the unpredictable consequences of revolution.

Al-Wefaq reportedly entered into negotiations with representatives of the regime at several points throughout the crisis, most notably on 13 March, when the reform-minded Crown Prince was given responsibility for opening a dialogue with the moderate opposition groups to bring an end to the uprising.[659] A number of interview respondents, some of whom were close to al-Wefaq's political leadership, told the researcher that the Crown Prince was willing to make significant concessions, including giving al-Wefaq control of some important government ministries.[660] Escalating threats to the position of both sides however prevented them from reaching an agreement. By March the protest movement had become divided between supporters of al-Wefaq's moderate approach and supporters of radical youth movements and the antisystem opposition, who were demanding the fall of the regime. Al-Wefaq was forced to adopt a harder line in negotiations with the Crown Prince, demanding the resignation of the entire government, in an effort to see off some of the more radical opposition demands.[661] In addition, its engagement with the regime made al-Wefaq "the object of suspicion from the societies that have paid a high price for their participation in the uprising" as it seemed to confirm "that the regime considers al-Wefaq its main interlocutor,"[662] whose loyalty to the protesters' cause could therefore be called into question. According to Gengler, this situation reduced the government's incentive to reach a deal with al-Wefaq, as its "ability to deliver the Shiʿa street is, at best, highly questionable."[663]

[658] Interview with activist 29 September 2015.
[659] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 79.
[660] Interview with activist 29 June 2015, interview with activist 12 December 2015.
[661] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 79.
[662] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 184.
[663] Gengler, *Royal Factionalism*, 54.

Internal dynamics within the Al Khalifa monarchy also contributed to the failure of the negotiations with al-Wefaq, as the reformist camp, which included the Crown Prince and according to some, the King,[664] lost ground to a resurgent group of hardliners who had been marginalised following the NAC reforms and were alarmed by the reformers' apparent willingness to make concessions to the protesters. These hardliners, led by the Prime Minister and the *al-Khawālid* faction of the royal family, are thought to have been behind the violent crackdown of 17 February, and favoured pursuing a "security solution to what is a political conflict."[665] At the same time as the Crown Prince was negotiating with al-Wefaq, the hardliners are thought to have orchestrated the entry of Saudi-led GCC troops into Bahrain, which brought an end to both the negotiations and the mass protest movement.[666] According to one participant in the protests:

Some kind of coup took place. Right after his conciliatory gesture to the Pearl Roundabout protesters the Crown Prince disappeared and the son of the Prime Minister became the de-facto government mouthpiece on the protests. The Prime Minister's hardline faction had effectively taken over and has been in power ever since.[667]

From the post-uprising period of crackdown until the parliamentary elections of 2014 al-Wefaq occupied a precarious position, not entirely within Bahrain's political system (having withdrawn its members from parliament and declining to stand for the 2014 elections) yet not entirely excluded from it. Along with their ally Waʿad and other more minor moderate parties, al-Wefaq released the Manama Document in October 2011 outlining its key demands, most of which revolved around its goal of a constitutional monarchy, including revising the 2002 Constitution, a fully-elected parliament, an elected cabinet and a fairer distribution of electoral districts.[668] Al-Wefaq also increasingly adopted the language of human rights, and boosted its lobbying of international organisations to draw attention to the situation in Bahrain.[669]

[664] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 222.
[665] Gengler, *Royal Factionalism*, 53.
[666] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 183.
[667] Interview with protest participant 29 April 2015.
[668] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 228.
[669] Bhatia, Luke and Shehabi, Ala'a, 'Shifting Contours of Activism and Possibilities for Justice in Bahrain,' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising,* London: Zed Books, 112-113.

The government initially allowed al-Wefaq to stage small protest rallies in more discreet local areas, however because these protests were relatively safe from interference by the security forces they tended to attract members of the antisystem groups, who "attempted to use the protests to prove the amount of support they had."[670] These protests became a broader outlet allowing both al-Wefaq supporters and more radical elements to "express their outrage at the regime without creating real pressure by holding the protest in economically important areas of the country."[671] Al-Wefaq was unable to control the protests, including the anti-government slogans chanted at them, and as such struggled to disassociate itself from the antisystem opposition groups' more radical demands. This left al-Wefaq exposed to accusations, particularly from the regime's hardline faction, that it turned a blind eye to, or even supported, the more violent tactics of some of the antisystem groups. In the words of one government analyst, "how can Wefaq condemn violence on the one hand, but then on the other continue to openly associate itself with groups like the February 14 Coalition?"[672] Lust-Okar has noted that this tactic is common among antisystem groups during periods of heavy repression, as their (uninvited) participation in the legal demonstrations of the tolerated opposition enables them to attack the government whilst "hiding behind the cloak of the legal opposition."[673] This however can result in reluctance among tolerated groups to make demands of the government during crises, due to fears that the antisystem groups will exploit their activities and cause the regime to crack down on and repress the activism of the tolerated opposition.[674] The tolerated opposition's lack of engagement however can lead to a drop in support within the community, which may transfer its allegiance to the antisystem groups which are seen as more proactive. This in part may explain the fate of al-Wefaq in the years following the 2011 uprising.

[670] Al-Khawaja, Maryam, 'Crackdown: The Harsh Realities of Nonviolent Protests in the Bahrain Civil Conflict,' *Journal of International Affairs* 68:1 (2014): 195-196.
[671] Al-Khawaja, *Crackdown,* 196.
[672] Quoted in: Dickinson, Elizabeth, 'Bahrain's Disappearing Moderates,' *Al Monitor,* 22 April 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/bahrain-violence-opposition-moderates-disappearing.html#ixzz2zga1ACW9
[673] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World,* 171.
[674] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World,* 172.

The Rise of the Antisystem Opposition

Whilst al-Wefaq found itself caught between the regime and an increasingly uncompromising Shiʿi street, the 2011 uprising strengthened the Shiʿi antisystem groups, which pursued a radically different form of political participation that challenged the legitimacy of the regime and of the political system itself. In contrast to al-Wefaq, established antisystem societies which had formed during the NAC era, such as Haqq and Wafaʾ, supported the online activists' call for Arab Spring-inspired protests from the very beginning- indeed it was natural for them to join the uprising as they "always had a predilection for street politics."[675] Antisystem activists affiliated with groups like Haqq had gained valuable experience organising street protests and operating as part of an illegal, underground movement during the NAC period, and their skills would help propel the 2011 protest movement into a nationwide uprising. An old guard of antisystem leaders and activists had also been active during the 1990s *Intifāḍa,* and a number of antisystem groups also adopted tactics from this era, including setting up makeshift street barricades, burning tyres and throwing Molotov cocktails and other projectiles at police.[676]

In early March 2011, after two weeks of pro-democracy protests, the main Shiʿi antisystem groups joined together to form the Alliance for a Republic (*al-Taḥāluf min ʾajl Jumhūriyya*), which broke away from the al-Wefaq aligned protesters who favoured constitutional monarchy and instead openly called for the fall of the Al Khalifa regime.[677] The Alliance for a Republic formally consisted of Haqq, Wafaʾ and the London-based Bahrain Islamic Freedom Movement, and enjoyed the support of the February 14 Coalition, a new umbrella group which formed to represent the unaffiliated youth activists who had initiated, and were driving, the 2011 protests.[678] Well-known activists such as Bahrain Centre for Human Rights' founder Abdulhadi al-Khawaja also backed the Alliance.[679] This collaboration between veteran antisystem activists who made their names during the 1990s *Intifāḍa* and the youth activists inspired by the Arab Spring, or

[675] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 181.
[676] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 217.
[677] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 48.
[678] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 78.
[679] Bhatia and Shehabi, *Shifting Contours of Activism*, 121.

according to Khalaf between "the radical flanks and the contingent accelerators,"[680] marked an important development- in particular for the message it sent al-Wefaq. The Alliance furthered the split within the protest movement by undertaking a number of provocative marches on buildings closely associated with the monarchy, such as the royal court in Rifaʿ and one of the King's residences in Sadad.[681] Al-Wefaq opposed both the Alliance's inflammatory tactics and its decision to openly support a republic, and some scholars have suggested that the antisystem groups took up such a radical position in order to prevent al-Wefaq from making too many concessions in its negotiations with the regime.[682] This view also prevailed among a number of Haqq and Wafaʾ supporters interviewed by the researcher. For example, according to one activist:

[Wafaʾ leader] *ʿAbdul-Wahhab Hussein knew he couldn't do it, but he said 'I know how ʿAli Salman thinks, I know al-Wefaq will ask for reforms, so I will ask to remove the regime, and can create another movement if al-Wefaq tries to lower their demands'*… [Haqq leader] *Mushaimaʿ and Hussein have lots of experience with ʿIsa Qasim, they know how ʿAli Salman thinks. They wanted to stop al-Wefaq from moderating their demands*.[683]

One activist aligned with al-Wefaq told the researcher that he viewed the antisystem groups' approach as being primarily motivated by emotion rather than reason, and perhaps also the desire to get revenge on al-Wefaq in addition to the regime, describing the Alliance for a Republic as "angry because they see al-Wefaq coming up and stealing the revolution away from them."[684] Referencing the 1990s *Intifāḍa*, another unaligned activist remarked: "The experience we had in 1994 should have given them a view of what will happen if you ask for the fall of the regime. By repeating this, they are either stupid or motivated by a desire to die fighting."[685] One senior al-Wefaq leader told the researcher that at the time he thought Haqq

[680] Khalaf, Abdulhadi, 'Foreword' in: Shehabi, Ala'a and Jones, Marc Owen (eds)., 2015. *Bahrain's Uprising,* London: Zed Books, xiv.
[681] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 78.
[682] See: Bhatia and Shehabi, *Shifting Contours of Activism*, 123; Khalaf, *Foreword*, xiv.
[683] Interview with activist 29 September 2015.
[684] Interview with activist 27 September 2015.
[685] Interview with activist 4 January 2016.

was simply trying to score points against al-Wefaq after the bad blood of the NAC era- "when al-Wefaq's talking about constitutional monarchy, Haqq comes and starts talking about *jumhūriyya* [republicanism] … it's easy to say it, but it's not easy to do it."[686]

Calling for the fall of the monarchy broke a "psychological barrier… among the youth"[687] in particular, as it "constituted the ultimate insult to the royal family"[688] and crossed an almost-sacred red line in Bahraini politics. To a certain extent however, while it did serve as an ideological rallying point for the antisystem opposition, calling for the overthrow of the regime backfired in that it bolstered the position of the Al Khalifa hardliners, who claimed it was "evidence that the opposition wanted an 'Islamic' republic and used it as a *casus belli* for Saudi intervention."[689] It also benefited the regime in that deepening divisions and infighting between the tolerated and antisystem opposition camps weakened the strength of the overall protest movement, which was unable to push a unified set of demands nor agree on which tactics to employ. These divisions have further deepened in the years following the 2011 unrest, and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

Khalaf regards the collaboration between the veteran activists of antisystem groups such as Wafaʾ and Haqq and the youth protesters who initiated the peaceful demonstrations as a crucial factor in sustaining the uprising and preventing it from becoming a short-lived single protest event.[690] The relationship was mutually beneficial, as the youth activists brought large numbers of supporters and were skilled at organising protests online and promoting their cause via social media, and the veteran antisystem leaders leant the youth movement "credibility, prestige and political pedigree"[691] in addition to their considerable experience operating underground and conducting both violent and peaceful protests. As the uprising progressed, the youth activists formed their own umbrella organisation to represent their interests, which came to be known as the February 14 Coalition (*Iʾtilāf Shabāb Thawrat ʾArbaʿat ʿAshr Fibrāyir* or in full, the

[686] Interview with opposition leader 17 December 2015.
[687] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 148.
[688] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 221.
[689] Bhatia and Shehabi, *Shifting Contours of Activism*, 123.
[690] Khalaf, *Foreword*, xvii.
[691] Khalaf, *Foreword,* xiv.

'Youth Coalition of the February 14 Revolution'). The February 14 Coalition is decentralised and is divided into subgroups which represent different Shiʿi neighbourhoods and villages across Bahrain, each of which is active at a local level. According to the Coalition's foundational document, known as the Pearl Charter (*mīthāq al-luʾluʾ*):

The Coalition of the Youth of February 14 Revolution… was born from the very heart of the revolution. It was constituted by independent young revolutionaries who shared the vision and aspirations of the martyrs, the detainees and anyone who has offered sacrifices for the sake of democracy and freedom.[692]

In a rare interview in 2012, an anonymous spokesperson for the February 14 Coalition noted that the group's priority in its relationship with the antisystem Alliance for a Republic was "to close ranks amongst revolutionary groups against the common enemy, the bloody Al-Khalifa regime"[693] and that the Coalition was open to engaging with other opposition groups to "take advantage of all expertise and opinions" in order to advance their common aims.[694] The preference of young activists for collaborating with the more radical antisystem groups is part of a broader trend of dissatisfaction with the tolerated opposition groups supported by the Shiʿi political and religious establishment and endorsed by some of Bahrain's most influential Shiʿi clerics. This trend has its roots in the mainstream Shiʿi community's agonising over whether to enter parliament during the NAC era, but was boosted by disappointment with al-Wefaq's tepid response to the outbreak of the Arab Spring-inspired protests, particularly among the youth who felt they had the momentum to push for deeper concessions than what al-Wefaq was prepared to negotiate.[695] Shehabi and Jones describe the Shiʿi political establishment as "patriarchal and unrepresentative of both women and youth,"[696] two demographic groups which particularly stood out for their involvement in the

[692] The February 14 Youth Coalition, *Lulu Charter for 14th of February Revolution,* http://www.14f2011.com/ar/meethaq
[693] Quoted in: Jones, Toby, 'Bahrain's Revolutionaries Speak: An Exclusive Interview with Bahrain's Coalition of February 14th Youth,' *Jadaliyya,* 22 March 2012, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4777/bahrains-revolutionaries-speak_an-exclusive-interv
[694] Quoted in: Jones, *Bahrain's Revolutionaries Speak*, n.p.
[695] Diwan, Kristin, 'Breaking Taboos: Youth Activism in the Gulf States,' Issue Brief, *The Atlantic Council,* 7 March 2014, www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/breaking-taboos-youth-activism-in-the-gulf-states, 2.
[696] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 18.

2011 uprising. It is therefore unsurprising that the antisystem opposition's more radical tactics, proven history of street activism and rights-based discourse were more appealing to the youth activists who combined to form the February 14 Coalition, part of a wider regional trend in which young Arab Spring activists shared a "common disdain for both regimes and established opposition elites."[697]

Another way in which Bahrain's youth activists resembled their peers across the Middle East was in their use of the internet and new communications technologies to augment their offline activism, utilising social media in particular to facilitate mobilisation and promote their cause. As we will see, this new frontier of online political participation favoured the antisystem groups in particular, and was instrumental in enabling them to challenge the tolerated opposition groups in the wake of the uprising.

The Role of Social Media

Social media has transformed the means of political participation in Bahrain, especially for antisystem groups which had typically struggled to promote themselves to supporters within a tightly -controlled traditional media landscape. In the words of Khatib, "the internet has become the space to visually express political views that do not have a place in the offline world."[698] The arrival of the internet can be understood to have had a democratising effect on access to information in Bahrain and throughout the Arab world, and its impact has been considerable in the Gulf in particular, as the region's relative wealth and prosperity has led to the swift uptake of new technologies. Within authoritarian political systems, which traditionally exert tight control over the information sphere, the internet "provides an infrastructure for expressing minority points of view, breaking gatekeeper monopolies on public voice, lowering barriers to political mobilisation (even if symbolic), and building capacity for bottom-up contributions to the public agenda."[699] Blogs and social media act as a venue for previously-marginalised groups to participate in

[697] Aday, Sean; Farrell, Henry; Lynch, Marc; Sides, John and Freelon, Deen, 'New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring' Peaceworks 80, *United States Institute of Peace*, July 2012, www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW80.pdf, 6.
[698] Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East,* 35
[699] Etling, Bruce; Faris, Rob; Palfrey, John and Kelly, John, 'Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture and Dissent' Internet and Democracy Case Study Series, *Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University,* 16 June 2009, https://cyber.harvard.edu/publications/2009/Mapping_the_Arabic_Blogosphere, 10.

political discourse, in fact Janardhan has referred to Facebook in the Gulf as an "online diwaniyya."[700] The relative freedom of online political participation has strengthened political awareness among citizens in the Arab world, and has allowed dissidents and opposition groups a level of agency and influence which would have likely been unattainable in offline spaces. Examining the impact of online forms of activism on political participation is therefore highly relevant to this thesis' study of the Bahraini Shiʿi community's shifting engagement with politics, in particular during the increasingly repressive period which followed the 2011 uprising.

While the regime allowed the antisystem groups to challenge the tolerated opposition during the NAC era, it sought to manage and curtail the ability of groups such as Haqq to expand their support base, which could result in their presenting a real threat to the tolerated opposition and the government's carefully balanced system of liberalised autocracy. The regime's media controls, which were relaxed during the NAC period to allow for some critique and debate of policy, were key to restricting antisystem voices' ability to appeal to the mainstream. Only one opposition newspaper was authorised, *al-Wasat*, which literally translates as 'the middle' and was affiliated with al-Wefaq. The government monitored *al-Wasat* closely and periodically attempted to interfere with its coverage, including shutting it down temporarily in 2010.[701] The regime's influence over Bahrain's traditional media outlets enabled it to keep the tolerated opposition in check and restrict the antisystem opposition's ability to mobilise beyond its core group of supporters. However, the rise of satellite television, social media and even SMS messaging as alternative sources of news and information challenged the government's ability to control the information space, which ultimately strengthened the antisystem groups.

Evidence suggests that even prior to the Arab Spring unrest the government was concerned with its faltering ability to control access to information as a means of managing political opposition in Bahrain. In addition to closing down *al-Wasat* in 2010, the regime had moved to suspend a network of news updates

[700] Janardhan, N, 'New Media: In Search of Equilibrium' in: Tetreault, Mary Ann; Okruhlik, Gwenn and Kapiszewski, Andrzej (eds)., 2011. *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition,* Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 234.
[701] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 75.

sent to subscribers via BlackBerry's instant messaging service[702] and blocked some VoIP internet calling services.[703] The rise of new communications technologies presented the regime with a conundrum which it has since struggled to overcome. Like other non-democratic states the government is reluctant to allow opposition groups and citizens unfettered access to online information, however blocking popular social media and news sites in their entirety also risks sparking a public outcry from their many users, some of whom are pro-regime allies, and could also threaten the growing array of business interests which rely on the internet, potentially damaging the country's economy and reputation as 'Business-Friendly Bahrain.'[704]

As a result of the government's inability to balance the competing threats and benefits posed by the rise of the internet and new media technologies in Bahrain (a balance which could arguably prove impossible to achieve), political participation expanded greatly into online spaces, including blogs and chat forums such as *Bahrain Online*, new opposition media outlets such as *Bahrain Mirror* and thousands of social media accounts on a variety of platforms dedicated to politics. Many of these online sources of information challenged the rules of the game established during the NAC era, and whilst tolerated opposition groups such as al-Wefaq continued to largely observe regime red lines in their online communications prior to the Arab Spring, the relative freedom of the online sphere significantly bolstered the antisystem groups. Because "the low cost of emergent content and the difficulty of controlling emergence would seem to enhance the asymmetric advantages of non-state groups,"[705] we can expect that political participation in the social media age will be characterised by the empowerment of antisystem opposition groups, whose means of participating in politics have improved, regardless of their continuing offline exclusion from the formal political system. Chapters 7 and 8 of this thesis will examine this phenomenon in depth, in order to provide a clearer picture of the ways in which Bahrain's main tolerated and antisystem Shi'i opposition

[702] Janardhan, *New Media: In Search of Equilibrium*, 235.
[703] ITP.net, 'Bahrain Orders Illegal VoIP Services Blocked' 3 October 2010, www.itp.net/582029-bahrain-orders-illegal-voip-services-blocked
[704] Coates Ulrichsen, *Bahrain's Uprising*, 1.
[705] Al-Lami, Mina; Hoskins, Andrew and O'Loughlin, Ben, 'Mobilisation and Violence in the New Media Ecology: The Dua Khalil Aswad and Camilia Shehata Cases,' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5:2 (2012): 239-240.

groups utilise the online sphere to mobilise support and promote their offline political objectives and demands.

The End of Liberalised Autocracy?

The regime's initial response to Bahrain's 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising appeared to be an attempt to strengthen the Divided Structure of Contestation it had built up over the NAC period- the government called negotiations with the tolerated opposition in advance of the Day of Rage and showed a willingness to make significant concessions should al-Wefaq act to dampen support within the Shiʿi community for street protests.[706] This strategy however failed, and the government perhaps underestimated the extent to which regional events would galvanise support for antisystem elements, which were also bolstered by widespread disappointment with al-Wefaq's inability to achieve meaningful reforms from within the political system. The divide and rule strategy the regime had pursued toward the opposition as a whole had engendered a situation in which it was unlikely that those organising the protests would have been swayed by al-Wefaq's intervention in any case- many of them saw themselves as al-Wefaq's political rivals. In retrospect, it appears that during the liberalised-autocratic system of the NAC era the regime did not do enough to reward the tolerated opposition's involvement in formal politics, other than through enhancing the personal status of some opposition politicians. The regime's reluctance to accommodate some of al-Wefaq's main policy demands, including on issues such as eliminating sectarian discrimination in the workplace and the housing shortage in some of the Shiʿi villages, meant al-Wefaq had few achievements to present to its constituents as evidence that political participation according to the regime's rules of the game benefited the community. This weakened the position of the tolerated opposition during the uprising, and enabled the antisystem groups to more effectively make the case for challenging the political system itself.

[706] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 173.

According to Lust-Okar, illegal or antisystem groups "are more capable of capitalising on the increased discontent that accompanies prolonged… crises,"[707] in spite of their typically paying a heavier price for their activism through repression. A number of scholars have argued that in Bahrain, "al-Wefaq's moderation in the face of repression alienated it from popular support,"[708] and as such, antisystem groups like the February 14 Coalition have "become ever more popular and at least as important as al-Wifaq in Bahraini Shia politics"[709] [sic]. According to Louër, "some have considered the February 14 Coalition as the main political actor of the post-uprising period" and consequently, "the relations between the Coalition and al-Wefaq have been tense, with the Coalition accusing al-Wefaq of being too moderate."[710] For its part, al-Wefaq has repeatedly condemned the sometimes violent tactics of the February 14 Coalition, and has attempted to leverage its moderate stance to promote itself as the only responsible actor within the Shiʿi opposition who can be trusted to negotiate with the government.[711] However, this strategy has become less effective with the passage of time, as the rift between the pro-constitutional monarchy and pro-republic camps within the Shiʿi opposition deepens, and al-Wefaq loses the clout it might have enjoyed in negotiations. So far the government has shown little appetite for meaningful compromise, however even if negotiations were to eventuate al-Wefaq's ability to strike a deal on behalf of the Shiʿi opposition is now highly questionable. Because al-Wefaq no longer enjoys the status of "legitimate intermediary between the throne and the Bahraini street"[712] any deal which excludes the increasingly influential antisystem groups would likely be disregarded by large segments of the Shiʿi community.

