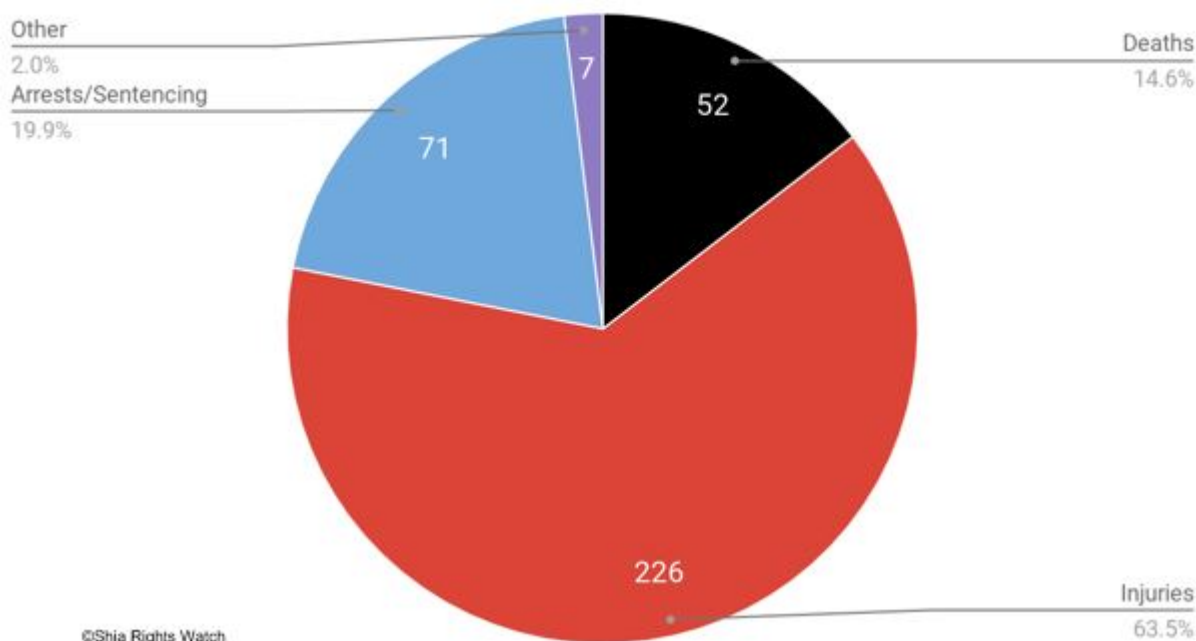


# Incidents of Anti-Shiism in February, 2018

February proved itself to be a much less violent month than January, with sources reporting 343 incidents of Anti-Shiism, half of last month's 673. However, the crackdowns on freedom of expression and incessant discrimination against the Shia population led to 52 deaths, 226 injuries, 71 arrests and harsh sentencing, and seven related anti-Shia actions, including but not limited to, sectarian slander, police brutality, and vandalism.

February Incidents



Anti-Shia incidents were witnessed in countries including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria, India, and Canada, while peaceful protests and essential meetings on religious tolerance were held in the United States, United Kingdom, and Italy.

## Saudi Arabia

The government of Saudi Arabia continues to crack down on the Shia minority through both passive and active means. The country stood witness to 3 arrests, and two corrupt trials resulting in harsh sentencing on Shia civilians.

This month, Saudi Arabian officials were caught creating and using some fake social media accounts which produced thousands of posts per day to propagate anti-Shia and sectarian sentiments. The statements are also used to drown out dissent on social media by spamming popular hashtags and media feeds.

In addition to social media attacks, three young men were taken into custody by Saudi regime forces on February 11<sup>th</sup>, after their home was raided without warning. Two brothers, Hani and Ali al-Faraj, and one minor Hussain al-Zanadi were arrested as Saudi forces continue their attacks on the Shia-majority Eastern Province.

On the same day, a Shia civilian was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by the Saudi court in Riyadh for alleged terrorism, and February 21st saw the death sentence handed down to another on 'security threat' charges.

## **Bahrain**

In the month marking the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2011 uprising, Bahraini Shia saw yet another month consumed by regime crackdown. The government continues to hold responsibility for the mistreatment experienced by its citizens through means of violence and systematic oppression. Bahrain has seen a slight turn away from violent Regime attacks, but has witnessed an increase of the Regime's brute force against the Shia population through a more hidden personification of oppression in the form of court sentences handed down to "security threats." The country saw 66 Shia Muslims jailed or sentenced in court, 25 of which had their citizenship stripped leaving them stateless; 2 were documented as injured from prison torture, and activists were met with police brutality in an attempt to silence human rights advocates.

Beginning on February 1<sup>st</sup> with the sentencing of 32 individuals in Bahrain's High Criminal Court, 1 defendant, Moosa Abdallah Moosa was sentenced to death as the alleged responsible party for a crime that occurred 3 years ago in 2015, while 13 defendants were handed down life sentences, 8 defendants were sentenced to 15-years imprisonment, 4 defendants received 3 to 5 years' imprisonment, and 6 individuals were acquitted; 25 of the 32 defendants were also stripped of their