Clearly the Divided Structure of Contestation which existed during the NAC era, which enabled the regime to pursue cosmetic democratisation whilst balancing tolerated and antisystem opposition groups to prevent either from challenging its grip on power, came to an end with the onset of Arab Spring-inspired protests in Bahrain. Such a system relied on popular support for tolerated groups, which promised to

[707] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World,* 68.
[708] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 187.
[709] Mattheisen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 61.
[710] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 187.
[711] Al-Khawaja, *Crackdown,* 195.
[712] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 149.

reform the system from within in exchange for votes, an arrangement which depended on the public's faith in the legitimacy and efficacy of parliament. The regime's crackdown on peaceful protests shattered this legitimacy, and al-Wefaq's inability to negotiate a deal with the regime confirmed to many that the NAC era was simply a new manifestation of the Al Khalifa's tried and tested tactics of co-optation and divide and rule. Shifting dynamics within the Shiʿi opposition in the wake of the 2011 crackdown has indicated that the Divided Structure of Contestation has been replaced by a Unified-Exclusive Structure of Contestation, in which all opposition groups effectively sit outside the political system. The tolerated opposition's position crystallised further following its refusal to participate in Bahrain's 2014 parliamentary elections, the implications of which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

A Unified-Exclusive Structure of Contestation is in fact a classic model of authoritarianism, and it appears that Bahrain's 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising highlighted the fragility of the liberalised-autocratic system constructed by King Hamad during the first decade of his rule. In abandoning the liberalisation approach in favour of authoritarian repression, the Al Khalifa have returned to strategies which traditionally helped the monarchy maintain its grip on power at a time in which it arguably faced one of the gravest threats in its history. Such strategies, including promoting sectarian divide and rule as a means of shoring up Sunni support for the regime, were arguably never abandoned by the hardline wing of the royal family, which in March 2011 had wrested control away from Al Khalifa moderates who had supported the NAC-era liberalisation and had advocated for negotiating with the protesters.[713]

Promoting what were essentially pro-democracy demonstrations as a sectarian conflict enabled the regime to diffuse the risk of cross-sectarian collaboration within the protest movement, which emerged as a real possibility during the early days of the uprising.[714] Figure 4 for example shows a banner hung by activists at the Pearl Roundabout at the beginning of the Arab Spring-inspired protests, proclaiming "No Sunnism, no Shiʿism, we are all united in patriotism" (*lā suniyya.. lā shīʿiyya.. kulnā waḥda waṭaniyya*). In a move

[713] Gengler, *Royal Factionalism*, 56.
[714] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 102.

reminiscent of the government's response to the 1994 protests, the regime acted quickly to eliminate evidence of cross-sectarian support for the uprising, immediately detaining prominent Sunni speakers at the Pearl Roundabout including former military officer Mohamed al-Buflasa and Waʿad leader ʿIbrahim Sharif. State media outlets heavily promoted the narrative that the protests were a foreign conspiracy perpetrated by Shiʿi traitors, which prompted many Sunnis who were initially sympathetic to stay away from the Roundabout.[715] Attempts to depict the protests as motivated by sectarianism also had the added bonus of reinforcing both American and GCC fears of expanding Iranian influence in the Gulf, which may have eased some of the Western pressure on the Bahraini government to make concessions and negotiate with the protesters.[716]

Figure 4: "No Sunnism, no Shiʿism, we are all united in patriotism," Pearl Roundabout Banner February 2011

The sectarian narrative has further intensified in the post-2011 era, as Bahrain transitions away from liberalised autocracy and back to full-authoritarianism. The government's sectarian divide and rule strategies, combined with the weakening of the tolerated opposition groups, has resulted in the transformation of the protest movement into an increasingly radical activist collective focused on the

[715] Gengler, Justin, 'Bahrain's Sunni Awakening,' *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 17 January 2012, www.merip.org/mero/mero011712, 234.
[716] Jones, *Saudi Arabia Versus the Arab Spring*, 50.

political rights of the Shiʿi community. Returning to an authoritarian approach, including a heavy reliance on repression to stifle dissent and promoting sectarian social stratification, has enabled the Al Khalifa to re-assert their control over the political system during a period of intense instability which posed an existential threat to regime survival. However, the regime's departure from the liberalised-autocratic system and its increasingly repressive tactics risk returning Bahrain to the cycles of political unrest and violent repression which characterised the country's political scene prior to King Hamad's democratising reforms. In addition, further entrenching the sectarian divide risks the spectre of sectarian conflict becoming a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy.[717] The instability unleashed by either eventuality would be counter-productive to the Al Khalifa's aim of maintaining its grip on power in the longer-term. Indeed Trejo has argued that "when incumbents give up on political liberalization and dismantle limited electoral rights and civil liberties, they… undermine the electoral path of social transformation and open the way for armed revolutionary action."[718]

Conclusion

In detailing the events of Bahrain's 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising and their aftermath, this chapter has highlighted the dramatic shift in political participation engendered by what was arguably the greatest challenge to regime stability in the Al Khalifa's centuries-long period of rule. The uprising transformed not only the nature of political opposition in Bahrain, but also shifted the established balance of power within the regime and enhanced the influence of external actors such as Saudi Arabia, which came to undertake an increasingly pivotal role in maintaining security and brokering Bahrain's post-2011 transition to full-authoritarianism. This chapter argued that the Arab Spring unrest ruptured the Divide Structure of Contestation which existed during the previous decade's period of liberalised autocracy, disproportionately empowering the antisystem opposition at the expense of previously-tolerated groups such as al-Wefaq and effectively returning Bahrain to a Unified-Exclusive Structure of Contestation, in which all opposition is excluded from the formal realm of politics.

[717] Moore-Gilbert, Kylie, 'Sectarian Divide and Rule in Bahrain: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?' *Middle East Institute,* 19 January 2016, www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarian-divide-and-rule-bahrain-self-fulfilling-prophecy
[718] Trejo, *The Ballot and the Street*, 348.

This chapter also focused on the growing polarisation within the Shiʿi opposition, arguing that antisystem groups are structurally better-suited to operating in the more repressive political environment of post-Arab Spring Bahrain, which, coupled with perceptions surrounding the then-tolerated groups' ineffectiveness during the 2011 uprising, has led them to challenge al-Wefaq's support base. Analysing the growing role of informal, street-driven youth activism, this chapter also considered the impact of the internet and social media on shifting Shiʿi political participation in the wake of the crackdown, and made the case for examining online spaces in analysing opposition activism, as the space for formal political participation in Bahrain continues to shrink. Given the regime's transition from liberalised autocracy to authoritarianism, social media is increasingly becoming one of the only venues available to opposition groups seeking to organise, mobilise and promote their demands. The next chapter will present the results of a close study of some of these activities, shining light on the online political participation of three of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition groups as they grapple with growing authoritarian repression and attempts to further restrict the opposition's ability to mobilise.

Chapter 7- Examining the Shiʿi Opposition's Online Political Participation

As in other parts of the Arab world, social media played a crucial role in empowering Bahraini activists to organise and promote their cause both domestically and internationally during the 2011 uprising. In spite of debate surrounding the role of social media in sparking the Arab Spring, its utility as tool facilitating organisation and communication within activist movements has been well established.[719] The advent of online activism, much of which is conducted on social media, has had a profound impact on the ways in which Shiʿi opposition groups organise and express their demands, from both within the political system and as outsiders seeking to challenge it. Rather than approaching online activism as a departure from established forms of political participation, this thesis considers the social media activity of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition to be an extension of their offline modes of activism. Social media is a new tool which a group can utilise to expand its capacity to mobilise support and promote its aims, and it offers the researcher a novel means of gaining insights into how technological developments have impacted the ways in which opposition groups undertake activism. However, the internet has not "done away with the classical set of contentious politics performances"[720] highlighted in this thesis' examination of Bahrain's lengthy history of opposition politics. For all of the major opposition groups in Bahrain social media is a new means to a long sought-after and much-coveted end: Widening the scope for political participation to the extent that their voices are heard, and the needs of their supporters are accounted for. In this sense the online world will always been complimentary to, and constrained by, the offline world, insofar as an opposition group's aims are rooted in their offline context. Given the growing centrality of social media activism during and after Bahrain's uprising, this thesis's analysis of changing political participation within the Shiʿi community would be incomplete without taking into account the online activities of the Shiʿi opposition.

[719] See for example: Aouragh, Miriyam and Alexander, Anne, 'The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution,' *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1344-1358; Etling et al, *Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere*, 1-62.
[720] Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 17.

This chapter will examine how Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition has utilised online forms of political participation following the country's post-2011 crackdown, which was accompanied by a dramatic increase in social media usage across Bahrain.[721] Drawing on the framing and content analysis method outlined in Chapter 2, the findings of an in-depth study of the social media activities of three of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition groups will be presented. A comparison between these groups, belonging to both the tolerated and antisystem opposition, will shed light on the fragmentation of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition into a number of ideologically distinct camps with varying approaches to political participation, and will reveal the role of new media technologies in empowering antisystem opposition groups in particular. The results of this study will provide fresh insights into the shifting patterns of political participation which have emerged during Bahrain's transition from liberalised autocracy to full-authoritarianism, and will enhance this thesis' broader examination of the changing internal dynamics of Bahrain's main Shiʿi opposition groups, as they respond to shifting institutional structures triggered by the regime's crackdown.

Outline of the Study

In seeking to examine online Shiʿi political participation, the study applied textual and visual content analysis techniques to 539 Facebook posts from the official accounts of three Bahraini Shiʿi opposition groups across a three-day period in 2015. Within this dataset, a total of 609 visual Facebook posts were also analysed, a slightly higher number due to multiple images being uploaded as part of a single textual post. The opposition groups examined were chosen to represent the diversity of political participation and approaches to activism within the Bahraini Shiʿi community. The study analysed the then-tolerated opposition society al-Wefaq, the pro-republic antisystem political society Haqq, and the decentralised, youth-driven antisystem movement known as the February 14 Coalition.

As outlined in Chapter 6, al-Wefaq remains officially in favour of the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Bahrain, and seeks to work within the existing political system. The society maintained a

[721] Jones, *Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics*, 239.

robust social media presence prior to its court-ordered dissolution in July 2016[722] (see Chapter 8), and its Facebook page had over 82, 000 followers as of May 2017.[723] Typical of antisystem opposition groups, Haqq adopted a more radical approach to activism and was one of the first groups to challenge the political system itself by calling for the fall of the Al Khalifa monarchy during the 2011 uprising. Haqq is closely associated with the aforementioned group Wafaʾ, which could have equally been profiled in this study as representative of the republican stream within the Bahraini antisystem opposition. Haqq was ultimately selected on the basis of its greater number of Facebook followers, which in May 2017 numbered 3,635.[724] Whilst the February 14 Coalition does not seek to influence Bahraini politics as a political society in the same vein as al-Wefaq and Haqq, it claims to represent the Shiʿi youth whose activism triggered the uprising in 2011 and who continue to protest on a regular basis, mainly in Bahrain's Shiʿi villages. The February 14 Coalition rejects the concept of a constitutional monarchy and has also endorsed a republic, whose leadership would be decided by a popular referendum.[725] Youths aligned with the Coalition regularly clash with security forces and have been known to use rocks, burning tyres, Molotov cocktails and in certain instances, homemade explosives when confronted by police.[726] The group is very active across a number of social media platforms and as of May 2017 its Facebook page had over one hundred thousand followers.[727]

The one opposition group whose distinct ideological approach is missing from the study is Waʿad, Bahrain's main secular-nationalist party (see Chapter 5). Waʿad was excluded from the study because, despite its cross-sectarian membership, it is considered by some scholars[728] to be a predominantly Sunni party and does not strictly fit within this thesis' primary concern with Bahraini Shiʿi political participation. Following the uprising Waʿad reaffirmed its aforementioned alliance with al-Wefaq, and together they have released

[722] The Guardian, 'Bahrain Court Orders Shia Opposition Group to be Dissolved' 18 July 2016, www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/17/bahrain-al-wefaq-shia-opposition-group-sunni
[723] Al-Wefaq's Facebook page can be found at: www.facebook.com/AlwefaqNews/
[724] Haqq's Facebook page can be found at: www.facebook.com/HaqMovement/
[725] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf,* 48.
[726] See for example: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVJC7eS2Zt4
[727] The February 14 Coalition's Facebook page can be found at: www.facebook.com/Coalition14th/
[728] Meijer and Danckaert *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 224.

the Manama Document,[729] outlining a shared set of demands on the government. The collaboration between these two political societies has led to a significant amount of cross-promotion of each group's activities on social media, in spite of their ideological differences, some of which has been captured in this study.

Facebook was chosen as the most appropriate data source for the study due to its popularity in Bahrain and regular utilisation by all groups examined, as well as the multimodal nature of its posts, which unlike Twitter allow the researcher to archive visual and textual data of unrestricted length. Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in Bahrain, and according to Aday et al, in 2011 had the second highest rate of usage in the Gulf after the UAE, at 34% of the population.[730] Given the current trend of increasing social media usage in the Arab world, it can be assumed that this figure is even higher today.[731] In addition, of the available social media platforms Facebook is arguably the "most effective at organising protests and creating or bringing together disconnected individuals and collectives into one social network."[732] In fact, Khalaf has described the 2011 uprising in Bahrain as "a social alliance that had been- in part- summoned up via Facebook."[733] Studies involving the content analysis of Facebook profiles have also demonstrated the applicability of social media analysis to examining the real-world behaviour of individuals and organisations, for example Elmasry et al have shown that "Facebook can be employed as an online manifestation of… larger socio-cultural and political realities."[734]

Social media data mining software was used to archive every Facebook post across three separate days in 2015, capturing the textual data of each post in addition to any embedded hashtags and links, and any associated image files. Datasets were compiled for the following three dates: 14 February; the anniversary of Bahrain's Arab Spring-inspired uprising popularly referred to as the Day of Rage (*yawm al-ghaḍab*); 24

[729] The Manama Document can be accessed via al-Wefaq's website: http://alwefaq.net/cms/2011/10/12/5933/
[730] Aday et al, *New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring*, 16.
[731] For analysis of Facebook usage in the Arab world, see the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government's Arab Social Media Report: www.arabsocialmediareport.com/
[732] Aday et al, *New Media and Conflict After the Arab Spring*, 16.
[733] Khalaf, *Squaring the Circle*, 271.
[734] Elmasry et al, *Facebook Across Cultures*, 49.

October, commemorated by Bahraini Shiʿa as the day of Ashura, characterised by ritual mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and arguably the most important event in the Shiʿi religious calendar; and 10 June, a randomly-selected test day designed to provide insights into each group's everyday activism and act as a point of contrast to the other two datasets which concern known periods of political mobilisation. Combining the three datasets enabled the researcher to build a comprehensive picture of al-Wefaq, the February 14 Coalition and Haqq's social media activities across strategic periods throughout 2015.

The total number of textual and visual elements of each post examined in the study is outlined in Table 1:

Opposition Group	Textual posts	Visual posts	Total
Al-Wefaq	135	234	369
February 14 Coalition	316	287	603
Haqq	88	88	176

Table 1: Total Facebook posts examined

Each textual post was classified for source type and location, and was coded on the basis of whether it referenced the framing categories 'Religion,' 'Social grievances,' 'Political system' and 'Geopolitics.' Textual posts were also coded thematically to account for a maximum of three 'Purpose' categories, which were outlined within the following sub-categories: 'Commemoration,' 'Mobilisation,' 'Information,' 'Grievances' and 'Ideology.' Visual posts were classified for type, source and whether they contained images of people, and were analysed according to whether they featured Sunni, Shiʿi or nationalist visual frames. They were also coded for manifest content on the basis of whether they fit a number of mutually-exclusive categories, which included depicting 'non-violent political protest,' 'violence or clashes' or a 'non-violent religious event.' Hashtags were analysed on the basis of frequency of repetition, including total number of mentions per dataset and their usage as a percentage of total posts.[735]

[735] For the coding manual, see Appendix 1.

What is Being Posted, and Where?

The visual posts examined in the study were classified on the basis of type, with photographs overwhelmingly the most popular across all groups- 88% of February 14 Coalition visual posts, 85% of al-Wefaq visual posts and 73% of Haqq visual posts featured photographs. This could indicate the continuation of the trend observable during the Arab Spring, in which demonstrators uploaded images of protests to social media in real time, both as a means of communicating events instantaneously to followers locally and abroad, and to warn other participants about threats or opportunities on the ground as they occurred.[736] Interviews conducted by the researcher with Bahraini opposition activists also mentioned this method, for example one February 14 Coalition supporter declared that during protests, "I always shared my news on Facebook and showed the violations that were committed against the Bahraini people demanding democracy."[737] Another told the researcher that she volunteered as a social media specialist for the group Wafa', closely affiliated with the Haqq society, and that her role was specifically to attend protests and post images to Wafa''s social media sites using her smartphone.[738] It appears that in Bahrain the Arab Spring-era technique of updating social media in real-time with photographs of activist events has not dramatically changed, despite the government's crackdown on peaceful protest.

The study also sought to shed light on the geographic locations within Bahrain in which all three opposition groups are most active, using publically available social media location data to examine the villages and suburbs most mentioned during the 2015 anniversary of the uprising, Ashura and the control day. Analysing the geographical distribution of opposition activity across Bahrain is important given the urban bias which some scholars have identified as existing within the literature on authoritarian political participation, with rural or village-based protest activity often overlooked in favour of analysing mobilisation in capital cities.[739] Of greatest interest is data relating to the February 14 Coalition, given that very little is known about the group's operations and organisational structure. 78% of all February 14 Coalition posts across the three

[736] Aouragh and Alexander, *The Egyptian Experience*, 1351-1352.
[737] Interview with activist 27 September 2015.
[738] Interview with activist 22 December 2015.
[739] Trejo, *The Ballot and the Street*, 334.

days examined contained location data, of which sixty-six different locations were mentioned. In contrast, only 37% of al-Wefaq posts contained location data, mentioning twenty-six locations in Bahrain. The number of Haqq posts containing location data was similar to that of the February 14 Coalition, at 77%, however like al-Wefaq the number of locations mentioned by Haqq was much smaller, at twenty-eight. This suggests that during the sample period, the February 14 Coalition was active in between two and three times as many locations within Bahrain compared with the more established political societies al-Wefaq and Haqq. That the online activities of the February 14 Coalition appear to be spread across a greater number of towns and villages in Bahrain than those of the tolerated opposition group al-Wefaq adds further weight to this thesis' hypothesis that online activism most benefits antisystem political participation. In spite of al-Wefaq's considerable organisational network and its then-legal status, which ensured it operated under less government repression than the antisystem groups, the February 14 Coalition appears to draw on a geographically-broader wellspring of online support. The locations most mentioned in the publically-available Facebook data used in the study are shown in Figure 5.

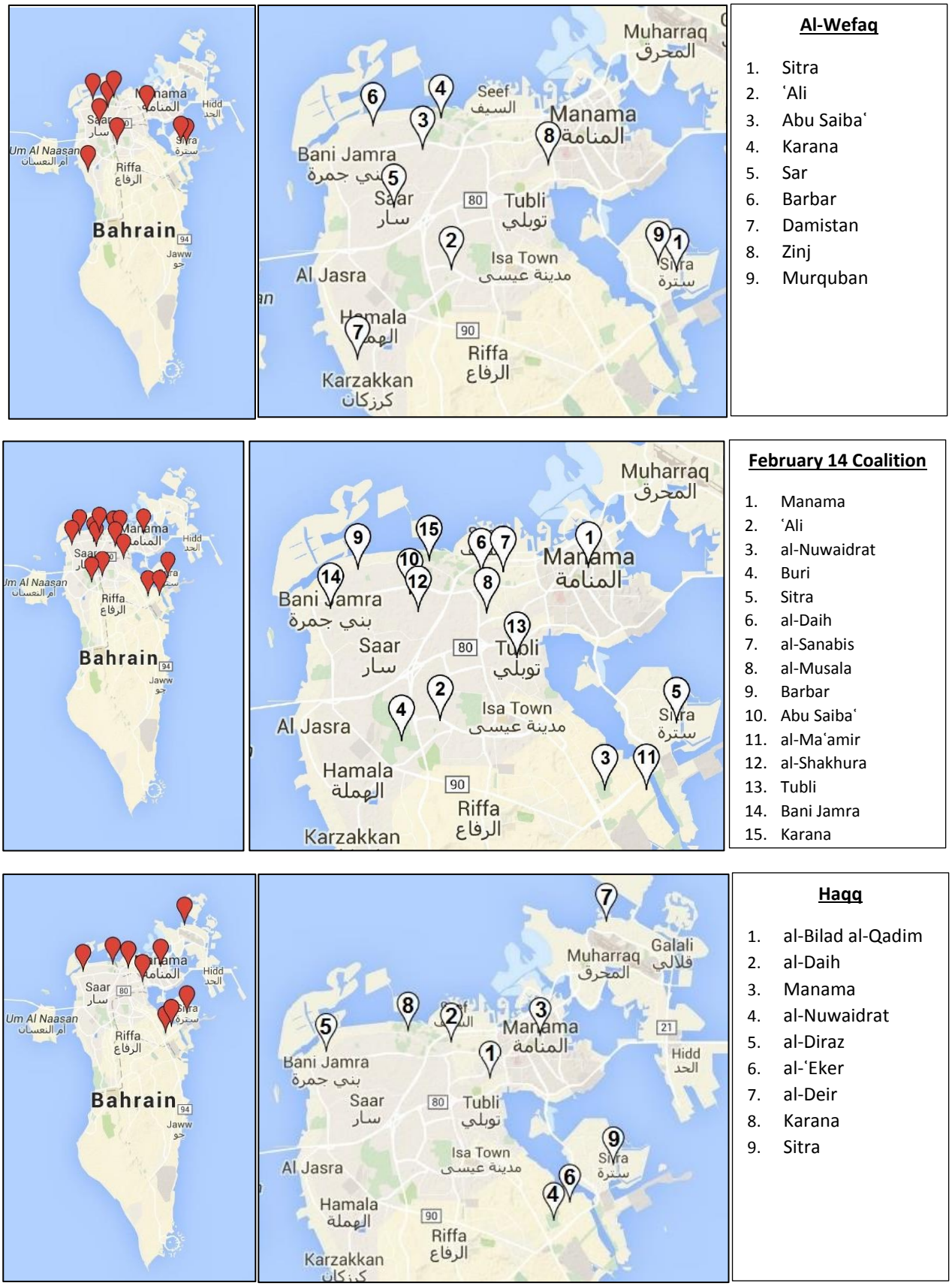

Figure 5: Geographic distribution of most-mentioned locations

The few studies which mention the February 14 Coalition typically note that the movement is "village-based,"[740] or "formed along neighbourhood lines,"[741] with "branches in every Shia village and many urban quarters."[742] Whilst much of the information is available online, very little academic research exists into where exactly the group operates, and from which specific neighbourhoods and villages it draws its support. One paper went as far as to claim that the Coalition "operates both locally and abroad,"[743] however no examples or evidence were provided as to where and how the Coalition operates internationally. Indeed the February 14 Coalition often draws on nativist discourse in its posts, for example with statements such as "this is our land, our strength, and the earth of our ancestors, and we will remain here."[744] Given the very Bahrain-specific nature of the group's demands, and its frequent references to Bahrain as "homeland,"[745] it is unlikely the Coalition operates abroad aside from receiving support from some Bahraini exiles.

Gengler's aforementioned 2009 attempt to map Bahrain's Sunni/Shiʿi demography enabled him to construct a "confessional map of Bahrain,"[746] indicating which towns and neighbourhoods were Sunni-exclusive, Shiʿa-exclusive or mixed- information which the government had ceased compiling in 1941[747] (see Appendix 2). A comparison of the February 14 Coalition's most-mentioned locations with Gengler's map is particularly striking- the top fifteen locations neatly fit within the areas of Bahrain highlighted by Gengler as Shiʿi-exclusive, with the exception of the capital Manama which is considered a mixed city with some Shiʿi-majority suburbs. The February 14 Coalition's activity during the sample days appears to be focused on three main areas of Bahrain. The first is the northern Shiʿi villages along the Budaiyaʿ highway, including al-Daih and al-Sanabis, which connect to an important junction the group refers to as "the triangle of resistance"[748] and are within walking distance of the site of the Pearl Roundabout, as well as the villages of

[740] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 23.
[741] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 94.
[742] Mattheisen, *Sectarian Gulf,* 61.
[743] Alsayed, Wafa, 'The Impatience of Youth: Political Activism in the Gulf,' *Survival* 56:4 (2014): 97.
[744] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=910964452287920&id=178269738890732
[745] See for example: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1044053345645696&id=178269738890732
[746] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain*, 97.
[747] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain*, 9.
[748] See for example: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=911104322273933&id=178269738890732

al-Musala, Abu Saibaʿ, al-Shakhura, Barbar, Bani Jamra and Karana. Barbar village is well known for its many colourful anti-government murals and graffiti, and the February 14 Coalition often refers to it as "the capital of revolutionary art."[749] Bani Jamra is home to a number of high profile activists such as Bahrain Centre for Human Rights' Nabeel Rajab, and is also the hometown of Sheikh ʿAbdul ʾAmir al-Jamri, a 1990s *Intifāḍa* leader who was Bahrain's most respected Shiʿi cleric before he passed away in 2006.

The second area of February 14 Coalition activity is greater Sitra, an island to Bahrain's east which the Coalition refers to as "the capital of the revolution."[750] Sitra has a long history of resistance to Al Khalifa rule, and was the site of clashes as far back as 1923 when an Al Khalifa faction attacked the island and committed atrocities against its villagers.[751] Residents of Sitra were some of the most active during the 2011 protests, and according to Gengler "are commonly held to be among the most 'extreme' in their anti-government views,"[752] a conclusion also arrived at by the researcher when conducting interviews with Sitra-based activists. A number of protesters from Sitra were killed during the uprising and 'National Safety' period, including ʾAhmad Farhan, who was famously shot in the head when Saudi and Bahraini troops laid siege to the town during the crackdown. The faces of Farhan and other local 'martyrs' such as ʿAli al-Sheikh can be seen on the posters and stencilled graffiti which feature on many of Sitra's street corners. The villages of al-Nuwaidrat and al-Maʿamir sit on the mainland opposite Sitra in Bahrain's east, and are also known for their anti-government activism. Al-Nuwaidrat, the February 14 Coalition's third most mentioned location, is the hometown of prominent opposition leader ʿAbdul-Wahhab Hussein, a cleric who was imprisoned for his role in the *Intifāḍa* and went on to form the aforementioned Wafaʾ society.[753] Like the February 14 Coalition, Wafaʾ has called for the replacement of the Al Khalifa monarchy with a republic, and

[749] See for example: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=910893332295032&id=178269738890732
[750] See for example: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=911083018942730&id=178269738890732
[751] Khuri, Fuad., 1980. *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 98-99.
[752] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain*, 99.
[753] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 96.

the Coalition's posts mentioned ʿAbdul-Wahhab Hussein, who is back in prison for his role in the 2011 uprising, on a number of occasions.[754]

The third area of February 14 Coalition activity is centred on the villages of ʿAli and Buri in Bahrain's central north, on either side of the Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman highway and to the south of the highway which leads to the causeway crossing into Saudi Arabia. Whilst contacts in Bahrain have told the researcher that both villages are considered majority-Shiʿa, a number of mixed neighbourhoods are located nearby, including Hamad Town and ʿIsa Town. Gengler's study actually classifies both ʿAli and Buri as being demographically mixed, and therefore the February 14 Coalition's sizeable involvement in this area in particular is the most surprising finding of the location data.

An area of Bahrain which unexpectedly did not feature prominently in the social media location data of all three opposition groups is the chain of Shiʿi villages along the west coast of the country, which include al-Malkiyya, Karzakkan, Damistan, Dar Kulaib and Shahrakan. Like Sitra, this area is known for its long-term hostility to the government and is frequently the site of unauthorised protests and violent clashes with security forces. One local of Karzakkan described her village as "a revolutionary centre," noting that unlike the rest of Bahrain, "Karzakkan didn't stop protesting since the nineties"[755]- referring to the *Intifāḍa* which was quelled following King Hamad's NAC reforms. Activists also alleged that the government took over a waste treatment plant in the centre of the village and converted it into a heavily-fortified prison facility, which locals refer to as *Baladiyya*, in order to send a message to the Shiʿi villagers in this area. Residents of Karzakkan and al-Malkiyya have been involved in long-term disputes with members of the royal family over the appropriation of their public beaches to build private villas, and significant resentment exists in the village of Shahrakan surrounding the enormous *Ṣāfriyya* palace, the King's main residence and, in the words of one activist, "bigger than three villages combined."[756] Residents of Shahrakan complain about the impact of the palace's heavy security presence on their village, but also see their proximity to the palace as an

[754] See for example: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=910903458960686&id=178269738890732
[755] Interview with activist 13 December 2015.
[756] Interview with activist 27 December 2015.

opportunity, as "every Molotov [thrown] here is heard in the palace."[757] The February 14 Coalition conducted a campaign in the area in 2016 called "the volcano of the revolution street" which directed members to set fire to tyres and protest on the main thoroughfare outside the palace connecting the villages of Shahrakan and Sadad (see Figure 6). The researcher interviewed al-Wefaq members as well as a number of youths affiliated with the February 14 Coalition in these villages, however aside from al-Wefaq's mention of Damistan, this area surprisingly did not feature prominently in the list of locations most cited by any of the opposition groups.

Figure 6: 'The Volcano of the Revolution Street' Posted to Facebook by the February 14 Coalition 19/02/16[758]

A number of northern and eastern Shi'i villages feature in Haqq's location data, whose distribution is similar to that of the February 14 Coalition with the exception of the aforementioned demographically-mixed area in central Bahrain, which receives scant mention by the group. This result is unsurprising, as whilst some

[757] Interview with activist 20 December 2015.
[758] The points indicated on the map are (L-R) *Ṣāfriyya* Palace, Shahrakan village and Sadad village. The caption reads: "The Coalition is launching 'the volcano of the revolution street' on the street leading towards the palace of the dictator Hamad, in honour of Bahrain's heroes and revolutionaries."

have argued that Haqq began as a cross-sectarian movement,[759] with a number of Sunni members, it quickly came to be associated with the radical Shiʿi current of Bahraini politics, and as such draws its popularity from the economically deprived, Shiʿi-dominated areas of Bahrain. As in the case of the February 14 Coalition, this includes some of the northern villages and neighbourhoods like al-Daih, al-Bilad al-Qadim and al-Diraz and the greater Sitra area including the mainland villages of al-Nuwaidrat and al-ʿEker. Haqq was also the only group surveyed to mention Bahrain's second largest island Muharraq, which is a demographically mixed area with strong socio-economic divides. One Sunni resident of an upmarket Muharraq suburb even told the researcher that supporters of the Sunni extremist group Islamic State operate in Muharraq, describing her suburb as "a centre of hate within all Bahrain," and recounting that during the 2011 unrest she saw anti-Shiʿa demonstrations take place in which images of Shiʿi opposition leaders were displayed with nooses around their necks.[760] The Muharraq neighbourhood of al-Deir was the seventh most-mentioned location in Haqq posts, and Muharraq itself was also mentioned a number of times. According to Gengler's map, al-Deir is a Shiʿi-majority area.

Whilst it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about each group's activities from their public social media data alone, the geographical distribution of al-Wefaq's support is well established, given the group has contested two elections and won seats in the vast majority of Shiʿi-dominated constituencies in Bahrain.[761] In fact, all of the locations most-mentioned in al-Wefaq posts were held by al-Wefaq in the 2010 elections. Al-Wefaq made mention of several locations omitted in Haqq and February 14 Coalition posts, including Sar, an upmarket residential area popular with expatriates and Zinj, a southern suburb of Manama close to al-Wefaq's offices and the American embassy. Sitra and Karana were the only locations mentioned in any significant number by all three organisations. As in the case of the February 14 Coalition, the mixed town of ʿAli was al-Wefaq's second most-mentioned location, and the group also mentioned a number of Shiʿa-majority villages including Abu Saibaʿ, Barbar, Damistan and the Sitra neighbourhood of Murquban.

[759] Valeri, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 143.
[760] Interview with Sunni community member 24 December 2015.
[761] See Appendix 2 for Gengler's map of the 2010 electoral districts.

Interestingly the UK and Lebanon featured in 4% and 2% of locations mentioned respectively, all of which occurred on the control day and involved re-posted messages from supporters abroad calling for the release of al-Wefaq General Secretary Sheikh ʿAli Salman. This international element was entirely absent from the location data of Haqq and the February 14 Coalition's posts, however Haqq did try to make itself accessible to a more international audience by writing 26% its posts in English on the anniversary of the uprising, which neither al-Wefaq nor the February 14 Coalition had attempted via their central Facebook accounts.

Al-Wefaq and Haqq's greater international awareness is reflected in an analysis of the hashtags used by the three opposition groups across the sample period, see Table 2 and Figures 7-9. Three English language terms each appear in the list of al-Wefaq and Haqq's ten most popular hashtags, whereas the February 14 Coalition used exclusively Arabic hashtags and did not post in English at all on its central account.[762] The most popular al-Wefaq hashtag, used in 34.1% of posts, was indeed simply #Bahrain, which was also the third most popular Haqq hashtag, used in 28.4% of Haqq posts. The other two English language hashtags most used by al-Wefaq were #Alwefaq (28.9%) and #FreeSheikhAli (25.1%), again referring to the campaign for the release of the group's General Secretary, who was also mentioned in al-Wefaq's Arabic hashtags *#al-Shaīkh_ʿAlī_Salmān* (27.4%) and *#ʾAmīn_al-Shʿab* ('the peoples' secretary,' 22.2%). Haqq's other two English hashtags were the somewhat benign #14feb and #haq_movement (both 21.6%). As all of the #14feb hashtags were used on the anniversary of the uprising, Haqq is almost certainly referring to the well-known date of the 2011 'Day of Rage' rather than to the February 14 Coalition, in particular as this hashtag was often accompanied by the Arabic *#thawrat_14fibrāyir* ('14February_revolution,' 8%).

[762] Al-Wefaq operates a separate English language Facebook page- see www.facebook.com/alwefaqen/ however it has less than 500 followers. The February 14 Coalition similarly operates an English language Twitter account @Coalition14EN with around 10,000 followers, considerably less than its main Arabic account.

Al-Wefaq			
Hashtag	**Translation**	**Number of mentions**	**% of total posts**
#Bahrain		46	34.1%
#ستعجزون_ولن_نعجز	#You will lose strength we will not be weakened	40	29.6%
#البحرين	#Bahrain	39	28.9%
#Alwefaq		39	28.9%
#الشيخ_علي_سلمان	#Sheikh Ali Salman	37	27.4%
#سلمية	#Peacefulness	36	26.7%
#FreeSheikhAli		34	25.1%
#أمين_الشعب	#The peoples' secretary	30	22.2%
#الوفاق	#Al-Wefaq	30	22.2%
#رهائن	#Hostages	27	20.0%

February 14 Coalition			
Hashtag	**Translation**	**Number of mentions**	**% of total posts**
#إضراب_الإباء	#The strike of dissent	186	58.9%
#البحرين	#Bahrain	139	44.0%
#يوم_الغضب_الكربلائي	#Karbala day of rage	34	10.8%
#ثورة_تأبى_الانكسار	#The revolution refuses to be broken	33	10.4%
#المنامة	#Manama	15	4.7%
#نداء_الإباء	#the call of dissent	14	4.4%
#الديه	#al-Daih	13	4.1%
#لبيك_ياحسين	#At your service Hussein	12	3.8%
#النويدرات	#al-Nuwaidrat	12	3.8%
#السنابس	#al-Sanabis	10	3.1%

Haqq			
Hashtag	**Translation**	**Number of mentions**	**% of total posts**
#حركة_حق	#Haqq movement	67	76.1%
#إضراب_الإباء	#The strike of dissent	31	35.2%
#bahrain		25	28.4%
#ستعجزون_ولن_نعجز	#You will lose strength we will not be weakened	24	27.3%
#يسقط_حمد	#Down with Hamad	24	27.3%
#14feb		19	21.6%
#haq_movement		19	21.6%
#ثورة_14فبراير	#14 February revolution	7	8.0%
#نداء_الإباء	#the call of dissent	6	6.8%
#الديه	#al-Diah	5	5.7%

Table 2: Most popular al-Wefaq, February 14 Coalition and Haqq hashtags

Figure 7: Most popular al-Wefaq hashtags 14/02/2015

Figure 8: Most popular Haqq hashtags 14/02/2015

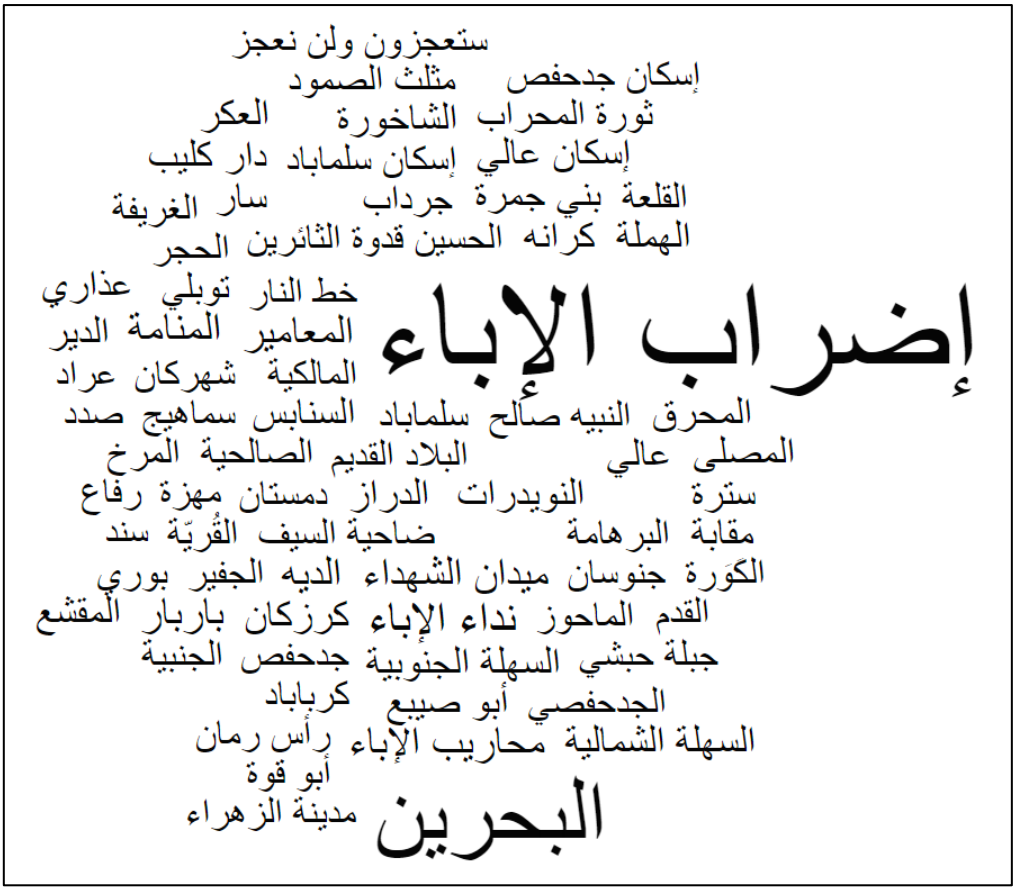

Figure 9: Most popular February 14 Coalition hashtags 14/02/2015

The most popular February 14 Coalition hashtags typically involved the group's main protest slogan for that particular period, for example #*ʾiḍrāb_al-ʾibāʾ* ('the strike of dissent') featured in 93% of posts on the anniversary of the uprising (see Figure 9), and #*yawm_al-ghaḍab_al-karbalāʾī* ('Karbala day of rage') featured in 53% of posts during Ashura. These hashtags are publicised in advance of each protest campaign, and February 14 Coalition supporters use them when posting their own material during the campaign period. Haqq's Facebook posts also promoted some of these hashtags, #*ʾiḍrāb_al-ʾibāʾ* was used in 35.2% of Haqq posts and the hashtag *#nidāʾ_al-ʾibāʾ* ('the call of dissent') was also used extensively by both groups. This implies that Haqq activists are working with the February 14 Coalition, suggesting that both antisystem groups are involved in joint campaigns on social media. As discussed in Chapter 6, this informal alliance, which Khalaf has referred to as a "collaboration between marginalised veterans and youth networks,"[763] is

[763] Khalaf, *Foreword*, xiv.

mutually beneficial to both sides, as the support of Haqq's leadership (as well as other groups within the Alliance for a Republic) affords the Coalition a measure of legitimacy and prestige. The Coalition is able to offer Haqq members a framework for continuing their activism, as some have argued Haqq has been "immobilised"[764] by the imprisonment of its leaders.

The February 14 Coalition also regularly uses hashtags to publicise the location of clashes or other activities, and a number of the towns and villages which featured in the list of the Coalition's most-mentioned locations also appear among the group's most popular hashtags. The capital #Manāma is the fifth most popular hashtag across the combined three-day sample period, followed by #al-Daīh, #al-Nuwaīdrāt and #al-Sanābis, in seventh, ninth and tenth place respectively. In contrast, al-Wefaq does not appear to use hashtags to publicise the location of its activities, and Haqq only did so in a limited capacity- for example, the village of #al-Daīh is the only location to feature in Haqq's list of most popular hashtags, mentioned in 5.7% of posts. This corresponds with the aforementioned analysis of each groups' location data, wherein February 14 promoted the location of its activities extensively in contrast with the other two opposition groups.

Who Features in Shiʿi Online Activism?

Turning to an analysis of the visual components of the data sample's Facebook posts, the kinds of people who featured in the photographs, videos and other imagery posted online by al-Wefaq, Haqq and the February 14 Coalition were analysed. Images of people often play a powerful role in the framing of visual texts, in particular due to their ability to provoke an emotional response in the viewer, such as pity or solidarity. Fahmy, in her study of representations of Afghan women in the Western media, has demonstrated that universally-understood gestures and facial expressions "establish an explicit contact" in which "the viewer feels a relationship" with the subject of the image.[765] Indeed the majority of all three

[764] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 23.
[765] Fahmy, Shahira, 'Picturing Afghan Women: A Content Analysis of AP Wire Photographs during the Taliban Regime and after the Fall of the Taliban Regime,' *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies* 66:2 (2004), 94.

groups' visual Facebook posts featured images of people- 94% of total al-Wefaq posts and 82% of both Haqq and February 14 Coalition total posts. The framing categories used to code for each type of individual featured and the frequency with which they appeared in each group's visual posts are set out in Table 3.

Type of individual	Al-Wefaq		February 14 Coalition		Haqq	
	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts
Non-violent protesters	66	28.2%	99	34.5%	36	40.9%
Violent protesters/ Protesters engaged in clashes	11	4.7%	65	22.6%	15	17.0%
Injured or wounded people	87	37.2%	3	1.0%	12	13.6%
Political leaders- Government, royal family	-	-	1	0.3%	-	-
Political leaders- Opposition	48	20.5%	2	0.7%	2	2.3%
Shiʿi clerics	17	7.3%	11	3.8%	-	-
Uniformed security forces	10	4.3%	10	3.5%	11	12.5%
Deceased/ martyrs	7	3.0%	4	1.4%	-	-
Worshipers	12	5.1%	39	13.6%	3	3.4%
Other	3	1.3%	30	10.5%	-	-

Table 3: Individuals featured in visual posts

Coding for types of people featured in each organisation's visual posts revealed that all three opposition groups maintained a strong focus on non-violent protest, with 30% of al-Wefaq total posts, 42% of February 14 Coalition total posts and 50% of Haqq total posts featuring non-violent individuals engaged in protest activities. The popularity of non-violent methods of political dissent has a long history in Bahrain, and many of the peaceful tactics adopted during the Arab Spring were developed during the sustained period of popular mobilisation of the 1990s *Intifāḍa*.[766] The right to peaceful protest is emphasised by all three groups, including the antisystem opposition. For example a Haqq communique on the 2015 anniversary of the uprising praised its supporters' peaceful demonstrations:

[766] Rabi and Kostiner, *The Shiʿis in Bahrain*, 184.

Your gleaming banners are fluttering in dissent… you are unarmed people without weapons or equipment, but with your faith and the strength of your religious and nationalist conviction you returned and answered the call…[767]

During 2015 al-Wefaq was hamstrung by an official ban on public assembly, which it had pledged to respect so as not to endanger its status as a legal political society. As a prominent former al-Wefaq MP told the researcher, "within al-Wefaq there are lots of people who aren't prepared to take to the streets if a protest is illegal. They know, and are aware of, the constraints."[768] Despite this however, al-Wefaq appears to have had few qualms about publishing numerous images of non-violent protest on its Facebook account, in what amounts to an endorsement of protest activities which have not been officially sanctioned by the group, but are in keeping with al-Wefaq's ideological and tactical focus on non-violence. This is an interesting finding, as it suggests that at this point al-Wefaq is prepared to test the boundaries of the government's rules of the game in order to promote its ideological position to supporters. While al-Wefaq remained a legal, tolerated opposition society during 2015, as the crackdown continued and its moderate approach failed to bear fruit antisystem groups such as the February 14 Coalition gained support at its expense. Given the threat from antisystem groups, the continued need for al-Wefaq to appeal to its supporters could potentially explain its willingness to risk its tolerated status by posting images of non-violent protest during a period in which demonstrations were banned.

Unsurprisingly, Haqq and the February 14 Coalition placed much heavier emphasis on promoting images of violent clashes compared to al-Wefaq. A total of 28% of all February 14 Coalition posts and 21% of all Haqq posts featured images of protesters engaged in clashes, whereas only 5% of total al-Wefaq posts fit this category. Al-Wefaq was however considerably more likely to depict the aftermath of violence, rather than the clashes themselves. 47% of al-Wefaq posts on the anniversary of the uprising and 40% of their posts overall featured images of injured or wounded people, many of them confronting, including graphic

[767] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=654214771351142&id=251280431644580
[768] Interview with opposition leader 16 May 2016.

photographs of wounds caused by birdshot pellets to the face and body of young teens.[769] The wounded whose suffering was so frequently publicised by al-Wefaq are likely to have been engaged in the same street clashes with security forces depicted by the February 14 Coalition and Haqq, violent encounters which al-Wefaq has deliberately decided not to promote its posts. As with the case of posting images of peaceful demonstrations however, publishing images of wounded protesters should likewise be considered an attempt by al-Wefaq to re-assert its values and, in an increasingly repressive formal political context, potentially challenge the rules of the game.

Figure 10: Clashes in al-ʿEker Posted to Facebook by the February 14 Coalition 14/02/15

It is clear that the February 14 Coalition has a different focus to al-Wefaq in the way in which it frames these clashes, with Haqq's approach falling roughly in between. On the anniversary of the uprising, only 1.3% of February 14 Coalition posts featured the injured or wounded, in contrast to 47% of al-Wefaq posts and 19% of Haqq posts. Conversely, 35% of February 14 Coalition posts and 19% of Haqq posts on the anniversary of the uprising depicted the clashes themselves, in contrast to al-Wefaq's aforementioned 6%. These findings indicate the differing priorities and approaches to activism between the groups. While al-

[769] See for example: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10153249988913072&id=203200448071

Wefaq had reluctantly adhered to the government's freeze on authorised street demonstrations, and has called on its supporters to refrain from participating in illegal rallies,[770] Haqq and the February 14 Coalition continued to call for protests and other unauthorised methods of expressing dissent including strikes and sit-ins. Accordingly, the two antisystem opposition groups' Facebook accounts emphasise images of individuals engaged in clashes, and promote the proactive nature of these activities, triumphing in any perceived successes, no matter how minor or symbolic. Al-Wefaq is sending a very different message by giving salience to images showing the aftermath of the clashes, a tactic which Khatib terms "visual evidence."[771] In doing so, al-Wefaq depicts the wounded as victims, most likely in an attempt to appeal to the sympathies of local and international supporters, without endorsing the clashes themselves. This somewhat precarious position allows al-Wefaq to continue its political activism without overtly crossing the government's red lines, whilst upholding its aim to engage the regime in meaningful dialogue and enact political reforms to establish a genuine system of constitutional monarchy in Bahrain.[772]

The February 14 Coalition took a markedly different approach to Facebook posts on the day of Ashura in contrast to the two more established political societies. During Ashura, Bahrain's Shiʿi community commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his followers at the Battle of Karbala with street processions, known as *ʿazzā'*, involving men and boys marching, chanting religious poems and beating their chests- an occasion which Gengler describes as an ideal time for "those looking to make a real political statement."[773] While all three groups featured images of Shiʿi clerics and worshippers, the February 14 Coalition was the only group to continue to post images of non-violent protesters (7%) and individuals clashing with security forces (11%), alongside photographs of a religious nature featuring *ʿazzā'* participants. While the February 14 Coalition is rightly considered to be a Shiʿi youth movement (its posts make reference to Shiʿi figures ranging from the early Imams to Ayatollah Khomeini)[774] it is not an

[770] Dickinson, *Bahrain's Disappearing Moderates*, n.p.
[771] Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East,* 128-129.
[772] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 228.
[773] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain*, 68.
[774] See for example: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=974032149314483&id=178269738890732

organised political society in the vein of al-Wefaq and Haqq, and lacks the kind of fully-formed political platform concerned with religious or social issues on a broader scale. The Coalition is a decentralised umbrella organisation whose primary objective is opposing the Bahraini government, indeed calling for the replacement of the Al Khalifa monarchy with a republic[775] has been its most coherent policy position. Highlighting its determination to continue the uprising is one of the group's core themes on social media, and unlike both Haqq and al-Wefaq the February 14 Coalition is not affiliated with or led by any particular Shi'i cleric. As such, the group's continuing to feature images of protesters on an important religious day such as Ashura is fitting with its ideology and aims, and distinguishes it from the other opposition groups in the study.

Figure 11: An Ashura Procession Re-Posted to Haqq's Facebook Page from Twitter 24/10/15[776]

[775] See for example this post on the February 14 Coalition's website: http://uk.14f2011.com/news/372109
[776] The caption reads: "#Haqq_Movement | Supporters of Hussein in the capital of the revolution #Sitra leave for the streets under the banner of '#At_your_service_Hussein' #Karbala_day of_rage"

Given the February 14 Coalition's decentralised structure and anonymous membership, it is unsurprising that the group posted very few images of prominent opposition leaders; just one on the control day- a photograph featuring ʿAbdul-Wahhab Hussein, the jailed leader of the aforementioned group Wafaʾ; and one on Ashura- featuring ʿAbdul-Jalil al-Singace, Haqq's former spokesman and head of human rights, also imprisoned. Both individuals are closely associated with republicanism, again one of the Coalition's main objectives. Haqq also posted just two images, of the same two antisystem opposition leaders, making an appeal for the release of both on the anniversary of the uprising. This stands in marked contrast to al-Wefaq, which posted 28 images featuring opposition leaders on the Day of Rage (15% of posts) and 20 on the Control Day (57% of posts). In addition, the single post al-Wefaq published on Ashura featured Sheikh ʿIsa al-Qasim, Bahrain's most preeminent Shiʿi cleric and al-Wefaq's spiritual guide. The majority of al-Wefaq's images of opposition leaders depicted their imprisoned General Secretary ʿAli Salman, as the group campaigned both online and offline for his release. Al-Wefaq's 2015 online campaign, centred on the Arabic hashtags *#al-Shaikh_ʿAlī_Salmān* and *#ʾAmīn_al-Shaʿb* ('the people's secretary') was heavily promoted across a number of social media platforms, but was conspicuous in its absence from the data sourced from Haqq and the February 14 Coalition. This is despite the fact that ʿAli Salman's fate resembles that of Haqq leader Hasan Mushaimaʿ, who is also behind bars after returning from exile to help lead the protests in 2011, and who has been sentenced to life in prison on charges of attempting to overthrow the monarchy.[777] Divisions between more moderate opposition groups such as al-Wefaq, who are prepared to negotiate with the government and are in favour of constitutional monarchy, and pro-republic groups such as Haqq and Wafaʾ, have existed since the NAC-era (see Chapter 5). That the antisystem groups largely ignore al-Wefaq's online campaigns, in spite of their shared interests, indicates the depth of the split between the pro-republic antisystem camp and that of the legal political societies.

[777] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 78-79.

Figure 12: A Protest March in Support of ʿAli Salman Posted by al-Wefaq to Facebook 10/06/15

Framing Religion

As outlined in Chapter 2, the framing method is a means of breaking down a text in order to analyse what its component parts communicate about the underlying assumptions held by its author. Evaluating techniques used in the construction of a text, such as selection and salience, and measuring for frequency enable researchers to examine which ideological perspectives or social or political values are emphasised by the text's creator. This section applies framing to the visual and textual Facebook dataset examined in this chapter, to analyse the ways in which al-Wefaq, the February 14 Coalition and Haqq utilise social media to communicate their methods and approach to online political participation during the post-Arab Spring crackdown.

The visual and textual datasets were analysed separately, as the characteristics indicating a particular frame would obviously differ significantly depending on data type. The first textual frame examined can broadly be termed the 'Religion Frame,' and sought to measure the frequency with which characteristics associated with religion appear in each of the three groups' textual posts across the sample period. The sub-categories and results of the Religion frame are outlined in Table 4.

Religion	Al-Wefaq		February 14 Coalition		Haqq	
	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts
Shiʿi religious doctrine, practice	2	1.5%	**43**	**13.6%**	3	3.4%
Shiʿi religious festivals	1	0.7%	8	2.5%	3	3.4%
Shiʿi religious notables	3	2.2%	5	1.6%	-	-
Shiʿi religious history in reference to current grievances	-	-	**74**	**23.4%**	2	2.3%
Shiʿi nativist narrative	-	-	4	1.3%	-	-
Glorifies martyrdom	5	3.7%	11	3.5%	3	3.4%
Anti-martyrdom	-	-	-	-	-	-
Neutral (martyrdom)	4	3.0%	4	1.3%	1	1.1%
Pro-terrorism	-	-	-	-	-	-
Anti-terrorism	-	-	3	0.9%	1	1.1%
Neutral (terrorism)	-	-	1	0.3%	-	-
Pro-Sunni	-	-	-	-	-	-
Anti-Sunni	-	-	-	-	-	-
Neutral (Sunni)	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4: The Religion frame

Terrorism does not of course strictly fit as a category within the Religious Frame, and had posts concerning terrorism featured more broadly within the dataset it could have potentially been developed into a standalone frame. Terrorism however was only mentioned on five occasions, four of which by the February 14 Coalition, and was included in this frame due to its frequent linkage to the religious-sectarian divide in Bahrain. For example, the Bahraini government has classified the February 14 Coalition as a terrorist organisation,[778] and has asserted on a number of occasions that Shiʿi underground terror cells are active in Bahrain with Iranian support.[779] Likewise, both Haqq and the February 14 Coalition have sought to link the Al Khalifa with the Islamic State group, and draw on the language of terrorism in their rhetoric as a means of deriding Bahrain's monarchs, referring for example to "the terror of the Al Khalifa-ISIS entity."[780]

It is clear from coding the religious frame that the February 14 Coalition in particular draws heavily on Shiʿism when presenting its worldview to supporters on Facebook. 41% of all February 14 Coalition textual

[778] Dickinson, *Bahrain's Disappearing Moderates*, n.p.
[779] Zemni, Sami and De Smet, Brecht, 'A Post Scriptum: The Arab Spring and the Sectarian Issue' in: Marechal, Brigitte and Zemni, Sami., 2013. *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism and the Media*. London: Hurst and Company, 250.
[780] See: www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=973857369331961&id=178269738890732

posts were coded as mentioning Shiʿi elements within the Religion frame; including doctrine and practice, festivals and religious notables, in contrast to 4.4% of al-Wefaq posts and 9.1% of Haqq posts. However, the majority of February 14 Coalition posts coded within the Religion frame (23.4%) fell into the 'Shiʿi religious history in reference to current grievances' category. Only 2.5% of total posts made direct reference to Shiʿi festivals and only 1.6% referenced Shiʿi notables such as prominent clerics. More than half of the posts coded as referencing Shiʿi doctrine and practice fell on the Ashura dataset (7.6%) which can be explained by the religious significance of this day, when February 14 Coalition members' marched in street processions commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. The majority of February 14 Coalition posts coded under the category 'Shiʿi religious history in reference to current grievances' also fell on Ashura, although they featured throughout all three sample days. This is also unsurprising, given the aforementioned proclivity of Shiʿi groups to draw parallels between the story of the Battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at the hands of the (Sunni) Caliph Yazid with contemporary events (see Chapter 4). Such parallels are evidenced in the group's online rhetoric, including the aforementioned hashtag *#yawm_al-ghaḍab_al-karbalāʾī* ('Karbala day of rage') and statements such as "resist the foreign mercenaries with the fires of #the holy_defence in keeping with Hussein's method of resistance"[781] and "the earth quakes under the feet of the Yazid of our time the dictator Hamad."[782]

Abdo, amongst others, has asserted that the Battle of Karbala, "a narrative of defeat, martyrdom and dispossession… lies at the core of Shiʿa identity"[783] and that the collective memory contained within the battle's annual re-enactment during Ashura, tied up in values such as self-sacrifice and resisting oppression, informs the Shiʿi community's contemporary political experience. As outlined in Chapter 4, the revolutionary potential of Shiʿi history and collective memory has been strongly asserted in recent times, particularly in post-revolutionary Iran, Lebanon and Iraq,[784] as well as in Bahrain during the 1990s

[781] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=974029172648114&id=178269738890732
[782] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1044120945638936&id=178269738890732
[783] Abdo, *The New Sectarianism*, 5.
[784] Louër, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East,* 11-12.

Intifāḍa.[785] Given that Bahraini Shiʿa overwhelmingly consider themselves to be oppressed by the Al Khalifa royal family, who prior to interference from the British presided over a system which confined most Shiʿa to indentured servitude,[786] linking current events in Bahrain to the Battle of Karbala carries powerful mobilising potential. As the majority of February 14 Coalition posts situated within the religious frame reference religious-historical injustices, rather than draw on the words of Shiʿi clerics or mention actual religious practice such as prayer, it is likely that Shiʿism is largely being employed as a tool for mobilisation. Unlike Islamist organisations of both sects, whose ultimate goal is to extend the social and political reach of religion, the February 14 Coalition is using religion as a tool to achieve its non-religious aims, which are primarily to "overthrow the tribal and illegitimate regime of Al Khalifa and... endorse the right of people for self-determination and the right to choose the political system that fulfils their aspirations."[787] This suggests that whilst the Coalition is certainly a Shiʿi organisation, in practice Shiʿism is often instrumentalised for political purposes.

In keeping with the February 14 Coalition's highly symbolic use of Shiʿi history and religious motifs, the concept of martyrdom (*istishhād*) also featured in 4.8% of the group's textual posts across the three day sample period, as well as in 6.7% of al-Wefaq posts and 4.5% of Haqq posts. Almost twice as many February 14 Coalition posts mentioned martyrdom during the anniversary of the uprising (6% of total posts on the day) compared with Ashura (3.1% of posts on the day), despite Ashura's central theme being the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. Similarly, Haqq only mentioned martyrdom during posts made on the anniversary of the uprising (5.3% of posts on the day) and all of al-Wefaq's posts concerning martyrdom (6.4%) were also made on this day with the exception of one, which was posted on the control day. All three opposition groups place great emphasis on commemorating the sacrifice of protesters who were killed in clashes (or as innocent bystanders) during the uprising and subsequent crackdown. In this sense, the 'martyrdom' sub-frame also functions as an example of the Shiʿi opposition's adapting a religious

[785] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 67.
[786] Khalaf, *Contentious Politics in Bahrain*, 1.
[787] The February 14 Youth Coalition, *Lulu Charter for 14th of February Revolution,* n.p.

concept to a contemporary (and arguably non-religious) setting, albeit hardly an unique approach given the word's liberal usage in contemporary conflicts across the Islamic world.[788] Statements such as "we will not forget the martyrs whose bones drew us to the path of freedom with their pure and pious blood"[789] (the February 14 Coalition) are typically posted alongside banners featuring the name and image of a protester killed by security forces, and the date and place of their martyrdom. Figure 13 is an example of such a post.

Figure 13: Poster commemorating the martyrdom of ʿAli Mushaimaʿ, posted by al-Wefaq to Facebook 14/02/15- the fourth anniversary of both Bahrain's uprising and Mushaima's death.[790]

The Bahraini Shiʿi opposition's visual posts were also coded for specifically-Shiʿi symbols or imagery, which were divided into clearly defined framing sub-categories, which included images of clerics, identifiably Shiʿi buildings such as mosques and ma'tams and banners or graffiti featuring identifiably Shiʿi slogans or images (see Table 5).

[788] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 125-126
[789] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=910889078962124&id=178269738890732
[790] The poster reads: "We will not forget the martyr ʿAli ʿAbdul-Hadi Mushaimaʿ. Date of martyrdom 14 February 2011."

Shiʿism	Al-Wefaq		February 14 Coalition		Haqq	
	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts
Cleric/s	**56**	**24.0%**	14	4.9%	1	1.1%
Buildings (Bahrain)	10	4.3%	13	4.5%	5	5.7%
Buildings (abroad)	-	-	2	0.7%	-	-
Clothing	1	0.4%	7	2.4%	-	-
Items of devotion	-	-	5	1.7%	-	-
Banners	13	5.6%	**56**	**20.0%**	**7**	**8%**
Graffiti	4	1.7%	5	1.7%	-	-

Table 5: The Shiʿism frame- Visual posts

In contrast to al-Wefaq's textual data, in which only 4.4% of total posts made reference to Shiʿi doctrine and practice, festivals and religious notables, al-Wefaq featured the highest number of images coded within the Shiʿi frame across the study period, with 32% of total posts. The majority of al-Wefaq visual posts coded within this frame depicted images of Shiʿi clerics, most of which involved the group's aforementioned campaign in support of its imprisoned leader Sheikh ʿAli Salman. Haqq, perhaps because of its reluctance to support clerics associated with al-Wefaq, featured less identifiably Shiʿi imagery during the anniversary of the uprising (9%, compared with al-Wefaq's 25%) and the Control Day (22%, compared with al-Wefaq's 69%). 100% of posts from both groups were coded under the Shiʿi frame during Ashura, a logical result given the religious nature of the day and the fact that such a large proportion of both groups' posts overall featured images of Shiʿi clerics and worshipers. The February 14 Coalition's use of the Shiʿi visual frame fell between that of al-Wefaq and Haqq, with 17% of posts on the anniversary of the uprising, 38% of posts on the Control Day and 76% of posts during Ashura. The comparatively low number of visual posts coded under the Shiʿi frame on the anniversary of the uprising, during which the group continued to stage non-violent protests and clash with security forces, further shows that strictly religious themes were not central to the February 14 Coalition's protest activities.

Across the period examined, it is notable that the February 14 Coalition was the only group to post images of Shiʿi religious buildings outside of Bahrain. The group posted an image of the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad, Iran on the anniversary of the uprising, and an image of the al-Abbas mosque in Karbala, Iraq on

Ashura, the scene of important Ashura commemorations which draw a number of Bahraini pilgrims each year. The February 14 Coalition was also the only group to have posted an image of a foreign cleric, including a photograph on Ashura of crowds in front of a poster of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, with the caption "large Ashura banners hang in the area of the steadfast land of #al-Sanābis implanting Hussein's revolutionary culture and fighting the despots."[791] Whilst Khamenei does enjoy a certain amount of support in Bahrain as a *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* this pales in comparison with support for the Najaf-based Ayatollahs, and there is scant evidence that the group owes the Islamic Republic its religious support. The February 14 Coalition is more likely to be drawing on Iran's brand of political Shiʿism as a means of further infusing the story of Imam Hussein with contemporary relevance, enabling it to draw on powerful political motifs associated with Khamenei and his predecessor Ayatollah Khomeini, who are strongly associated with revolution and 'fighting the despots.'

It is important to note that no al-Wefaq, February 14 Coalition or Haqq textual posts across the sample period made mention of content which could conceivably be coded as pro, anti or neutral toward Sunnis. Similarly, all three groups did not feature any visual content coded within the Sunni frame on the anniversary of the Day of Rage or Ashura. The February 14 Coalition was the only group whose posts were coded within this category at all, and this was confined to two instances on the Control Day, both coded under a sub-category denoting 'members or insignia of the royal family.' The first instance was a graphic poster advertising a series of peaceful protests to be held in a public square in the village of Karbabad, under the banner of what the February 14 Coalition referred to as a "media campaign" simply titled "Hamad!?"[792] The graphic featured a stylised upside-down image of King Hamad, his head pointing toward the ground in what is perhaps a visual representation of the popular Arab Spring chant 'down with Hamad' (*yasqut Ḥamad*), see Figure 14. The second instance also fit the 'members or insignia of the royal family' category, and appeared within a lengthy post titled "Broadcasting confessions extracted under torture reflects the terror of the Al Khalifa-ISIS entity." The post condemned the televised broadcast of prisoners'

[791] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1044225722295125&id=178269738890732
[792] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=973586422692389&id=178269738890732

confessions, which the February 14 Coalition alleged were "extracted under torture at the edge of a sword," denouncing the broadcasts as "empty balloons of propaganda covering up the ISIS-danger which threatens Bahrain."[793] The post is superimposed onto a screenshot from one of these broadcasts, featuring an unidentified military spokesman and the insignia of the Ministry of Interior (which somewhat appropriately includes a pair of swords in its motif). It is clear that in both cases February 14 is mocking the government and royal family, and whilst the imagery used does contain symbols coded within the Sunni frame, there is nothing obviously sectarian or anti-Sunni about them.

Figure 14: Poster featuring King Hamad posted by the February 14 Coalition to Facebook 10/06/15

The absence of any examples of negative or derisory posts referencing the Sunni community across the Shiʿi organisations examined in this study, whose politics range from moderate to radical, is significant. The Bahraini government has heavily promoted the narrative that the 2011 uprising was a sectarian conflict, claiming that the mostly-Shiʿi protesters were acting at the behest of Iran, and sought to install an Iranian-style Shiʿi theocracy in Bahrain.[794] For example, in 2011 King Hamad took the unprecedented step of contributing an opinion piece to the *Washington Times*, in which he argued that "the legitimate demands

[793] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=973857369331961&id=178269738890732
[794] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 89.

of the opposition were hijacked by extremist elements with ties to foreign governments in the region."[795] A government-affiliated entrepreneur has similarly claimed in the *New York Times* that "the radical, Iranian-financed theocratic agenda has become entrenched in domestic Bahraini politics."[796] State media was heavily involved in promoting the government's version of events, raising fears among Bahrain's Sunnis that the Shiʿi opposition wanted to expel the Sunni community or take away their government benefits.[797] This chapter's analysis of al-Wefaq, the February 14 Coalition and Haqq Facebook posts demonstrates that, in spite of some of these groups' image as violent and "radicalised,"[798] the Bahraini Shiʿi opposition does not appear to be at all motivated by sectarianism, and no evidence was found of any negative sentiments directed toward Bahrain's Sunni community.

Framing Ideology and Purpose

Activists often assert that their opposition to the government is motivated by a desire to promote democracy and human rights for the benefit of all Bahrainis, with Bahraini nationalism often presented as a vehicle which could potentially unite the country's various ethnic and sectarian identities.[799] To investigate this, the three Shiʿi opposition groups' visual posts were coded for identifiably nationalist symbols or imagery, with sub-categories set out in Table 6.

[795] Al-Khalifa, *Stability is Prerequisite for Progress*, n.p.
[796] Bin Ashoor, Sarah, 'Bahrain's Hijacked Reform Efforts,' *New York Times,* 18 February 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/02/19/opinion/bahrains-hijacked-reform-efforts.html
[797] Jones, *Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics*, 251.
[798] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 114.
[799] See for example: Kilbride, Erin, 'Calling Nabeel Rajab a "Shia" Activist Is Dangerous' *Muftah* 20 July 2015, http://muftah.org/calling-nabeel-rajab-a-shia-activist-is-a-dangerous-misnomer/#.Vbxqr_mFGDk; Meringolo, Azzurra, 'The Inconvenient Revolution: An Interview with a Leading Human Rights Activist from Bahrain,' *Foreign Policy,* 07 November 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/11/07/the-inconvenient-revolution/

Nationalism	Al-Wefaq		February 14 Coalition		Haqq	
	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts
Bahraini flags	51	21.8%	50	17.4%	18	20.5%
Model or banner of Pearl Roundabout monument	5	2.1%	8	2.8%	2	2.3%
Images of secular/nationalist leaders	9	3.8%	-	-	-	-
National landmarks	-	-	2	0.7%	1	1.1%

Table 6: The Nationalism frame- Visual posts

The only nationalist symbol which featured significantly in each of the groups' visual posts was the Bahraini flag, which appeared in 21.8% of al-Wefaq posts, 17.4% of February 14 posts and 20.5% of Haqq posts, most prominently on the anniversary of the uprising. The only other category which was featured across all groups was the symbol of the Pearl Roundabout monument, which typically appeared on banners and on several occasions as small-scale models held aloft during peaceful protests. 3.8% of al-Wefaq posts featured images of secular/nationalist leaders, most of whom were affiliated with al-Wefaq's ally the Waʿad society, such as Waʿad's imprisoned figurehead ʾIbrahim Sharif. The overall lack of strong nationalist visual frames across the Facebook posts of all three opposition groups highlights the salience of the Religion frame discussed in the previous section, suggesting that Shiʿism is perceived of as a more effective tool through which to communicate ideological positions and engage the support base of each group. Within Bahrain's complex identity politics, it appears that Shiʿism remains a more appealing marker of identity than Bahraini nationalism within the Shiʿi community, a development which arguably began following the Iranian Revolution (see Chapter 3) and is perhaps unsurprisingly reflected in the online political participation of Bahrain's main Shiʿi opposition groups.

In addition to their framing of religion, each group's textual posts were also examined against three other ideological frames: 'Social Grievances,' 'Political System' and 'Geopolitics.' The aim of this approach was to gauge to what extent the tolerated and antisystem groups were preoccupied with various issue-based grievances. This included grievances of a social nature (some of which are discussed in Chapter 4), grievances surrounding the Al Khalifa regime's rules of the game and structuring of the domestic political

system, and grievances concerning the role of international actors in Bahrain's political scene. The coding sub-categories applied within the Social Grievances frame are outlined in Table 7.

Social Grievances	Al-Wefaq		February 14 Coalition		Haqq	
	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts
Torture and murder	1	0.7%	2	0.6%	1	1.1%
Impunity and justice	3	2.2%	-	-	2	2.3%
Government discrimination	-	-	1	0.3%	-	-
Freedom of speech	1	0.7%	-	-	-	-
Freedom of Assembly	17	**12.6%**	2	0.6%	2	2.3%
Crimes committed by security forces	26	**19.3%**	10	3.1%	7	**8.0%**
Imprisonment of dissidents	19	**14.1%**	4	1.3%	3	3.4%
Destruction of Shiʿi religious sites	3	**32.2%**	3	0.9%	1	1.1%
Other	-	-	8	2.5%	-	-

Table 7: The Social Grievances frame

Al-Wefaq stands out as the opposition organisation whose posts evidenced greatest concern for social grievances, including freedom of assembly (12.6% of total posts), crimes committed by security forces (19.3%), the imprisonment of dissidents (14.1%) and the destruction of Shiʿi religious sites (32.2%). This can partly be explained by the fact that, unlike the unlicensed Haqq and banned February 14 Coalition, al-Wefaq's participation in elections and parliamentary life has meant that it has crafted a broad policy agenda, developing positions on a range of issues of less immediate concern to the underground opposition, which is arguably primarily occupied with opposing the regime and ensuring its own survival. Al-Wefaq had also adopted the language of democracy and human rights in much of its political rhetoric both during and after its time in parliament, which could potentially explain its greater preoccupation with issues such as the justice system and freedom of assembly, which are less relevant to extra-legal organisations like Haqq.

Of greatest concern to al-Wefaq within the Social Grievances frame is the issue of the destruction of Shiʿi religious sites by security forces, reportedly including up to thirty-five Shiʿi mosques as well as maʾtams and

cemeteries.[800] Al-Wefaq posted images of communal prayers and protest meetings held at the sites of some of the razed mosques, with captions such as: "Citizens hold midday prayers in the ruined *al-ʿAlawīyāt* mosque exposing its destruction by the Bahraini regime."[801] The February 14 Coalition and Haqq also posted about the destruction of religious sites, however not to the same extent as al-Wefaq, perhaps reflecting the closeness of the former's ties to the Shiʿi religious establishment. The February 14 Coalition and Haqq only devoted 0.9% and 1.1% respectively to the issue of religious sites, in contrast to al-Wefaq's 32.2% of total posts. The antisystem groups' rhetoric however was more provocative, for example the February 14 Coalition posted the following about the same mosque: "prayers held on the pure site of the *al-ʿAlawīyāt* mosque will outlast the criminality of the Saudi-Al Khalifa destruction and demolition."[802]

The Political System frame sought to account for any mentions in favour of, against or neutral toward a range of sub-categories including democracy, constitutional monarchy, republic and theocracy as well as any mentions of dialogue with the government and participation in or boycott of parliamentary elections. None of the groups studied made any significant number of posts about the political system, in fact not a single al-Wefaq post was coded within this frame. The only category worth mentioning was titled 'Pro-Al Khalifa Overthrow,' and featured in 33% of total Haqq posts, mostly repeating the aforementioned popular Arab Spring slogan 'down with Hamad' (*yasqut Ḥamad*).

The Geopolitics frame was designed to code for mentions of international actors involved in the unrest in Bahrain, however there was very little mention of any external players- Saudi Arabia featured in 0.9% of total February 14 Coalition and 1.1% of total Haqq posts, the US was mentioned in 0.6% of Coalition posts and the UK was mentioned in 1.5% of al-Wefaq and 0.6% of February 14 Coalition posts. Iran featured in 0.3% of February 14 Coalition posts and 1.1% of Haqq posts. This suggests that all three opposition organisations are strongly focused on their domestic context, and that mentioning international actors on social media, whose involvement is widely acknowledged in Bahrain, is not viewed by any of the opposition

[800] Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 'Discrimination and Deprivation of Religious Freedom in Bahrain,' 8 June 2011, www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/4295
[801] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10153250053248072&id=203200448071
[802] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=911017615615937&id=178269738890732

groups as favourable to advancing their cause. Further emphasising this point, 'Bahrain' was used as a hashtag in 34% (English) and 29% (Arabic) of al-Wefaq posts, and 44% of February 14 Coalition posts and 28% of Haqq posts.

The relative absence of discussion surrounding social grievances and the structure of the political system from the Facebook activity of Bahrain's main underground opposition groups does not necessarily indicate a lack of concern for these issues. The February 14 Coalition's 'Pearl Charter' sets out the group's position clearly, and mentions both righting social wrongs, including preventing discrimination, reforming the judiciary and the "equitable distribution of wealth," as well as its ambition to "rebuild an entirely new political system" based on "a new constitution."[803] Both Haqq and the February 14 Coalition have a policy to hold a popular referendum to decide on Bahrain's next system of government in the event of the downfall of the Al Khalifa. In fact, both groups were involved in conducting a symbolic referendum in November 2014, in which ballots were cast in temporary polling booths set up in the Shiʿi villages.[804] The February 14 Coalition's stance on international actors is similarly covered in the Pearl Charter, which states that the group rejects "all forms of foreign intervention from Saudi Arabia or any other country… and perceive such intervention as an illegal occupation that must be driven out."[805] Haqq has also vocally condemned the Saudi intervention, often referring to the Saudi-led Peninsula Shield Force as occupiers and invaders, and is scathing of the role of Britain and the US, which it terms "traitorous conspirator countries," accusing them of "professing to hold values of justice, freedom and human rights" whilst acting as the Al Khalifa's "arrogant international patrons."[806]

It is more likely that the relative absence of February 14 Coalition and Haqq posts coded within the Social Grievances, Political System and Geopolitics frames reveal differences in the groups' approach to online activism, in contrast to say, that of human rights groups. The February 14 Coalition's Facebook account appears to augment its real-world activities, including daily protests and clashes with security forces- it is

[803] The February 14 Youth Coalition, *Lulu Charter for 14th of February Revolution,* n.p.
[804] Shehabi, *Inviolable Sheikhs and Radical Subjects,* 246.
[805] The February 14 Youth Coalition, *Lulu Charter for 14th of February Revolution,* n.p.
[806] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=654214771351142&id=251280431644580

not its only means of activism. As such, its target audience is different from groups which maintain a robust online presence but, in a country in which civil society has long been stifled, are less active offline. The core of Haqq support is similarly based on grassroots activism and street protests, although Haqq's presence is now arguably greater online than offline due to the imprisonment of its leadership and the post-2011 rise of the February 14 Coalition as the main driver of youth activism on the streets. Whilst al-Wefaq continued to behave in the manner of a tolerated political society, maintaining a responsible, moderate tone in its posts and concerning itself with issues of policy, Haqq's focus on street activism is reflected in its social media activity. In spite of Haqq's similarities to al-Wefaq in both origins and organisational structure, the group's approach appears to be closer to the February 14 Coalition. Both Haqq and the February 14 Coalition's Facebook followers are mostly Bahrain-based, and many of them also appear to participate in the groups' offline activities. The February 14 Coalition in particular uses Facebook as a tool to communicate information about its offline activism- for example, when and where the next protest will be held, or posting captions and images detailing the group's latest clashes with police, highlighting any perceived successes. This can be seen in the fact that all of the group's Facebook posts appear in Arabic, including all of the hashtag campaigns featured in this study- Facebook is used primarily to inform and communicate with local supporters, rather than to publicise the Coalition's platform and perspective on the 'big issues' internationally. In contrast, the Pearl Charter, which sets out these views, has been translated by the group into English and Russian, with their website stating that a Chinese version is forthcoming.[807]

The final coding frame applied to the Shiʿi opposition's textual data across the sample period sought to analyse the purpose/s behind each Facebook post. A maximum of three purpose sub-categories were assigned, based on the explicit or manifest content of each post, according to criteria contained in the coding manual. As such, the Purpose frames were not mutually-exclusive, as one post could be coded as having up to three separate 'purposes.' For example, a post might seek to remember the sacrifices made during the 2011 uprising whilst calling for further protest activity and affirming the group's position to

[807] See: www.14f2011.com/ar/meethaq

remain on the streets until its goal of bringing about the fall of the regime is achieved. Coding for purpose within the Shiʿi opposition's Facebook posts was designed to gain broader insights into how each group utilises social media, including understanding the messages they were most concerned with communicating to their audiences.

In analysing the purpose of the Shiʿi opposition's posts, content was first categorised according to 'major' and 'minor' frames- the former being a broader categorisation of a post's purpose/s, and the latter involving a more detailed breakdown of purpose sub-categories. The results of the analysis of the Purpose frame are presented in Tables 8-11.

Purpose	Al-Wefaq		February 14 Coalition		Haqq	
	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts	No. posts	% total posts
Commemoration/ Remembrance	25	19%	38	12%	10	11%
Mobilisation	**36**	**27%**	**233**	**74%**	**50**	**57%**
Information	10	7%	47	15%	**38**	**43%**
Drawing attention to grievances	**39**	**29%**	16	5%	12	14%
Promoting ideology	26	19%	**127**	**40%**	19	22%

Table 8: The Purpose frame

Al-Wefaq	Number of Posts	% Total Posts
Commemoration		
Martyrdom	9	6.7%
Anniversary of uprising	13	9.6%
Anniversary of imprisonment	2	1.5%
Other anniversary	-	-
Ashura	1	0.7%
Mobilisation		
Announcing march/ rally	-	-
Update on march/ rally underway	24	17.8%
Informing on completed march/ rally	5	3.7%
Announcing other protest activity	-	-
Update on other protest activity underway	1	0.7%
Informing on completed other protest activity	1	0.7%
Announcing social media campaign	-	-
Information		
Informing on security services activity	7	5.2%
Informing on other government activity	2	1.5%
Promoting new policy/ initiative	2	1.5%
Promoting new third party policy	3	2.2%
Informing on news item	-	-
Appealing for information/ volunteers	1	0.7%
Grievances		
Injuries and wounds	23	17.0%
Socio- economic issues	-	-
Sectarian discrimination	-	-
Freedom of speech/ assembly	7	5.2%
Other human rights issues	3	2.2%
Political prisoners	6	4.4%
Ideology		
Making demands of the government	6	4.4%
Outlining ideological position	1	0.7%
Affirming commitment to continuing opposition activities	19	14.1%
Expressing encouragement or appreciation	-	-
Promoting achievements	-	-

Table 9: Breakdown of the Purpose frame- Al-Wefaq

February 14 Coalition	Number of Posts	% Total Posts
Commemoration		
Martyrdom	5	1.6%
Anniversary of uprising	14	4.4%
Anniversary of imprisonment	2	0.6%
Other anniversary	1	0.3%
Ashura	16	5.1%
Mobilisation		
Announcing march/ rally	5	1.6%
Update on march/ rally underway	102	32.3%
Informing on completed march/ rally	21	6.6%
Announcing other protest activity	4	1.3%
Update on other protest activity underway	92	29.1%
Informing on completed other protest activity	5	1.6%
Announcing social media campaign	4	1.3%
Information		
Informing on security services activity	25	7.9%
Informing on other government activity	1	0.3%
Promoting new policy/ initiative	13	4.1%
Promoting new third party policy	-	-
Informing on news item	7	2.2%
Appealing for information/ volunteers	-	-
Grievances		
Injuries and wounds	4	1.3%
Socio- economic issues	-	-
Sectarian discrimination	-	-
Freedom of speech/ assembly	1	0.3%
Other human rights issues	2	0.6%
Political prisoners	9	2.8%
Ideology		
Making demands of the government	2	0.6%
Outlining ideological position	19	6.0%
Affirming commitment to continuing opposition activities	76	24.1%
Expressing encouragement or appreciation	15	4.7%
Promoting achievements	15	4.7%

Table 10: Breakdown of the Purpose frame- February 14 Coalition

Haqq	Number of Posts	% Total Posts
Commemoration		
Martyrdom	3	3.4%
Anniversary of uprising	5	5.7%
Anniversary of imprisonment	-	-
Other anniversary	-	-
Ashura	2	2.3%
Mobilisation		
Announcing march/ rally	4	4.5%
Update on march/ rally underway	26	29.5%
Informing on completed march/ rally	-	-
Announcing other protest activity	-	-
Update on other protest activity underway	16	18.2%
Informing on completed other protest activity	1	1.1%
Announcing social media campaign	3	3.4%
Information		
Informing on security services activity	22	25.0%
Informing on other government activity	-	-
Promoting new policy/ initiative	-	-
Promoting new third party policy	-	-
Informing on news item	13	14.8%
Appealing for information/ volunteers	3	3.4%
Grievances		
Injuries and wounds	6	6.8%
Socio- economic issues	-	-
Sectarian discrimination	-	-
Freedom of speech/ assembly	1	1.1%
Other human rights issues	-	-
Political prisoners	5	5.7%
Ideology		
Making demands of the government	1	1.1%
Outlining ideological position	2	2.3%
Affirming commitment to continuing opposition activities	11	12.5%
Expressing encouragement or appreciation	4	4.5%
Promoting achievements	1	1.1%

Table 11: Breakdown of the Purpose frame- Haqq

The above indicates that Mobilisation is clearly the Major Purpose Frame most utilised across the Shiʿi opposition as a whole, being the most-featured category by both the February 14 Coalition (74% of total posts) and Haqq (57% of total posts) and the second most-featured by al-Wefaq (27% of total posts). Within this, the sub-category 'update on march/ rally underway' was most heavily featured by all three groups, in 32% of February 14 Coalition posts, 30% of Haqq posts and 18% of al-Wefaq posts. A significant

number of February 14 Coalition and Haqq textual posts were also coded within the Mobilisation frame as an 'update on other protest activity underway'- 29% and 18% of posts respectively. This sub-category refers to forms of activism such as strikes and sit-ins or private events such as conferences designed to promote the opposition group's cause. For example, the February 14 Coalition posted several images on the anniversary of the uprising of groups of youths who had taken a break from protesting and were being fed by volunteers, with captions such as "firm cooperation between the local public and the heroes of the squares whilst lunchtime meals are handed out."[808] That the majority of posts within the Mobilisation category involved *ongoing* forms of activism adds further weight to this study's observation that posting information about offline activism in real-time on social media continues to be an important tool for Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition, in particular the February 14 Coalition. In fact this study's analysis of the February 14 Coalition's textual and image data suggests that this is the group's dominant social media strategy. The focus on mobilisation across all of the Shiʿi opposition groups examined also complements a number of studies which have shown that Facebook is most often used as a "mobilization tool" to prepare supporters for "offline action"[809] and as a "springboard" for the recruitment of new supporters.[810]

Promoting Ideology was the second most prevalent framing category within the February 14 Coalition's textual posts, featuring in 40% of posts across the survey period, and most prominently during the anniversary of the uprising. Of this, 24% were attributed to the 'affirming commitment to continuing opposition activities' sub-category. Emphasising characteristics such as steadfastness (*ṣumūd*), dignity (*karāma*) and resistance (*shumūkh*) are common rhetorical motifs within the February 14 Coalition's social media posts, many of which call on supporters to take pride in the group's (modest) successes and pledge to continue the uprising for as long as it takes, regardless of the costs involved. Statements such as "we will not return to the pre-14 February 2011 situation. The knights of dissent stand firm in the squares"[811] were

[808] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=911038118947220&id=178269738890732
[809] Tsatsou, Panayiota and Zhao, Yupei. 'A "Two-Level Social Capital Analysis" of the Role of Online Communication in Civic Activism: Lessons From the Role of Facebook in the Sunflower Movement,' *Social Media + Society*, 2:4 (2016): 2.
[810] Gerbaudo, Paolo., 2012. *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. London: Pluto Press, 145.
[811] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=910958138955218&id=178269738890732

particularly common during the anniversary of the uprising, but featured throughout the sample period, as evidenced by the group's fourth most-cited hashtag #The revolution refuses to be broken (#*thawra_taʾbā_al-inkisār*, see Table 2). The focus on continuing revolutionary activities also ties in with the aforementioned importance the February 14 Coalition places on commemorating the uprising's martyrs.

Al-Wefaq and Haqq showed comparatively less concern with promoting ideology in their textual posts, with 'continuing opposition activities' the sub-category most utilised by both groups' within the Ideology frame, at 14% and 13% of total posts respectively. Al-Wefaq was characteristically moderate in its emphasis on continuing its peaceful activism, referring to "renewing the commitment to continuing the movement for freedom"[812] whilst avoiding any overt attacks on the authorities. Haqq however employed rhetoric similar to that of the February 14 Coalition, with statements such as:

Be certain that we are continuing in our revolution, this is our promise as revolutionary opposition forces, we will not give up on our people and our clerics [ʿulamāʾ] *and our freedoms and our injured, our followers and our exiles, our revolution will remain even at the cost of our lives*.[813]

That all three opposition groups did not appear to use Facebook as a platform for what Hartley et al refer to as "identity formation" in promoting their ideology suggests that they are aware that their Facebook pages are essentially preaching to the converted, and as such the "process of consensus formation"[814] was less important to followers, who already broadly agreed with their group's worldview. This can be contrasted with the early online activism which emerged in Bahrain prior to the outbreak of protests on 14 February 2011, in which supporters were asked to vote via the forum *Bahrain Online* in favour of the proposed date and location of Bahrain's version of the Arab Spring (see Chapter 6).

Al-Wefaq's comparatively greater focus on issues coded within the 'Grievances' sub-frame echoes its aforementioned preoccupation with matters such as freedom of assembly, crimes committed by security

[812] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10153249730083072&id=203200448071
[813] www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=654214771351142&id=251280431644580
[814] Hartley, Lisa; Lala, Girish; Donaghue, Ngaire and McGarty, Craig. 'How Activists Respond to Social Structure in Offline and Online Contexts,' *Journal of Social Issues*, 72:2 (2016): 393.

forces and the imprisonment of dissidents within the 'Social Grievances' frame. 17% of al-Wefaq textual posts mentioned 'injuries and wounds,' in contrast to only 7% of Haqq and 1% of February 14 Coalition posts. A higher number of Al-Wefaq posts also made mention of 'freedom of speech and assembly' and 'other human rights issues.' These results fit with the earlier discussion surrounding the types of people depicted in Bahraini Shiʿi opposition visual posts, which indicated that the February 14 Coalition and Haqq were more likely to post images of clashes between protesters and security forces, whereas al-Wefaq would often depict the aftermath of the clashes instead, typically by posting images of injuries. An analysis of Haqq and the February 14 Coalition visual posts also showed that they often posted images of weapons (7% and 7.1% of total posts respectively) in keeping with both group's status as underground antisystem movements willing to confront the security forces on the streets. These posts were typically photographs of weapons used by the army or police, such as images of rifles aimed at protesters from police vehicles, or piles of leftover teargas canisters collected by activists.

Within the Information sub-frame, the only significant point to note is that all three groups appeared to utilise their Facebook accounts to inform supporters about the activities of the security services- occurring in 25% of Haqq total posts, 8% of February 14 Coalition posts and 5% of al-Wefaq posts. Tsatsou and Zhao have suggested that "the information-dissemination and information-sharing functions of Facebook seem to be the main driving force for the online social capital that activists form on the platform,"[815] and warning supporters about the movements or activities of the security services is a strong example of this. Providing such information would of course only be tactically effective if conducted in real-time, and therefore adds further weight to the conclusion that Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition, and in particular the antisystem groups, employs Facebook as a tool for augmenting offline activities, and that such Arab Spring-era tactics remain effective in spite of the government's heavy crackdown on both offline protests and citizen journalism.

[815] Tsatsou and Zhao, *A Two-Level Social Capital Analysis*, 13.

Conclusion

This chapter's close study of the Shiʿi opposition's Facebook activism revealed the differing priorities and approaches of the three groups examined, in particular surrounding the participation in and promotion of clashes with security forces, the staging of protests during religious festivals and the role of clerics in opposition activism. The study also demonstrated that while religious themes featured across all groups, differences existed within the opposition surrounding the utilisation of Shiʿi motifs and historical narratives vis-à-vis Shiʿi religious doctrine and practice. The relative absence of posts mentioning Sunni themes indicates that all three groups do not use their online presence to position themselves in opposition to Bahrain's Sunni community, their activism rather appears to be directed toward the government and the royal family and at domestic grievances on an issue-by-issue basis.

By extending this thesis's analysis of the changing nature of opposition activism in Bahrain to the online sphere, this chapter has sought to account for the shifting means of political participation which have emerged alongside technological developments, and reinforce rather than redefine pre-existing forms of opposition politics. Tilly and Tarrow have commented that researchers can "learn more by examining what activists *do* during major episodes of contention," rather than simply relying on "what activists say or later write about their activities."[816] In this sense social media sites such as Facebook function as record, curated in real-time, of the activities of political and societal actors, and serve as an unobtrusive window into the world of entities which might otherwise remain off-limits. Examining a group's online activism enables the researcher to avoid some of the pitfalls of interview and fieldwork research, as social media contributors are unaware of their status as research subjects, yet are capable of indirectly offering similarly rich and valuable insights into their ideology and practice. Indeed the centrality of social media to contemporary activism and politics more broadly, even in authoritarian regimes, has meant that any study which fails to consider a group's online activities risks omitting a potentially critical reference point in the landscape of their political participation. This chapter has sought to bridge the gap between the online and offline

[816] Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 39. Emphasis in the original.

activism of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition, in an effort to highlight the inter-dependency between the two fora, as well as underscore the growing importance of social media in providing an outlet for opposition groups' continuing to participate in and contribute to politics from within authoritarianism political systems.

Chapter 8- Discussion of Findings: A New Status Quo

This thesis has provided insights into Bahrain's increasingly divided Shiʿi opposition groups, many of which have pursued divergent strategies in engaging the regime, stretching from the streets to the ballot box, and have differing visions for the kind of participatory politics they would like to build in Bahrain. This chapter will incorporate the findings of the previous chapter's social media study into a broader discussion surrounding the post-2011 dismantling of Bahrain's liberalised autocracy and transition to authoritarianism. In particular, it will consider the implications of the government's crackdown on the tolerated opposition, which has effectively been forced underground to compete with other antisystem groups. This chapter will build on some of this thesis' key findings in examining debates in the literature concerning the stability of liberalised autocracy and the links between political liberalisation and democratisation. It will conclude with a discussion of Bahrain's new status quo, which features entrenched state repression and an increasing reliance on foreign support to guard against future opposition attempts to redefine the nature of political participation.

Eliminating the Tolerated Opposition: Explaining the Fate of al-Wefaq

The Al Khalifa regime was not the only important actor unprepared for the Arab Spring's challenge to Bahrain's liberalised autocracy, al-Wefaq also struggled to re-position itself vis-à-vis both the regime and its constituents in the wake of the events of 2011. Some of this is borne out in the findings of the social media study presented in Chapter 7, which suggest that whilst still a legal opposition society, al-Wefaq was torn between reasserting its values on issues such as non-violent protest, human rights and social grievances in an effort to regain lost ground among its supporters, and positioning itself as a reliable participant for any future political dialogue with the government that accepted the law's encroachment on its political activities. In continuing to post images of non-violent protests which were not formally sanctioned, and demonstrating sympathy for protesters affiliated with other groups who were injured in clashes with security forces, al-Wefaq occupied the contradictory space of endorsing the Shiʿi community's right to express its dissatisfaction with the regime in an abstract sense, whilst simultaneously vowing to adhere to

the regime's demands to suspend its own protest activities. Al-Wefaq's social media posts throughout 2015 indicated that the group was prepared to indirectly test the boundaries of the regime's rules of the game, despite the emergence of ever-more restrictive red lines and a lack of interest on the part of the regime in meaningful negotiation with the tolerated opposition. Al-Wefaq's reassertion of its ideological position, including its emphasis on the Religious frame in its visual posts and its focus on grievances such as the destruction of Shiʿi religious sites, was arguably a risky but necessary strategy in light of the threat posed by the antisystem opposition to its support base and reputation as Bahrain's leading Shiʿi opposition society.

The contradictions inherent within al-Wefaq's attempts to balance its conflicting interests with both the government and the Shiʿi community had already caused the group significant damage in the year prior to Chapter 7's 2015 social media study. Looking back, it appears that the 2014 parliamentary elections were the final test for al-Wefaq, when pressure from antisystem groups for a complete opposition boycott made the tolerated opposition's participation politically untenable.[817] Al-Wefaq was essentially caught between a rock and a hard place- had they stood for election, powerful antisystem voices would have accused them of selling out to the regime, further eroding their popular legitimacy and support within the Shiʿi community. However, not participating eventually cost al-Wefaq its status as a tolerated, legal opposition group.

Following al-Wefaq's announcement of its decision to boycott the 2014 elections, the Supreme Court suspended the group's activities for three months, after the Ministry of Justice accused al-Wefaq of failing to observe administrative regulations.[818] This ban was later reversed, but the regime continued it's targeting of the group, charging it with publishing false news and threatening national security via its social media accounts in February 2015, and arresting its Secretary General Sheikh ʿAli Salman in late 2014 on charges including plotting to overthrow the political system.[819] Al-Wefaq leaders interviewed throughout 2015 were divided as to whether the regime would seek to ban their group outright. One prominent al-

[817] Khalaf, *Foreword,* xiv.
[818] Hassan, Mohamed, 'The Dilemmas of Bahrain's Opposition Group Alwefaq: Between Fragmentation and an Underground Movement' *Global Voices,* 5 May 2015, https://globalvoices.org/2015/05/05/the-dilemmas-of-bahrains-opposition-group-alwefaq-between-fragmentation-and-an-underground-movement/
[819] BBC News, 'Bahrain Opposition Leader Sheikh Ali Salman Jailed,' 16 June 2015, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33147198

Wefaq-affiliated cleric told the researcher that he thought the government had anticipated that al-Wefaq would boycott the parliament, and that they had simply used the boycott as an excuse to crack down- "their mood is different between now and 2006. They are looking for others to take our place."[820] In a 2015 media interview former al-Wefaq MP Matar Matar agreed with this sentiment, claiming that the government sought to "portray us as rejectionists who refuse to participate in elections in order to escalate the situation" and that "a decision had been taken to crackdown on even the moderate sides of the opposition who are calling for negotiation."[821] Other al-Wefaq leaders however told the researcher in 2015 that they did not believe the government would dissolve al-Wefaq- "if they do that it means all their talking about democracy, it will be no use. If the biggest society in Bahrain, who most of the time are talking about peace, is banned every democratic thing in Bahrain will stop."[822] Even as little as one month prior to a court-ordered suspension of al-Wefaq in June 2016, a former al-Wefaq MP speaking with the researcher was adamant that the government would not ban the group.[823]

The array of different positions on the matter within al-Wefaq's inner circle indicates that the group was unable to speak with one voice about its troubled relationship with the regime, which suggests that it was unlikely to have agreed on a contingency plan in the event that al-Wefaq was forced underground. This adds to the perception, highlighted by al-Wefaq's publicising of other groups' non-violent street activism in lieu of its own in Chapter 7's social media study, that the group is merely reacting to events rather than seeking to influence them- a key criticism levelled against al-Wefaq by supporters of the antisystem opposition.

Al-Wefaq was formally suspended in June 2016,[824] shortly after an appeals court more than doubled ʿAli Salman's prison sentence to nine years.[825] The dissolution of al-Wefaq was confirmed a month later, when

[820] Interview with opposition leader 21 December 2015.
[821] Hassan, *The Dilemmas of Bahrain's Opposition Group Alwefaq*, n.p.
[822] Interview with opposition leader 14 December 2015.
[823] Interview with opposition leader 16 May 2016.
[824] Al Jazeera, 'Bahraini Court Suspends Al-Wefaq Opposition Group,' 15 June 2016, www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/bahraini-court-suspends-al-wefaq-opposition-group-160614133354700.html
[825] Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 'Bahrain Court of Appeal Increases the Sentence of Al-Wefaq's Sheikh Ali Salman to Nine Years in Prison,' 30 May 2016, www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/7849

the group was charged with a number of offenses including supporting terrorism, and was officially banned.[826] The government also revoked the citizenship of al-Wefaq's spiritual leader and Bahrain's most revered Shi'i cleric Sheikh 'Isa al-Qasim, accusing him of financial crimes and stoking sectarian tensions.[827] Ultimately, al-Wefaq was unable to represent the views of its constituents, who were less inclined to negotiate within an increasingly repressive political climate, whilst retaining its included, tolerated status within a system which was steadily dismantling its liberalising reforms and was equally ill-disposed to compromise.

Lust-Okar has noted that tolerated opposition groups typically pay a heavy price if they cross a liberalised-autocratic regime's red lines- "they not only face the same strong sanctions that illegal opponents face, they also may lose the gains they have made. They may lose their ability to play the game and all the benefits that this provides."[828] In transitioning from a liberalised autocracy to full-authoritarianism, the Al Khalifa's red lines became so restrictive that only regime-loyal opposition was tolerated. After largely abandoning the veneer of democratisation, centred on symbolic institutions such as a parliament that permits a measure of genuine political debate, an authoritarian state has little need for a tolerated opposition, which arguably also carries a symbolic function. Groups such as al-Wefaq, whose "main policy goals cannot be mapped onto the main political dimensions of authoritarian politics,"[829] are therefore excluded. Al-Wefaq's dissolution arguably completes the government's dismantling of King Hamad's experiment with liberalised autocracy, suggesting that the Al Khalifa hardline faction, long opposed to the 2001 NAC reforms, is now firmly in control of the regime.[830] According to Albrecht, "the disappearance of… tolerated opposition indicates a substantial increase in repression and confinement for societal activism, and possibly a subsystemic change within an authoritarian regime."[831] The decline of al-Wefaq's fortunes

[826] Al Jazeera, 'Bahrain Dissolves Main Shia Opposition Al-Wefaq Party,' 18 July 2016, www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/bahrain-dissolves-main-opposition-party-160717132556468.html
[827] BBC News, 'Bahrain Revokes Top Shia Cleric Isa Qassim's Citizenship,' 20 June 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36578000
[828] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 171.
[829] Trejo, *The Ballot and the Street*, 336.
[830] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 183.
[831] Albrecht, *Political Opposition and Arab Authoritarianism*, 21.

appears to indicate that Shiʿi political participation in Bahrain must once again be conducted within the confines of authoritarianism.

The Antisystem Revival: A New Protest Culture

Chapter 7's social media study provides a clear example as to why the nature of opposition political participation in Bahrain has shifted in the post-2011 era, in contrast to earlier periods of popular mobilisation. One important finding of this study, when considered within the broader context of Bahrain's domestic politics, is that online activism appears to be of greatest benefit to antisystem opposition groups, as opposed to the tolerated or regime-loyal opposition which are permitted to operate within the confines of formal politics. Social media appears to have altered the political opportunity structure within Bahrain's opposition, a process which according to McAdam is triggered by any development that "serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured."[832] Whilst the Al Khalifa regime, with the help of GCC troops, has been largely successful in suppressing Bahrain's uprising in the physical world, employing tried and tested means of repression and re-establishing its full control over all domestic media, it has been unable to replicate this success in the online world. Peterson has argued that "discussion and the exchange of views via social media have provided an advantage over physical demonstrations, both in terms of the difficulties in arranging such forbidden displays and in maintaining anonymity for participants."[833] Shirazi has observed that the shift in activism to the online world in the wake of Bahrain's 2011 crackdown has "intensified" the ability of those with "radical views about the socio-economic and political situation and demand for regime change"[834] to promote their agenda to supporters. Social media and the internet have diluted the impact of authoritarian repression on opposition in Bahrain- whilst it may be just as difficult for groups such as the February 14 Coalition to

[832] McAdam, Doug., 1999. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 41.
[833] Peterson, *The GCC States*, 17.
[834] Shirazi, Farid, 'Social Media and the Social Movements in the Middle East and North Africa,' *Information Technology and People*, 26:1 (2013): 35.

achieve their aims in the physical world, the regime is no longer able to heavily restrict their ability to promote their objectives and communicate with supporters.

The February 14 Coalition's aforementioned Pearl Charter explicitly states that "audio-visual and written" forms of media are of "prominent importance" in the group's "revolutionary work."[835] The Charter lists three ways in which the group aims to utilise "media," which we can assume largely refers to online sources, in its struggle against Bahrain's monarchy:

1. To "expose the repressive brutality of the illegitimate Al-Khalifa regime and mercenaries, and condemn the occupation of Saudi forces and the complicity of the Western countries by documenting and widely disseminating information and facts, organizing seminars and press conferences, conducting audio-visual interviews, and any other appropriate means."
2. To "expose the genuine demands of the revolution and revolutionaries to the world, publicise it to media around the world and impose it on the regional and international scenes."
3. To "produce audio-visual and written material on the revolution of the people of Bahrain and their historical struggle against the illegitimate Al-Khalifa regime, to preserve it within the cultural and historical heritage of the country."[836]

These statements demonstrate that the group is fully aware of the potential of utilising social media and online communications technologies to circumvent traditional media restrictions on criticising the regime and expressing dissent, and that the February 14 Coalition views online activism as critical to its ability to promote its cause to supporters both in Bahrain and abroad. Its emphasis on preserving and documenting evidence of the uprising as part of Bahrain's heritage also highlights the nativist undertones to the group's discourse mentioned in Chapter 7, indicating that the Coalition remains focused on its local context including advancing its domestic political demands.

[835] The February 14 Youth Coalition, *Lulu Charter for 14th of February Revolution,* n.p.
[836] The February 14 Youth Coalition, *Lulu Charter for 14th of February Revolution,* n.p.

The impact of the internet on opposition groups' ability to communicate and mobilise during periods of intense repression is not restricted to antisystem groups. Indeed as Chapter 7's social media study has shown, al-Wefaq maintained a significant social media presence and has also sought to utilise online tools of political participation. However, it appears that despite this, the antisystem groups have more greatly benefited from the emergence of online spaces as alternative venues for activism. This is likely due to two reasons: The internet's ability to amplify antisystem voices which the regime would have been more readily able to suppress in the pre-internet world, and the structural affinity of underground, antisystem groups for the dynamic and largely anonymous form of activism typically produced by online activists.

On the first point, it is clear that during the NAC era the tolerated opposition groups which operated legally in Bahrain typically enjoyed broader and less-restrictive means of organising and communicating with supporters than banned antisystem groups, whose ability to promote their ideology and activism was heavily curtailed by government repression. Tolerated groups like al-Wefaq, which viewed themselves as being in direct competition with antisystem challengers such as Haqq, also had an interest in ensuring that antisystem groups struggled to promote themselves as an alternative opposition within the Shiʿi community. Prior to the widespread adoption of internet-based communications technologies, the antisystem opposition had fewer tangible avenues to communicate with supporters and appeal to new constituents compared with the tolerated opposition, which was permitted to publish and distribute its own newspapers (such as the aforementioned *al-Wasat*) and could legally promote its positions in mosques and maʾtams affiliated with the Shiʿi clerical establishment. Social media in particular levelled the playing field, in that it enabled antisystem groups to disrupt the tolerated opposition's monopoly on information by enabling supporters and potential supporters to bypass the tightly regulated traditional media and access ideas and practice forms of activism which had been suppressed by both the government and the tolerated opposition. By removing restrictions on antisystem groups' ability to communicate and promote their cause, the internet effectively strengthened the antisystem at the expense of the tolerated opposition.

The second point, that antisystem groups are structurally better suited to online forms of activism than the tolerated opposition, and are hence better placed to take advantage of new platforms such as social media, is borne out in the research presented in Chapter 7. Part of this is simply due to demographics- in the words of one seasoned al-Wefaq leader, "they are the ones who master the social media. We hardly manage to use it."[837] Because groups such as the February 14 Coalition are understood to have a high number of supporters among the youth demographic, in contrast to the traditional, cleric-backed al-Wefaq, antisystem youth groups are better able to draw on the tech-savvy skills of their members to promote themselves online. According to Diwan, "the February 14 Youth Coalition is showing great creativity in its use of social media to direct acts of civil disobedience... The group is proud of the protest culture it helped take root."[838] The considerable flexibility demonstrated by the February 14 Coalition in the data examined in Chapter 7's social media study, seen through its interconnected, cross-platform approach which incorporated information from a range of different internet sources into its Facebook posts, and its presence across every conceivable social media platform and messaging application in use in Bahrain, has been key in developing and driving this new protest culture. Chapter 7's study also revealed that the February 14 Coalition's social media activities are spread across a greater number of villages and suburbs in Bahrain than those of al-Wefaq, whose posts in contrast appeared to be centrally-managed with little cross-platform interconnectivity, and mentioned fewer geographical locations throughout Bahrain.

In addition, the February 14 Coalition's decentralised and anonymous structure in the physical world has largely been replicated in the online world, which enables it to operate much more freely than al-Wefaq, whose official online activities are constrained by its comparatively transparent organisational structure. The government for example can easily hold al-Wefaq cadres responsible for social media activities which allegedly breach Bahraini law, with legislation concerning incitement and terrorism in particular frequently used against known online activists. In spite of regime efforts to hack anonymous activists' Twitter accounts

[837] Interview with opposition leader 22 December 2015.
[838] Diwan, *Breaking Taboos*, 6.

and the use of other nefarious techniques such as spyware and malware,[839] the February 14 Coalition has largely managed to leverage its anonymous, decentralised organisational structure to maintain its online protest culture.

The online anonymity of most antisystem activists, including grassroots supporters of groups such as Haqq and Wafaʾ whose known leadership is currently in prison, has contributed to the development of what Alsayed refers to as "novel templates of activism,"[840] which typically involve a combination of online and offline activities. Traditional methods of expressing dissent, such as petitioning the ruler (used as recently as during the 1990s *Intifāḍa*), have been discarded in favour of creative techniques which draw attention to the antisystem groups' cause yet preserve the anonymity of activists. Examples include the aforementioned coordinated chanting of *Allahu Akbar* from the rooftops of Shiʿi villages at night, the sounding of car horns to the tune of *yasquṭ Ḥamad* (down with Hamad),[841] consumer boycotts of government-aligned businesses and attempts to trigger a run on state-owned banks by urging savers to withdraw all of their funds on the same day.[842] Most of these initiatives depend on social media and/or messaging aps to facilitate communication between activists, much of which is anonymous- the participants themselves do not typically know the identities of other collaborators,[843] which provides an additional layer of protection.

Chapter 7's social media study demonstrated that the February 14 Coalition in particular appeared to use online activism to augment its offline activities, for example through its focus on promoting ongoing protest events and clashes with security forces in real-time. The study also highlighted the geographic spread of February 14 Coalition activism, with the group mentioning almost three times as many locations across the sample period than al-Wefaq. Khalaf has described the scattering of protests across a broad geographic area as a deliberate technique developed during the 2011 uprising, which "succeeded in reducing the ability of the security forces to contain the protests."[844] Again, many of the offline protests captured in this

[839] Jones, *Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics*, 246.
[840] Alsayed, *The Impatience of Youth*, 102.
[841] Horne, *Tn Tn Ttn and Torture in Bahrain*, 154.
[842] Bhatia and Shehabi, *Shifting Contours of Activism*, 121.
[843] Interview with activist 22 December 2015.
[844] Khalaf, *Foreword,* xv.

thesis' social media data were organised online and were promoted with slogans and hashtags across social media platforms and between different antisystem groups- for example, the popular *#ʾiḍrāb_al-ʾibāʾ* ('the strike of dissent') and *#nidāʾ_al-ʾibāʾ* ('the call of dissent') campaigns which featured on both the February 14 Coalition and Haqq's Facebook pages but were ignored by al-Wefaq. Hybrid campaigns involving a combination of online and offline activism appear to be uniquely suited to antisystem groups such as the February 14 Coalition, whose decentralised and anonymous organisational structure complicate government attempts to hold opposition leaders accountable for online content, which has been used for example to justify crackdowns on al-Wefaq, Waʿad and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights.[845] The advent of online activism appears to have played to the natural strengths of antisystem opposition actors, giving them a platform to relatively freely organise and promote their views previously unavailable to them due to government repression and resistance from competitors within the tolerated opposition.

What Next for the Antisystem Opposition?

The regime's 2016 dissolution of al-Wefaq has effectively pushed all opposition in Bahrain underground and has significantly strengthened voices within the Shiʿi community calling for the overthrow of the Al Khalifa by any means and at any cost. The February 14 Coalition for example had initially adopted the NAC-era demands of the antisystem political societies Haqq and Wafaʾ, which had opposed the 2002 Constitution and demanded a return to the original reforms promised in the 2001 referendum, which in their view would facilitate Bahrain's transformation into a true constitutional monarchy.[846] The February 14 Coalition, Haqq and the other antisystem groups began the uprising with calls for the removal of the Prime Minister, but the regime's violent crackdown led to an escalation of their demands and the formation the Alliance for a Republic. According to Alimi and Meyer, "when authorities foreclose institutional means of redress, extra-institutional action appears to be the most promising route to influence."[847] Bahrain's shift

[845] See for example: Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 'More Arrests and Jail Sentences in Bahrain Over Social Media Posts,' 20 June 2016, http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/7919
[846] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 185-187.
[847] Alimi, Eitan and Meyer, David S, 'Seasons of Change: Arab Spring and Political Opportunities,' *Swiss Political Science Review* 17:4 (2011): 476.

from liberalised autocracy to full-authoritarianism has removed the limited means of redress which previously existed for disaffected citizens in the form of parliamentary elections and tolerated opposition groups which were nominally responsive to the concerns of their constituents. Looking to the future, the biggest question now seems to be how Bahrain's antisystem groups will seek to advance their participation in an increasingly repressive political climate with little tolerance for dissent. Whilst it is unwise for this thesis to attempt to predict future trends within Bahrain's opposition movement, it is clear that some of the emerging dynamics discussed in previous chapters, including the disruptive impact of online methods of activism, inter-generational divides, government attempts to cement sectarian divide and rule and the increasing fragmentation of the Shiʿi opposition, will be key in determining the nature of political participation in Bahrain.

One of this thesis's contributions has been its detailed examination of the antisystem February 14 Coalition, which is yet to be the subject of in-depth academic research in spite of the critical role it has played in both Bahrain's 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising and in the country's post-uprising transition from liberalised autocracy to authoritarianism. The February 14 Coalition is typically described by scholars of Bahrain in terms such as "an increasingly radicalised protest movement"[848] or a "politicized youth movement unwilling to surrender"[849] but most academic studies which touch on the group fail to discuss its activism or demands in detail. The overall lack of information about the February 14 Coalition has led to a number of misconceptions about the goals of its members, most prominent among them being the suggestion that the group is affiliated with or sponsored by Iran. Lori Plotkin Boghardt for example, has claimed the following:

February 14 leaders have been linked to well-established opposition figures currently in jail, including several from the Shiite opposition party al-Haq. Some believe that the youth coalition is also receiving funds from wealthy Shiites throughout the Gulf. Indeed, its success in mobilizing and sustaining support on the

[848] Kinninmont, *Bahrain: Rentierism and Beyond,* 114
[849] Jones, Toby C. and Shehabi, Ala'a, 'Bahrain's Revolutionaries,' *Foreign Policy,* 2 January 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/01/02/bahrains-revolutionaries/

ground has been impressive, so its leaders may well be benefitting from organizational, tactical, and financial assistance offered by longstanding opposition elements and prominent Gulf Shiites.[850]

Plotkin Boghardt was unable to provide any evidence to support her claims that the February 14 Coalition owes its success to wealthy Gulf Shiʿa, and it is unclear to which "prominent Gulf Shiites" she could be referring, and whether Iranians are included among them. Likewise, the links between the Coalition and imprisoned Haqq leaders are also unsubstantiated, and whilst this thesis has also argued that the Coalition has expressed solidarity for, and indeed collaborates on social media campaigns with, Haqq and the other Alliance for a Republic groups, it is certainly a stretch to suggest that the Coalition's success on the streets is a result of Haqq's "organizational, tactical and financial assistance." This thesis has rather suggested the opposite- that Haqq, with its smaller number of supporters and much of its leadership in prison, has tended to follow the February 14 Coalition's lead, including adopting its protest slogans and hashtag campaigns. Indeed during the 2011 uprising Haqq threw its lot in with the youth protesters whose activism triggered Bahrain's Arab Spring unrest and who would go on to form the February 14 Coalition. This thesis' social media study failed to locate any evidence of links between the antisystem opposition groups and Iran or wealthy Gulf Shiʿa, and rather suggested that the February 14 Coalition and Haqq are mostly concerned with their domestic political context, with neither displaying an ideological affinity with Iran nor a sectarian worldview vis-à-vis Bahrain's Sunnis.

Another important debate which has emerged from both the academic literature and this thesis's fieldwork interviews is the potential for violence among antisystem groups. Social movement theorists have long argued that a regime's repression of non-violent activism can trigger a shift to more violent tactics, because it "delegitimises the state's monopoly on violence and strengthens the position of those activists who see reactive violence as legitimate."[851] Moreover, repression of non-violent protests can shift the political opportunity structure in favour of violent protests as the costs of violence decrease- protesters may as well

[850] Plotkin Boghardt, Lori, 'Youth Activism in the Small Gulf States,' Policy Watch, *The Washington Institute,* 28 March 2013, www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/youth-activism-in-the-small-gulf-states
[851] Kriesi, Hanspeter; Koopmans, Ruud; Duyvendak, Jan Willem and Giugni, Marco., 1995. *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 127.

fight back if they perceive the regime's response to be the same regardless. Della Porta and Tarrow have also suggested that when mass mobilisation, like that experienced by Bahrain in 2011, decreases, political violence typically increases.[852] According to Lawson, this is because "as mainstream challengers steadily lose their capacity to inspire and organise large-scale popular protest, radical organisations and entrepreneurs operating on the fringes of the political spectrum attempt to seize the initiative through the use of violent tactics."[853] This shift from moderates to radicals has arguably occurred in Bahrain, however the country has experienced comparatively little violence on the part of the antisystem opposition in the five years following the regime's crackdown on dissent and dismantling of liberalised autocracy.

Both this thesis' interview subjects and the existing literature on contemporary Bahrain are divided as to whether the antisystem opposition could turn to violence if the current repressive status quo continues. Nebil Husayn stands at one extreme end of the spectrum, arguing that "continued repression will encourage disenfranchised and persecuted protestors to begin attacking Bahraini, Saudi, and American installations or accept extremist or Islamist ideologies as alternatives to democracy."[854] Prominent activist Maryam al-Khawaja has noted that "an increasing number of Bahraini voices both inside the country and in exile started questioning the effectiveness of nonviolence"[855] and that "as the situation dragged on, the groups using violent means as a response to the systematic use of excessive force by the regime became more popular."[856] Citing international law concerning the protection of civilians in violent conflict, al-Khawaja argued that "if the opposition in Bahrain had chosen armed struggle as a method, there would have been mechanisms and more concrete actions for holding the regime accountable for the countless crimes it has committed against the population."[857]

[852] Della Porta, Donatella and Tarrow, Sidney, 'Unwanted Children- Political Violence and the Cycle of Protest in Italy 1966-1973,' *European Journal of Political Research,* 14:5 (1986): 609.
[853] Lawson, *Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain*, 106.
[854] Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*, 48.
[855] Al-Khawaja, *Crackdown*, 193.
[856] Al-Khawaja, *Crackdown*, 194.
[857] Al-Khawaja, *Crackdown*, 197.

A number of interview subjects took a hard line on opposition groups' use of violent tactics, justifying acts attributed to the February 14 Coalition such as throwing Molotov cocktails at security forces, also evidenced in this thesis' social media study, as self-defence: "When you kill, torture, arrest someone you should expect a reaction."[858] Others however attempted to play down such tactics, and emphasised that all opposition groups remained broadly committed to non-violence. According to one interview subject:

They are boys in masks burning tyres and setting bins alight. When you look at it, it looks quite scary but you send another Bahraini out and he just yells at them and they're all terrified. You yell at them and they just run home, you know? I think it's often not what it looks like.[859]

A former secular-nationalist opposition leader voiced similar sentiments about the adoption of violent tactics:

Of course there will be some incidents from time to time, frustrated people will go and manufacture rocket bombs from the internet, they do that… No I don't think it will develop into firearms, no… it's more young zealots or young enthusiastic people, but they are not armed, they are not a brigade in the militaristic sense of the word, they might have parades to show off, but nothing more than that.[860]

Shehabi and Jones have described the issue of opposition political violence as a paradox, arguing that activists understand that taking up weapons will only boost the regime and undermine their cause, but that there is significant frustration that non-violent tactics have not been effective in achieving change.[861] Bahrain's lengthy history of non-violent activism, stretching back almost a century, has also likely influenced the opposition's approach, as has the understanding voiced by many interview subjects that the country tends to experience alternate cycles of repression and more open political participation. Chapter 7's social media study demonstrated that al-Wefaq, Haqq and the February 14 Coalition all maintained strong rhetorical support for non-violent protest, and all three groups heavily emphasised this theme in

[858] Interview with activist 9 September 2015.
[859] Interview with professional 13 May 2015.
[860] Interview with opposition leader 5 January 2016.
[861] Shehabi and Jones, *Introduction*, 36.

both their visual and textual posts. The study also however presented evidence that both Haqq and the February 14 Coalition frequently engaged in violent clashes with security forces, and triumphantly promoted any perceived successes to their supporters. As highlighted in the above interview, their tactics largely involve homemade or makeshift weapons, and groups such as the February 14 Coalition can hardly be compared with the organised militias which took up arms in other parts of the Arab world following the Arab Spring. However, the potential for the pro-republic antisystem groups to radicalise further remains a distinct possibility. Wehrey has claimed that the February 14 Coalition is increasingly choosing improvised explosives over Molotovs in clashes with security forces,[862] and Coates Ulrichsen has argued that "elements of the opposition are growing more violent with an increase in bomb attacks carried out by members of the 'February 14' youth movement."[863] Anderson's classic study of opposition under authoritarianism has suggested that "regimes face the opposition they deserve," and that "violent, secretive and ideological regimes give rise to violent, secretive and ideological oppositions."[864] This thesis has argued that claims that the antisystem opposition has already embraced militantism are premature at best. However given the predilection of groups such as the February 14 Coalition for provoking security forces on the streets such a transformation cannot be ruled out should the current repressive status quo persist.

Strengthening Authoritarianism in Bahrain

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that Bahrain during the NAC period of 2001-2010 (and in particular 2006-2010) should be viewed as a liberalised autocracy, rather than a nation undergoing democratisation on a path to constitutional monarchy. It has also argued that the five year period following the 2011 Arab Spring-inspired uprising has seen Bahrain transform from a liberalised autocracy into a fully-authoritarian state, culminating in the 2016 dissolution of al-Wefaq, the country's last remaining tolerated Shiʿi opposition group. This is significant, in particular as the Bahraini government continues to present itself as being committed to implementing democratising reforms, and important Western allies of Bahrain

[862] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 95.
[863] Coates Ulrichsen, *Bahrain's Uprising*, 6.
[864] Anderson, Lisa, 'Lawless Government and Illegal Opposition: Reflections on the Middle East' *Journal of International Affairs*, 40:2 (1987): 228.

including the US and the UK have also sought to further this narrative. For example, in as recently as 2013 the British parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee asserted that Bahrain's 2002 constitution "affirmed Bahrain as a constitutional monarchy,"[865] and even in 2016 UK officials continued to claim that Bahrain is undertaking political reforms- a statement by the British Prime Minister's office in October commended "the progress that had been achieved through the King's ongoing domestic reform programme"[866] and in May Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond tweeted his support for Bahrain's "welcome commitment to continuing reforms."[867] The US government has adopted similar rhetoric, with a 2017 Congressional Research Service report for example claiming that the 2011 uprising "compelled the ruling family to undertake some modest reforms."[868] It is unclear which reforms are being referred to here, as in the five years following Bahrain's Arab Spring unrest the government has largely ignored the recommendations of the independent investigation it commissioned into the events of the crisis,[869] and has instead steadily dismantled its NAC era liberalising reforms in favour of a return to authoritarianism.

It is evident from the literature on democratisation that the mere existence of a parliament is an insufficient guarantee against authoritarianism. Boix and Svolik define a dictatorship as lacking one or both of "free and competitive legislative elections" and "an executive that is accountable to its citizens," noting that an "independently elected legislative body" does not preclude classifying a regime as a dictatorship.[870] In fact, Gandhi and Lust-Okar have argued that "as the cachet of elections as proof of democratisation wears off, incumbents who instituted them in response to pressures for democratisation generally neither abort them entirely nor allow them to result in regime change. Rather, elections become increasingly divorced from democratisation."[871] This appears to be the case in Bahrain, which held bi-elections following

[865] UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, 'The UK's Relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain,' 31 January 2013, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaff/88/8808.htm
[866] UK Prime Minister's Office, 'Press Release: PM Meeting with the King of Bahrain,' 26 October 2016, www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-the-king-of-bahrain-26-october-2016
[867] https://twitter.com/PHammondMP/status/737284713107337221
[868] Katzman, Kenneth, 'Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy,' *Congressional Research Service,* 14 February 2017, www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/95-1013.pdf, ii.
[869] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf,* 92.
[870] Boix, Carles and Svolik, Milan W, 'The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships,' *The Journal of Politics,* 75:2 (2013): 308.
[871] Gandhi and Lust-Okar, *Elections Under Authoritarianism,* 407.

al-Wefaq's withdrawal from parliament in 2011 and legislative elections in 2014. Rather than evidencing a continuation of the NAC era's democratising reforms, these elections more closely resembled those of an authoritarian government seeking to rubber-stamp policy in the absence of meaningful 'included' opposition. The 2011 bi-elections gave rise to "a largely pro-government coalition who ratified, among other things, laws that gave the state even deeper powers to control political opposition"[872] and the 2014 legislative elections, boycotted by all the major opposition societies including al-Wefaq, produced a situation in which, according to one former MP, "thirty-five or thirty-six of the forty MPs are independents, quote-unquote, controlled by the government."[873]

An overwhelming number of interview participants viewed Bahrain's post-2011 parliament as a regime-loyal institution, with one senior opposition figure likening it to a municipal council rather than a nationally-representative legislative body.[874] According to one activist, "within this parliament you can't even change any single thing… the government will just pass down the memos to the Shura Council and the Shura Council will say yes, and will pass it down to the parliament as if they are just taking their signature."[875] Even a prominent Sunni public servant affiliated with the ruling family acknowledged that "there are only one or two MPs who are trying," branding the entire parliament "dummies."[876] Continuing the pretence of parliamentary life has enabled the Al Khalifa regime to depict itself as committed to the reforms it instituted in the early 2000s, a narrative which Western allies worried about regional instability have enthusiastically taken up. However the institutions of liberalised autocracy, including parliament and a tolerated opposition, have been essentially emptied of their substance, and have been replaced by a Unified-Exclusive Structure of Contestation (see Chapter 6) and a heavy reliance on repression- both key indicators of authoritarianism.[877]

[872] Jones, *Saudi Intervention, Sectarianism, and De-Democratization*, 260.
[873] Interview with opposition leader 16 May 2016.
[874] Interview with opposition leader 22 December 2015.
[875] Interview with activist 29 June 2015.
[876] Interview with public servant 24 December 2015.
[877] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 43.

Bahrain's new status quo is characterised by a return to authoritarianism and a corresponding reliance on both repression and the support of foreign powers, in particular its GCC neighbours, to secure the regime. The role of foreign support for Bahrain's Al Khalifa monarchy has been crucial in enabling the regime to re-establish authoritarianism and maintain its grip on power. Indeed the 2011 intervention of the Saudi-dominated Peninsula Shield Force, which has now established a permanent base in Bahrain,[878] acted as a disincentive for the regime to negotiate a political settlement with the opposition. The substantial financial, diplomatic and military backing of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular for the Al Khalifa regime enabled ascendant hardliners within the monarchy to dig in rather than seek the negotiated solution with the moderate opposition advocated for by the United States.[879] Khalaf has in fact argued that Bahrain was forced to "surrender its autonomy" to Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states in order to prevent revolution, as the government had "lost its ability to mobilise its own infrastructural and repressive capacities to deal with domestic challenges."[880]

The shift toward Saudi Arabia can also be interpreted as a pivot away from the United States, which maintains a strategic interest in Bahrain as the host of an important naval base, and had long encouraged King Hamad to pursue economic and political liberalisation. The Bahraini government has reacted strongly to the US's relatively measured criticism of its post-Arab Spring crackdown, and in 2014 took the unprecedented step of expelling US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour Tom Malinowski, after he met with members of al-Wefaq without government oversight.[881] Ultimately, "the regime believes itself well-guarded against future strife" as a result of the GCC intervention, "which helps to explain its continuing resistance to major political reform,"[882] and has arguably led the US to conclude that pushing for compromise in Bahrain is less of a priority than securing its own strategic interests, which depend on a stable Gulf.

[878] Guzansky, *The Arab Gulf States and Reform*, 35.
[879] Louër, *Activism in Bahrain*, 194.
[880] Khalaf, *Foreword*, xvii.
[881] Meijer and Danckaert, *Bahrain: The Dynamics of a Conflict*, 237.
[882] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 85.

There is a widespread understanding within Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition that the role of Saudi Arabia will be a major obstacle in any future attempt to broaden political participation to include the Shiʿi community, in particular given Saudi Arabia's tendency to view the grievances of Arab Shiʿa through the prism of its own geopolitical rivalry with Iran. Numerous interview subjects echoed Khalaf's analysis of the extent of Saudi influence in post-Arab Spring Bahrain, with claims such as "the government is receiving its orders from Saudi Arabia, they can't do anything"[883] and "these hardliners care less about democracy and human rights, civil society, press freedom- they always say, 'Saudi doesn't have that, the UAE doesn't have that, why should we be different?'"[884] According to human rights activist Maryam al-Khawaja:

What has changed is the confidence that the Bahraini regime has about itself. Now they feel as though they have international immunity. They feel that, no matter what they do, they are not going to face consequences for their actions. This allows them to do whatever they want. They are moving against the most prominent human rights defenders. They would never have done this last year [2011]. *Now they feel free to do what they want because they know that, even if there are international statements, there are no consequences*.[885]

The new status quo in Bahrain is one of authoritarian repression, but, as demonstrated by this thesis' social media study, the current situation is also characterised by robust opposition on the streets and in the online sphere, as well as in private spaces. Opposition groups in exile have also proliferated in recent years, with a number of NGOs and lobby groups established in the mostly-Western countries which play host to increasing numbers of Bahraini refugees.[886] A new culture of political participation is emerging, younger and more dynamic than that which developed out of 2001's NAC, and more tech-savvy and aware of transnational political and religious narratives compared with the activists driving the 1990s *Intifāḍa*. As this thesis has shown, the political participation of Shiʿi youth in particular is framed around themes such as

[883] Interview with activist 14 December 2015.
[884] Interview with opposition leader 16 May 2016.
[885] Meringolo, *The Inconvenient Revolution*, n.p.
[886] For example: The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, Bahrain Watch, Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, The Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights.

steadfastness (*ṣumūd*), dignity (*karāma*) and martyrdom (*istishhād*), and whilst sectarianism is broadly rejected, activists' Shiʿi identity is a central component of the demands and grievances which inform their mobilisation. Where Bahrain's transition to repressive authoritarianism has quelled some elements of the opposition it has galvanised others, leading to a shift in political participation in Bahrain rather than an elimination of it. This suggests that the current status quo, with its developing culture of underground opposition, marks a new cycle in Bahrain's century-long oscillation between repression and relative openness. Many within Bahrain's Shiʿi community have argued that their country continues to exist in the throes of revolution, characterised by instability and volatility. In the words of one activist: "The situation is like a volcano covered in sand. The pressure will build up again, and it will explode."[887] What form a future eruption of popular dissatisfaction with the current status quo might take will have important implications for political participation in Bahrain and across the GCC.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that a new status quo has emerged in Bahrain following the crackdown that brought an end to the popular uprising of 2011. Characterised by increasing repression and a reliance on external actors to maintain regime stability, this new status quo indicates that Bahrain is dismantling its liberalised autocracy and transitioning to full-authoritarianism, and as such has little need for the democratic veneer it had invested in developing during the liberalising period of 2000-2010. In undoing the 2001 NAC reforms, Bahrain's regime has sought to limit political participation within the parliamentary system to the regime-loyal opposition, and has adjusted the rules of the game to exclude previously-tolerated groups such as al-Wefaq, which have been forced to choose between regime co-optation and the support of their constituents.

Antisystem opposition groups were able to use the post-Arab Spring period of growing repression and the government's targeting of the tolerated opposition to gain the upper hand over their rivals, who were constrained by a comparatively transparent organisational structure, designed in accordance with the

[887] Interview with activist 13 December 2015.

previous decade's liberalising reforms. The antisystem opposition's history of underground activism, decentralised and anonymous leadership structure and leverage of new media technologies enabled it to sidestep elements of the regime's crackdown whilst continuing to communicate and promote its cause to supporters. This has led to a shift in the internal dynamics of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition, with more radical antisystem groups such as the February 14 Coalition posing a growing threat to the support base of moderate and once-tolerated groups such as al-Wefaq. While all opposition groups have remained broadly committed to non-violence, the regime's dismantling of its own liberalising reforms and its crackdown on peaceful protest have reduced the potential costs of violent resistance. How the increasingly fractured Shiʿi opposition deals with the challenges of this new and repressive status quo will likely determine the nature of future attempts by the Shiʿi community to participate in Bahrain's political system, whether through violence or negotiation and reform.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Bahrain may be a small island facing a number of unique challenges, however its geostrategic significance has made it a "bellwether for the political climate of the region."[888] Unrest in Bahrain in 2011 quickly spilled over into the Saudi Eastern Province and arguably also Kuwait, and as the first post-oil Gulf state the Bahraini government's seeming inability to placate an increasingly assertive citizen population, including regime supporters, may be a sign of what is to come for some of its GCC neighbours. How Bahrain manages issues such as dwindling oil revenues, rapid population growth, a bloated and expensive public sector and growing inter-communal tensions will have implications for other Gulf states grappling with similar challenges. Continuing political upheaval or even violence in Bahrain risks damaging the much-vaunted myth of monarchical stability cultivated in the Gulf since the end of the colonial period, exposing even the wealthiest and most secure of its neighbours. This is why understanding the political participation of Bahrain's 'marginalised majority' matters. The Shiʿi community's long history of contention and engagement with Bahrain's government and institutions, and its continuing struggle to draw attention to grievances from both within the political system and outside of it, has implications not only in determining the future of the Al Khalifa regime but for the stability and security of the other Gulf states.

This thesis has considered the central research question of how Bahrain's Arab Spring uprising has impacted the Shiʿi community's political participation through an examination of Bahrain's cycles of repression and liberalisation, with a particular focus on the most recent cycle beginning with King Hamad's NAC reforms and ending in the post-2011 retreat to full-authoritarianism. Whilst the impact of the Arab Spring in Bahrain and across the Middle East is ongoing, this thesis has shed light on the transformation of government-opposition and inter-opposition relations during the crucial first five years after the uprising, and has made the case that the state itself has undergone a process of transition from liberalised autocracy to authoritarianism. Challenging the assumptions of some of the literature surrounding democratisation, rentierism, monarchical stability and Gulf exceptionalism, this thesis has sought to integrate theories of

[888] Bahry, *The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition,* 129.

opposition under authoritarianism with emerging research into the impact of social media on opposition mobilisation. This thesis has argued that while the means of Shiʿi political participation have changed alongside technological developments, the core grievances motivating the political activities of Shiʿi opposition groups and social movements have remained relatively constant. Ultimately, this thesis has demonstrated that the nature of Shiʿi political participation in Bahrain is determined by inter-opposition dynamics and shifting institutional structures within the Al Khalifa regime, which has alternated between repression and liberalisation as a means of containing threats to its security and grip on power.

Key Contributions and Recommendations for Further Research

This thesis's interdisciplinary approach to analysing the political participation of Bahrain's Shiʿi community has made a significant contribution to the academic literature from a number of angles. Drawing on Bahrain as a case study, it has deepened our theoretical understanding of the ways in which regimes shape and influence opposition behaviour, and how changes in inter-opposition dynamics can both influence and be influenced by the structure of authoritarian regimes. This thesis has also contributed to the somewhat more narrow field of research into Bahrain's politics, adding to the relatively small number of studies which have sought to account for the changing role of the Shiʿi community throughout history and within contemporary Bahraini society. This thesis's interpretation of the 2000-2010 NAC era as amounting to the institutionalisation of liberalised autocracy, rather than an experiment in genuine democratisation, is a departure from much of the literature on Bahrain that is in many ways crucial to understanding the dramatic shift in Shiʿi political participation evidenced after the 2011 uprising. Very little research has been published examining the changing role of al-Wefaq before and after Bahrain's Arab Spring, and at the time of writing not a single in-depth study has been published on Bahrain's February 14 Coalition youth movement.

This thesis also adds to the growing body of literature, largely in the media and communications field, which has sought to adapt the content analysis method, traditionally used to examine print and broadcast media, to social media. Only a very small number of scholars have applied this method to the study of

Middle Eastern opposition groups and social movements,[889] and given the growing importance of social media in the region there remains enormous scope to extend this technique to additional case studies in the future. The present section will expand on some of this thesis's insights, and will consider potential avenues for further research.

Building on previous studies of Gulf politics which have called some of the core assumptions of rentier state theory into question,[890] this thesis has provided further evidence to support claims that the rentier model simply does not stack up in the case of Bahrain. In contrast to the conventional wisdom surrounding rentierism's role in inducing political apathy and quiescence in the Gulf monarchies, this thesis has demonstrated that Bahrain's Shiʿi majority aspires to active participation in politics, with some even willing to challenge the structure of the political system itself at considerable personal and economic cost. Whilst outside the scope of this thesis, a number of groups within Bahrain's Sunni community have also sought to boost their involvement in politics above and beyond serving as loyal supporters of the Al Khalifa government and recipients of rentier largesse, most notably in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 uprising,[891] but also during the lengthy period of cross-ideological opposition cooperation in the mid-twentieth century outlined in Chapter 3. As some have argued that the rentier model in Bahrain is only applicable to the Sunni community,[892] which acts as a sort of "rentier class,"[893] investigating Sunni political participation and the impact, or lack thereof, of petroleum resource rents in shaping it would be a fruitful path for future research. In any case, it is clear that economic determinism has been unable to explain Bahrain's cycles of contentious politics, indeed it appears that, rather than strengthening regime stability,

[889] For example: Seo, Hyunjin and Ebrahim, Husain, 'Visual Propaganda on Facebook: A Comparative Analysis of Syrian Conflicts,' *Media, War & Conflict* 9:3 (2016): 227-251; Seo, Hyunjin, 'Visual Propaganda in the Age of Social Media: An Empirical Analysis of Twitter Images During the 2012 Israeli-Hamas Conflict,' *Visual Communication Quarterly* 21:3 (2014): 150-161.
[890] For example: Okruhlik, *Rethinking the Politics of Distributive States*; Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain*; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*.
[891] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 137.
[892] Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain,* 119.
[893] Davidson, *After the Sheikhs,* 6-7.

the (unequal) distribution of the country's resource wealth has actually fuelled contentious political participation driven by grievance.

This thesis has also highlighted a number of significant gaps which remain in the literature on political participation in the Arab world, in particular concerning the failure of democratisation and/or liberalised autocracy and the re-assertion of authoritarianism. As this thesis has shown, the assumption that liberalisation facilitates democratisation is questionable at best, as tolerated opposition groups are instead balanced with radical challengers to maintain the status quo, and authoritarian elections are employed as a means of reducing pressure for meaningful reform. Claims such as those of O'Donnell and Schmitter, who theorised that "as liberalisation advances so does the strength of demands for democratisation,"[894] or Shirah, who concluded that "regimes that hold elections but continue to be led by dictators may be sowing the seeds of their own democratization"[895] are not supported by this thesis' detailed analysis of Bahrain, which rather suggests that while liberalised autocracy opens new avenues for political participation, a substantive challenge to a regime's rules of the game can trigger a transition to authoritarianism rather than to representative democracy. More research is however required to determine the impact of the development of a participatory political culture under liberalisation, and whether this carries over once a political system reverts to authoritarianism. There is also a need for the further development of theory capable of explaining the political behaviour of opposition actors under authoritarianism and liberalised autocracy when democratisation is not a factor at play.

This thesis has also contributed to debates within the academic literature concerning the stability of liberalised autocracy. Early scholarship on authoritarian elections had suggested that liberalised autocracies were inherently unstable,[896] however more recent work by Lust-Okar, Paczynska, and Gandhi and Przeworski, among others, has found that "authoritarian regimes that hold elections tend to last longer

[894] O'Donnell, Guillermo and Schmitter, Philippe C., 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 10.
[895] Shirah, Ryan, 'Electoral Authoritarianism and Political Unrest,' *International Political Science Review*, 37:4 (2015): 482.
[896] See for example: Ekiert, Grzegorz,. 1996, *The State against Society: Political Crises and Their Aftermath in East Central Europe,* New Jersey: Princeton University Press; O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule.*

than those that do not" and that "elections tend to reinforce rather than undermine authoritarian regimes."[897] The case of Bahrain appears to suggest that elections did not provide the Al Khalifa regime with the stability and popular legitimacy necessary to see off the existential challenge of the Arab Spring-inspired pro-democracy movement. Indeed the Arab Spring has triggered a re-examination of the stability issue in a number of recent studies, which have contributed a variety of explanations as to why the particular institutional structures associated with liberalised autocracy, including a greater relative openness to popular political participation and the limited expression of dissent, have led to instability. Wright and Escriba-Folch, analysing data from 108 countries between 1946 and 2002, have found that whilst the existence of an authoritarian legislature does not destabilise regimes per se, permitting political parties to form under liberalised autocracy does have an observably negative impact on stability.[898] This is because political parties "lower the collective action costs of would-be regime opponents" which is more likely to lead to challenges to incumbents either from groups seeking democratisation, or seeking to replace the regime with a new dictatorship.[899] Bodnaruk Jazayeri has argued that resistance is more likely to develop in liberalised autocracies because such states lack the "nonviolent avenues… available to express discontent" present in democracies, but also lack the repressive mechanisms of full-authoritarianism, meaning they are structurally predisposed to unrest.[900] Albrecht has focused on the fluid nature of regime red lines surrounding opposition participation in liberalised autocracies, and argues that regimes deliberately foster "uncertainty in both political procedures and the outcome of contestation" in order to employ "idiosyncratic" rules of the game as a means of managing the balance between tolerated groups and antisystem challengers.[901] According to Albrecht, a liberalised autocracy's "floating between

[897] Lust, Ellen, 'Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East,' *Journal of Democracy,* 20:3 (2009): 122.
[898] Wright, Joseph and Escriba-Folch, Abel, 'Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival: Transitions to Democracy and Subsequent Autocracy,' *British Journal of Political Science*, 42:2 (2012): 283.
[899] Wright and Escriba-Folch, *Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival*, 286-287.
[900] Bodnaruk Jazayeri, *Identity-Based Political Inequality and Protest*, 413.
[901] Albrecht, Holger., 2013. *Raging Against the Machine: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism in Egypt,* New York: Syracuse University Press, 180.

pluralism and control, concession and coercion, and co-optation and the granting of autonomy"[902] makes it an inherently unstable polity.

This thesis' examination of Bahrain's authoritarian transition in the wake of the Arab Spring adds further weight to the arguments of those who assert that liberalised autocracy is not a stable political system in the longer term. Whilst the Al Khalifa regime deftly balanced the tolerated and antisystem oppositions within the NAC era's Divided Structure of Contestation, alternatively employing co-optation and repression and enhancing its reputation internationally as a government open to political and economic reform, Bahrain's liberalised autocracy did not survive its first real challenge. However, given the particularities of politics in Bahrain, and the unprecedented nature of the Arab Spring as a historical event, there remains a clear need for further academic research into the stability, or lack thereof, of hybrid regimes in the Middle East.

Whilst repression is generally inimical to maintaining a system of liberalised autocracy,[903] it has typically been understood by scholars of authoritarianism to be an effective means of preventing popular political participation, at least in the short-to-medium term, and of course at great cost to civil liberties.[904] Recent studies on the effect of repression on political mobilisation have suggested that the relationship between the two factors is complex and poorly-understood. For example, in 2015 Shirah found that "more repressive regimes face less protest,"[905] however in the same year a study by Bodnaruk Jazayeri concluded that "less repressive countries experience fewer counts of nonviolent and violent protest."[906] It is likely that distinguishing between different types of opposition political participation is an important factor in determining the impact of authoritarian repression on anti-regime mobilisation. For example, increasing repression may discourage moderates from joining street protests, as in the case of al-Wefaq, but it may actually stimulate greater resistance on the part of more radical antisystem groups, who may turn to violence and further escalate their conflict with the regime. According to Alimi, "situations of extreme

[902] Albrecht, *Raging Against the Machine*, 32.
[903] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism*, 43.
[904] Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, 27.
[905] Shirah, *Electoral Authoritarianism and Political Unrest*, 481.
[906] Bodnaruk Jazayeri, *Identity-Based Political Inequality and Protest*, 413.

repression are likely to produce extreme forms of contention,"[907] however it is important to note that a population's perceptions of what constitutes extreme repression are relative to context. Because repressive government tactics have long endured in neighbouring Saudi Arabia for example, the Saudi regime's strong repression of Arab Spring unrest in its Eastern Province did not mark the same dramatic departure from political norms as it did in Bahrain, whose Arab Spring protests ended a decade of liberalising reforms and more open political participation. Further research is needed to explore the impact of authoritarian repression on different types of opposition, and the implications of this for both popular mobilisation and regime stability.

A significant element of this thesis's contribution to the literature on contemporary Bahrain has been its effort to shed light on Shiʿi youth activism, including conducting the first in-depth academic study of the February 14 Coalition. The lack of credible research into the February 14 Coalition has arguably led to an over-reliance on Gulf media outlets and government sources, which have an interest in promoting the narrative that Bahrain's uprising was the result of foreign meddling and that Iran is sponsoring Shiʿi Islamist groups in Bahrain to agitate for an Iranian-style Islamic republic. As Trejo has commented, "understanding the logic of the street in autocracies is important because social protest is one of the few mechanisms of policy negotiation for independent citizens and groups."[908] The 'Shiʿi street' has been largely passed over by scholars analysing the post-2011 political situation in Bahrain, with changing political participation at the grassroots level often overlooked in favour of examining topics such as transnationalism or the implications of the Saudi-Iranian geopolitical rivalry. While these factors are certainly influential and play into Bahrain's retreat into authoritarianism, this thesis's analysis of youth activism has sought to emphasise the centrality of the local context in shaping the dynamics of political participation in Bahrain. This thesis's examination of youth activism and social media *following* the Arab Spring has also enabled it to address a gap in the literature- where significant research has been devoted to assessing the role of youth and new media

[907] Alimi, Eitan Y, 'Mobilising Under the Gun: Theorising Political Opportunity Structure in a Highly Repressive Setting,' *Mobilization: An International Journal* 14:2 (2009): 220.
[908] Trejo, *The Ballot and the Street*, 333.

technologies in facilitating and driving the 2011 protests, very little has been written about this topic in the wake of the uprising's failure to achieve regime change. This thesis has identified disaffected Shiʿi youth as some of the most proactive and determined opposition actors, and their familiarity with historical and contemporary grievances and willingness to take risks has established them as an central, if not unpredictable, player in Bahrain's post-Arab Spring contentious politics. While this thesis has laid the groundwork, further research into this important and largely-overlooked constituency will undoubtedly be called for moving forward.

This thesis's analysis of the Shiʿi opposition's social media activism has advanced our understanding of the growing role of online spaces in facilitating and enhancing more traditional forms of political participation in the offline world. This thesis has shown that whist the advent of social media has dramatically altered the *means* of Shiʿi opposition engagement in politics, it arguably reflects, or indeed amplifies, an ongoing theme manifest in over a century of contentious politics in Bahrain- the desire of Bahrain's citizens, and the Shiʿi community in particular, to actively contribute to the governance of their country. Sadiki has argued that "cyberspace not only gives oppositional forces self-confidence but also makes the technologies of protest increasingly difficult to police or proscribe."[909] This thesis has shown that online activism has more greatly boosted antisystem groups such as the February 14 Coalition, who were structurally better-suited to utilising associated benefits such as activist anonymity, in contrast to then-tolerated groups like al-Wefaq. Whilst the Shiʿi community's grievances have not dramatically changed since the colonial period, their ability to express and amplify these grievances has been dramatically bolstered with the arrival and mass take-up of the internet and social media in Bahrain. Considerable scope exists to continue to explore the impact of the internet on both opposition activism and protest and on authoritarian regimes' monopoly on information and capacity for repression. More research is also needed into the ways in which the internet can be used by governments to stymie dissent, in addition to its potential to mobilise opposition supporters and facilitate offline activism.

[909] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 240.

The content analysis study of the Facebook activism of three important Bahraini Shiʿi opposition groups presented in this thesis spoke to what is an emerging body of research which seeks to apply a media and communications methodological approach to the study of oppositions and social movements. Such interdisciplinary methods are increasingly being drawn on by scholars seeking ways and means of interrogating the role and impact of new media technologies in both local and transnational political spaces. Adopting such methods however also introduces a number of challenges and limitations that are important to mention. For example, the three opposition groups examined in this thesis's social media study were chosen in order to represent the diversity of organisational structures and ideological approaches to activism in Bahrain. However, it must be emphasised that the results of the study do not reflect all opposition movements in the country. It should also be emphasised that the datasets examined represent a relatively brief snapshot of each group's social media activity, which will likely shift in response to developing events on the ground with the passage of time. Due to the difficulty of retrospectively procuring a complete set of social media data from the 2011 uprising this study was unable to pursue a comparative approach with earlier periods, which could have potentially yielded results of considerable interest. However, there is significant scope moving forward for similar studies to be conducted to compare the 2015 findings with social media activism in subsequent years. In addition, future studies could analyse the social media activities of other political groups in Bahrain, including the secular-nationalist Waʿad society and the various broadly regime-loyal Sunni organisations.

Future research could also potentially broaden the approach of this study to account for the activity of Bahrain's Shiʿi opposition groups across a range of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Anecdotally however, it appears that much the same content is replicated across the various platforms by each organisation. Another potential avenue for further study is the growing use of mobile messaging apps by activist groups, including WhatsApp, Telegram and Snapchat. The February 14 Coalition is active across these platforms, and has even created its own branded mobile app available via Google

Play.[910] Whilst these apps can often enhance an activist's anonymity, in particular following revelations that the Bahraini government has been using malware to uncover the IP addresses of online activists,[911] they pose a number of accessibility challenges which the researcher was able to avoid by sampling from a more public forum such as Facebook. Social media analysis as a tool for academic research in areas such as politics and governance is arguably still in its infancy, and this thesis has only scratched the surface of what is possible. With the emergence of ever more sophisticated research software and the growing accessibility of big-data analytics it is likely that content analysis studies of social media and online activism such as this one will become more common-place in the politics literature in the years to come.

Finally, the fieldwork interview data presented in this thesis also makes an important contribution to the literature on contemporary Bahrain. In particular, this thesis's interview material provides an important window into a world which is becoming increasingly difficult to access for researchers, especially in light of the crackdown which began in 2016 and continues at the time of writing. According to Horne, between 2011 and 2015 "over 240 journalists, NGO employees, academics and other outside observers have been denied access to Bahrain,"[912] among them specialists in Gulf politics such as Kristian Coates Ulrichsen and Marc Owen Jones.[913] Contacts in Bahrain have also told the researcher that from 2016 onwards academics and journalists are increasingly being monitored and are being prevented from travelling to the Shiʿi villages outside the capital Manama. Given the current political climate in Bahrain, the fieldwork interview data presented in this thesis is arguably of considerable value. The researcher was able to conduct interviews in the Shiʿi-majority areas of Bahrain in late 2015 and early 2016 largely without hindrance, including visiting the homes and *majālis* of prominent Shiʿi community and political leaders, some of whom have been subsequently imprisoned. The timing of the fieldwork research presented in this thesis, whilst wholly unplanned, enabled the researcher to conduct interviews until shortly before the 2016 crackdown, and has

[910] See: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=feb14.com
[911] Jones, *Social Media, Surveillance and Cyberpolitics*, 246-247.
[912] Horne, *Tn Tn Ttn and Torture in Bahrain*, 162.
[913] Personal communication, 2016.

elevated this thesis's contribution by offering insights into people and places in Bahrain which are now essentially off-limits to academic fieldwork research.

Closing Remarks

Whilst the Al Khalifa may have retreated to a political system characterised by repression and a lack of tolerance for opposition, political participation in post-Arab Spring Bahrain has evolved significantly since the country's previous period of full-authoritarianism, which began after the short-lived parliamentary experiment of 1973-5 and came to an end with King Hamad's 2001 NAC reforms. In the mid-1970s and 1980s regime hardliners were largely successful in driving all opposition, including popularly-elected members of parliament, underground and limiting their ability to mobilise through strong repression and a firm control over Bahrain's media. Opposition political participation was mostly limited to the various Shiʿi Islamist groups which had emerged during this period and were able to present themselves as religious organisations (see Chapter 3). However, the regime's success in cracking down on the robust opposition which had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and had participated in Bahrain's first parliamentary elections in 1973, arguably led to the deep social disaffection which triggered the 1990s *Intifāḍa*. Even if one does not accept the argument that contentious politics in Bahrain is cyclical, this thesis has clearly demonstrated that a similar current of disaffection continues to animate the political activism of the Shiʿi community in particular, and that in contrast to the repressive period of the 1980s, many within the community have developed their demands to the point in which the overthrow of the monarchy is no longer the aim of a radical few. It is possible, indeed according to many of this thesis' interview subjects it is likely, that a second prolonged period of authoritarian repression will lead to the eruption of further mass popular unrest, which some have argued[914] will be more violent than that of the 1990s or 2011.

Bahrain's evident reversion back to an authoritarian political system poses the question of what impact, if any, did its ten-year period of liberalised autocracy have on political participation? Lust has argued that "even where uprisings have not succeeded in removing the incumbent authoritarian regime, they have

[914] Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*, 48.

altered the context of opposition mobilisation and coordination,"[915] and Tetreault et al have claimed that even cosmetic reforms can raise "expectations of further opening, limiting the ability of regimes to push back to square one as cheaply and unobtrusively as they might have done without them."[916] Much of the literature on opposition under authoritarianism has tended to gloss over the role of political participation in authoritarian regimes when it does not lead to democratisation. However, as noted by Albrecht, "the (presumed) fact that authoritarian incumbents do not like political participation does not alone warrant assuming that participation is absent."[917] A number of recent studies have suggested that "giving citizens new ways to express their opinions to and about the government," as in a liberalised autocracy, "leads to more protest mobilization"[918] and that "the longer a society is allowed to develop and maintain an autonomous organisational base during periods of political liberalisation, the more difficult and costly it becomes to reinstitute repression."[919] The development of a participatory political culture in a liberalised autocracy such as NAC-era Bahrain has arguably encouraged citizens to view themselves as active participants rather than passive subjects of the ruling monarchy, and ran contrary to the assumption that under rentierism citizens are simply the beneficiaries of allocative governments rather than the bearers of political rights. The widespread pro-democracy discourse of the 2011 Arab Spring protesters, which encompassed an ideological spectrum ranging from Shiʿi Islamism to secular socialism, is arguably testament to the rootedness of the culture of political participation which was encouraged by the 2001 NAC reforms. The empowerment of the Shiʿi community during this period, against the backdrop of a lengthy and protracted history of negotiation and re-negotiation of the boundaries of citizen participation in governance, suggests that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to once more return an angry, aggrieved and increasingly desperate genie into a tight-fisted and oppressive authoritarian bottle.

[915] Lust, Ellen, 'Opposition Cooperation and Uprisings in the Arab World,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 38:3 (2011): 434.
[916] Tetreault, Okruhlik and Kapiszewski, *Twenty-First-Century Politics in the Arab Gulf States*, 10.
[917] Albrecht, *The Nature of Political Participation,* 16.
[918] Shirah, *Electoral Authoritarianism and Political Unrest,* 472.
[919] Paczynska, *The Discreet Appeal of Authoritarianism,* 39.

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Appendix 1- Content Analysis Coding Manual

CODING INSTRUCTIONS: TEXTUAL DATA

Each of the three data sets, representing three different days of the year, to be analysed in separate spreadsheets.

Variable 1 (V1): ID number

Format: Date + Time of post, separate colour code and tab for each organisation.

[Day/Month/Year + Hour:Minute:Second] Al-Wefaq (Blue), February 14 (Yellow), Haqq (Green)

V2: Type of source

1 = Text only

2 = Photograph only

3 = Photograph + caption

4 = Graphic only[920]

5 = Graphic + caption

6 = Video only

7 = Video + caption

8 = Link to same organisation's webpage only

9 = Link to same organisation's webpage + caption

10 = Link to external video only

11 = Link to external video + caption

12 = Link to other social media platform- same organisation

13 = Link to other social media platform- same organisation + caption

14 = Link to other social media platform- third party

15 = Link to other social media platform- third party + caption

16 = Speech or official document

17 = Speech or official document + photograph

[920] A graphic is any image which has undergone some obvious form of editing, for example a photo collage or graphic design material.

V3. Location

0 = Not applicable

Code for Bahrain-only locations indicated in text of post or hashtag.

Code	Arabic	English
301	عالي	ʿĀli
302	إسكان عالي	ʿĀli housing
303	أبو قوة	Abū Quwa
304	أبوصيبع	Abū Ṣaībaʿ
305	عذاري	ʿAdhāri
306	العكر	al-ʿAker
307	عراد	ʿArād
308	بني جمرة	Bani Jamra
309	باربار	Bārbār
310	البلاد القديم	al-Bilād al-Qadīm
311	البديع	al-Budayaʿ
312	البرهامة	al-Burhāma
313	بوري	Būri
314	دمستان	Damistān
315	دار كليب	Dār Kulaīb
316	الدير	al-Deīr
317	الدراز	al-Dirāz
318	الغريفة	al-Ghuraīfa
319	الحجر	al-Ḥajar
320	الهملة	al-Hamala
321	جبلة حبشي	Jablat Ḥabshī
322	الجنبية	al-Janabiyya
323	جنوسان	Janūsān
324	جدحفص	Jid Ḥafṣ
325	إسكان جدحفص	Jid Ḥafṣ housing
326	الجفير	al-Juffaīr
327	جرداب	Jurdāb
328	كرانه	Karāna
329	كرباباد	Karbābād
330	كرزكان	Karzakān
331	الكَوَرة	al-Kawara
332	الخارجية	al-Khārijiyya
333	خط النار	Khaṭ al-Nār
334	المعامير	al-Maʿāmīr
335	مهزة	Mahaza
336	الماحوز	al-Māḥūz
337	المالكية	al-Mālkiyya
338	المنامة	al-Manāma
339	مقابة	Maqāba
340	المقشع	al-Maqshaʿ
341	المرخ	al-Markh
342	مدينة الزهراء	Medīnat al-Zahrāʾ (Hamad Town)
343	المصلى	al-Muṣalā
344	النبيه صالح	al-Nabīh Ṣāleḥ
345	النويدرات	al-Nuwaīdrāt
346	القدم	al-Qadam
347	القلعة	al-Qalaʿ
348	القُريّة	al-Qurayya
349	رأس رمان	Raʾs Rumān
350	رفاع	Rifāʿ
351	صدد	Ṣadad
352	الصالحية	al-Ṣāliḥiyya
353	سلماباد	Salmābād
354	إسكان سلماباد	Salmābād housing
355	سماهيج	Samāhij
356	السنابس	al-Sanābis
357	سند	Sanad
358	سار	Sār
359	ضاحية السيف	Seef suburbs
360	السهلة الشمالية	Sehla (North)
361	السهلة الجنوبية	Sehla (South)
362	شهركان	Shahrakān
363	الشاخورة	al-Shākhūra
364	سترة	Sitra
365	مثلث الصمود	‘Triangle of resistance’
366	توبلي	Tūbli
367	واديان	Wādiyān
368	مسجد العلويات	al-ʿAlawīyāt mosque (Zinj)
369	مسجد عين رستان	ʿAīn Rustān mosque (ʿĀli)
370	مركوبان	Murkūbān
371	الديه	al-Daīh
372	المحرق	al-Muḥarraq
373	مسجد فدك الزهراء	Fadak al-Zahrāʾ mosque (Hamad Town)
374	النعيم	al-Naʿīm

FRAMING

V4: Shiʿi Religious Frame

Does the post make reference to any of the following:

0 = Not applicable

1 = Shiʿi religious doctrine or practice (incl. prayer, *takbir*, not incl. festivals[921])

2 = Shiʿi religious festivals (eg. *ʿĀshūraʾ*)

3 = Shiʿi religious notables (eg. *Marājiʿ*)

4 = Draws on Shiʿi religious history in reference to current grievances

5 = Draws on Shiʿi nativist narrative (eg. uses term *Baḥārna*)

6 = Martyrdom
- 6.1 Glorifies martyrdom
- 6.2 Anti-martyrdom
- 6.3 Neutral[922]

7 = Terrorism
- 7.1 Pro-terrorism
- 7.2 Anti-terrorism
- 7.3 Neutral

8 = Describes Sunni individuals/organisations
- 8.1 Pro-Sunni
- 8.2 Anti-Sunni
- 8.3 Neutral

[921] Festivals is separated in this case due to one of the data sets falling on the day of the Shiʿi festival of ʿĀshūraʾ.

[922] For example, refers to an individual as a martyr but does not include language which indicates a value judgement.

V5: Social Grievances Frame

Does the post make reference to any of the following:

0 = Not applicable

1 = Human Rights (general)

2 = Torture and murder

3 = Impunity and justice system (incl. prison, court system)

4 = Corruption

5 = Naturalisation

6 = Government discrimination (eg. Housing, education policy, religious freedoms)

7 = Socio-economic disparity

8 = Freedom of speech

9 = Freedom of Assembly, incl. ban on protests

10 = Crimes committed by security forces

11 = Imprisonment of dissidents / political prisoners

12 = Destruction of Shiʿi religious sites

13 = Other

V6: Political System Frame

Does the post make reference to any of the following:

0 = Not applicable

1 = Democracy
- 1.1 Pro-democracy
- 1.2 Anti-democracy
- 1.3 'Self-determination'
- 1.4 Neutral

2 = Constitutional Monarchy
- 2.1 Pro-constitutional monarchy
- 2.2 Anti- constitutional monarchy
- 2.3 Neutral

3 = Republic
- 3.1 Pro-republic
- 3.2 Anti-republic
- 3.3 Neutral

4 = Overthrow of the Al Khalifa
- 4.1 Pro-overthrow
- 4.2 Anti-overthrow
- 4.3 Neutral

5 = Religious/clerical rule (incl. *Shariʿa* law)
- 5.1 Pro-religious/clerical rule
- 5.2 Anti- religious/clerical rule
- 5.3 Neutral

6 = Union with other GCC states
- 6.1 Pro-union
- 6.2 Anti-union
- 6.3 Neutral

7 = Dialogue with government
- 7.1 Pro-dialogue
- 7.2 Anti-dialogue
- 7.3 Neutral

8 = Participation in parliament/elections
- 8.1 Pro-participation
- 8.2 Anti-participation
- 8.3 Neutral

9 = Boycott of parliament/elections
- 9.1 Pro-boycott
- 9.2 Anti-boycott
- 9.3 Neutral

10 = Referendum to choose new political system
- 10.1 Pro-referendum
- 10.2 Anti-referendum
- 10.3 Neutral

V7: Geopolitics Frame

Does the post make reference to any of the following:

0 = Not applicable

1 = Iran
- 1.1 Pro-Iran
- 1.2 Anti-Iran
- 1.3 Neutral

2 = Saudi Arabia
- 2.1 Pro-Saudi
- 2.2 Anti-Saudi
- 2.3 Neutral

3 = GCC / other GCC states
- 3.1 Pro-GCC
- 3.2 Anti-GCC
- 3.3 Neutral

4 = United States
- 4.1 Pro-US
- 4.2 Anti-US
- 4.3 Neutral

5 = United Kingdom
- 5.1 Pro-UK
- 5.2 Anti- UK
- 5.3 Neutral

6 = The West / other Western states
- 6.1 Pro-West
- 6.2 Anti-West
- 6.3 Neutral

7 = Sunni non-state actors (eg. Islamic State)
- 7.1 Pro-Sunni non-state actors
- 7.2 Anti-Sunni non-state actors
- 7.3 Neutral

8 = Shiʿi non-state actors (eg. Hezbollah)
- 8.1 Pro-Shiʿi non-state actors
- 8.2 Anti-Shiʿi non-state actors
- 8.3 Neutral

9 = The United Nations
- 9.1 Pro-UN
- 9.2 Anti-UN
- 9.3 Neutral

10 = Other Arab States
- 10.1 Pro
- 10.2 Anti
- 10.3 Neutral

THEMES

In order to avoid the unnecessary subjectivity involved in evaluating the primary, secondary, tertiary etc. purposes of each post, purposes are simply numbered and are not ranked by order of assumed importance.

V8: Purpose of Post 1 (Major Code)

0 = Not applicable

1 = Commemoration / Remembrance

2 = Mobilisation

3 = Information

4 = Drawing attention to grievances

5 = Promoting ideology

V9: Purpose of Post 1 (Minor Code)

1- Commemoration	2- Mobilisation	3- Information	4- Grievances	5- Ideology
101 = Martyrdom	201 = Announcing march/ rally	301 = Informing on security services activity	401 = Injuries and wounds	501 = Making demands of the government
102 = Anniversary of uprising	202 = Update on march/ rally underway	302 = Informing on other government activity	402 = Socio-economic issues	502 = Outlining ideological position / what group stands for
103 = Anniversary of imprisonment	203 = Informing on completed march/ rally	303 = Promoting new policy/ initiative	403 = Sectarian discrimination	503 = Affirming commitment to continuing opposition activities
103 = Other uprising event anniversary	204 = Announcing other protest activity	304 = Promoting new third party policy/ initiative	404 = Freedom of speech & assembly	504 = Expressing encouragement or appreciation
104 = Other anniversary	205 = Update on other protest activity underway[923]	305 = Informing on news item	405 = Other human rights issues	505 = Promoting achievements
105 = ʿĀshūraʾ	206 = Informing on completed other protest activity	306 = Appealing for information / volunteers	406 = Political prisoners	
	207 = Announcing social media campaign			

[923] Used if unclear whether activity is an organised march.

V10: Purpose of Post 2 (Major Code)

0 = Not applicable

1 = Commemoration / Remembrance

2 = Mobilisation

3 = Information

4 = Drawing attention to grievances

5 = Promoting ideology

V11: Purpose of Post 2 (Minor Code)

1- Commemoration	2- Mobilisation	3- Information	4- Grievances	5- Ideology
101 = Martyrdom	201 = Announcing march/ rally	301 = Informing on security services activity	401 = Injuries and wounds	501 = Making demands of the government
102 = Anniversary of uprising	202 = Update on march/ rally underway	302 = Informing on other government activity	402 = Socio-economic issues	502 = Outlining ideological position / what group stands for
103 = Anniversary of imprisonment	203 = Informing on completed march/ rally	303 = Promoting new policy/ initiative	403 = Sectarian discrimination	503 = Affirming commitment to continuing opposition activities
103 = Other uprising event anniversary	204 = Announcing other protest activity	304 = Promoting new third party policy/ initiative	404 = Freedom of speech & assembly	504 = Expressing encouragement or appreciation
104 = Other anniversary	205 = Update on other protest activity underway	305 = Informing on news item	405 = Other human rights issues	505 = Promoting achievements
105 = ʿĀshūraʾ	206 = Informing on completed other protest activity	306 = Appealing for information / volunteers	406 = Political prisoners	
	207 = Announcing social media campaign			

V12: Purpose of Post 3 (Major Code)

0 = Not applicable

1 = Commemoration / Remembrance

2 = Mobilisation

3 = Information

4 = Drawing attention to grievances

5 = Promoting ideology

V13: Purpose of Post 3 (Minor Code)

1- Commemoration	2- Mobilisation	3- Information	4- Grievances	5- Ideology
101 = Martyrdom	201 = Announcing march/ rally	301 = Informing on security services activity	401 = Injuries and wounds	501 = Making demands of the government
102 = Anniversary of uprising	202 = Update on march/ rally underway	302 = Informing on other government activity	402 = Socio-economic issues	502 = Outlining ideological position / what group stands for
103 = Anniversary of imprisonment	203 = Informing on completed march/ rally	303 = Promoting new policy/ initiative	403 = Sectarian discrimination	503 = Affirming commitment to continuing opposition activities
103 = Other uprising event anniversary	204 = Announcing other protest activity	304 = Promoting new third party policy/ initiative	404 = Freedom of speech & assembly	504 = Expressing encouragement or appreciation
104 = Other anniversary	205 = Update on other protest activity underway	305 = Informing on news item	405 = Other human rights issues	505 = Promoting achievements
105 = ʿĀshūraʾ	206 = Informing on completed other protest activity	306 = Appealing for information / volunteers	406 = Political prisoners	
	207 = Announcing social media campaign			

CODING INSTRUCTIONS: IMAGE DATA

Each of the three data sets, representing three different days of the year, to be analysed in separate spreadsheets.

Variable 1 (V1): ID number

Format: Date + Time of post, separate colour code and tab for each organisation.

[Day/Month/Year + Hour:Minute:Second] Al-Wefaq (Blue), February 14 (Yellow), Haqq (Green)

V2: Type of visual media

1 = Photograph

2 = Graphic

3 = Video

4 = Header/ Front page of official document

V3: Source of visual media

1 = Facebook

2 = Twitter

3 = Instagram

4 = YouTube

5 = Other[924]

V4.1 Does the visual media contain images of people? (Major code)

1 = Yes

2 = No

V4.2 Images of people- If yes, what is their gender? (Minor code)

1 = Male (individual or group)

2 = Female (individual or group)

3 = Mixed (group)

4 = Unidentifiable

[924] Links to other webpages, which may contain further visual media, are not included in this study. Only re-posts or embedded visual media from other social media sites, in which the image itself appears in the group's Facebook feed, are to be examined.

V4.3 Images of people- If yes, who are they? (Minor code)

If multiple people appear in the visual media, multiple categories can be selected.

1 = Non-violent protesters (engaged in a protest act without a weapon, not participating in clashes)

2 = Violent protesters or protesters engaged in clashes (including obstructive acts such as building road blocks, burning tyres)

3 = Injured or wounded people

4 = Political leaders- Government, royal family

5 = Political leaders- Opposition

6 = Shiʿi clerics (excluding leaders of political parties)

7 = Sunni clerics (excluding leaders of political parties)

8 = Uniformed police, army and security forces

9 = Images of the identifiably deceased, including martyrs

10 = Images of worshipers

11 = Unidentifiable

V4.4 Images of people- If yes, what are their names?

List the names of the individual/s if recognisable

V5.1 Does the visual media contain identifiably Shiʿi symbols or imagery? (Major code)

For example, Shiʿi clerics, maʾatams, mosques, clothing, prayer beads etc.

1 = Yes

2 = No

V5.2 Identifiably Shiʿi symbols or imagery- If yes, what are they? (Minor code)

1 = Cleric/s

2 = Buildings (Bahrain)

3 = Buildings (abroad)

4 = Clothing

5 = Items of devotion

6 = Banners

7 = Graffiti

V6.1 Does the visual media contain identifiably Sunni symbols or imagery? (Major code)

For example, Sunni clerics, mosques, clothing etc.

1 = Yes

2 = No

V6.2 Identifiably Sunni symbols or imagery- If yes, what are they? (Minor code)

1 = Cleric/s

2 = Buildings (Bahrain)

3 = Buildings (abroad)

4 = Clothing

5 = Items of devotion

6 = Members or insignia of the royal family

V7.1 Does the visual media contain identifiably nationalist symbols or imagery? (Major code)

For example, Bahraini flags.

1 = Yes

2 = No

V7.2 Identifiably nationalist symbols or imagery- If yes, what are they? (Minor code)

1 = Bahraini flags

2 = Model or banner of the Pearl Roundabout monument

3 = Map of Bahrain

4 = Images of secular/nationalist leaders (eg. from Waʿad party)

5 = National landmarks (eg. Manama World Trade Centre)

V8. Manifest content of visual media

Does the visual fit with one of the following mutually-exclusive categories:

1 = Non-violent political protest- Individuals marching or occupying a public space. Includes banners, posters or other political protest material.

2 = Non-violent religious event- Individuals marching or as part of a religious procession or undertaking prayer or a religious ritual in a public or private space. Includes banners, posters or other religious material.

3 = Other protest activity- Activism conducted in a private space, such as a political meeting or conference

4 = Violence or clashes- Individuals clashing with security forces or images of arrests and other security operations.

5 = Injuries- Display of wounds or injuries, including dead bodies.

6 = Environment- Image of a building, vehicle, street or other location with no people present.

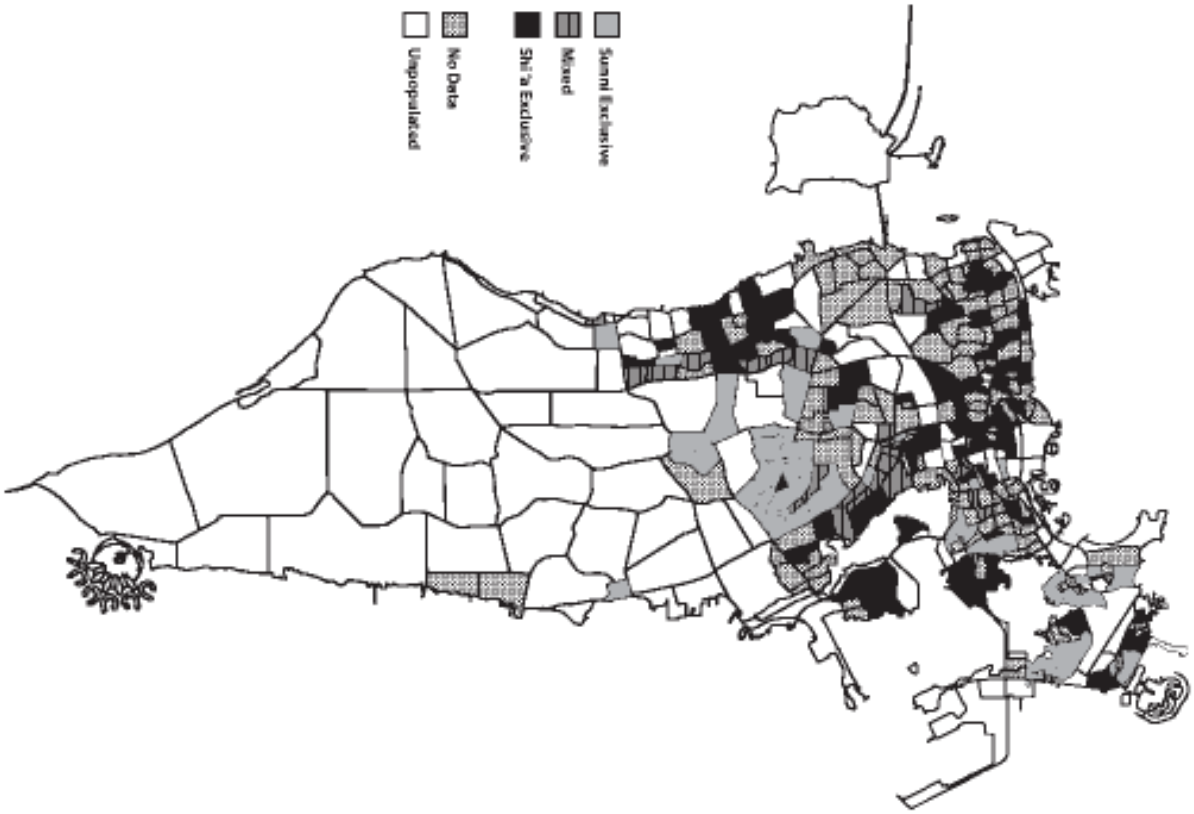
7 = Weapons- Display of weapons

8 = Martyrdom poster- Marking or commemorating an individual's martyrdom

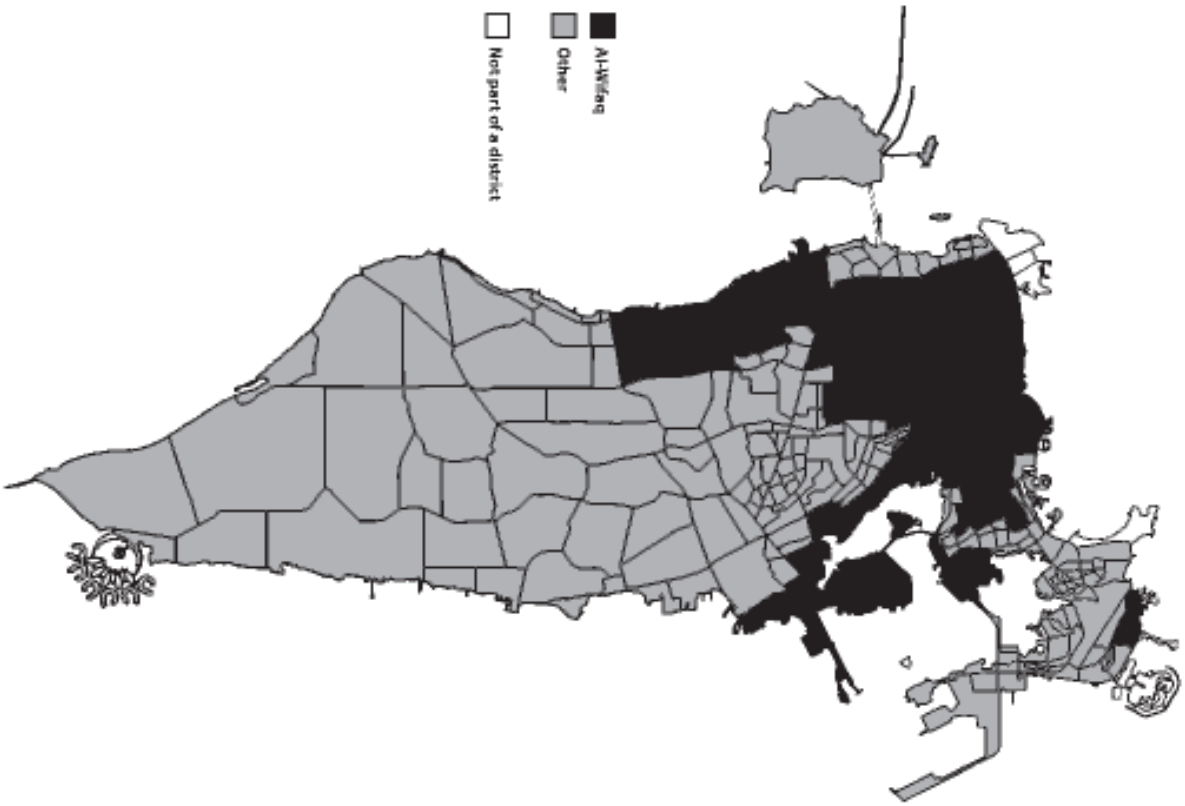
9 = Other

Appendix 2

Gengler's 'Confessional Map of Bahrain' and Map of 2010 Electoral Districts Won by al-Wefaq



Map 4.1. Confessional map of Bahrain.



Map 4.3. Map of Bahraini electoral districts, by 2010 winner.

Source: Gengler, Justin., 2015. *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.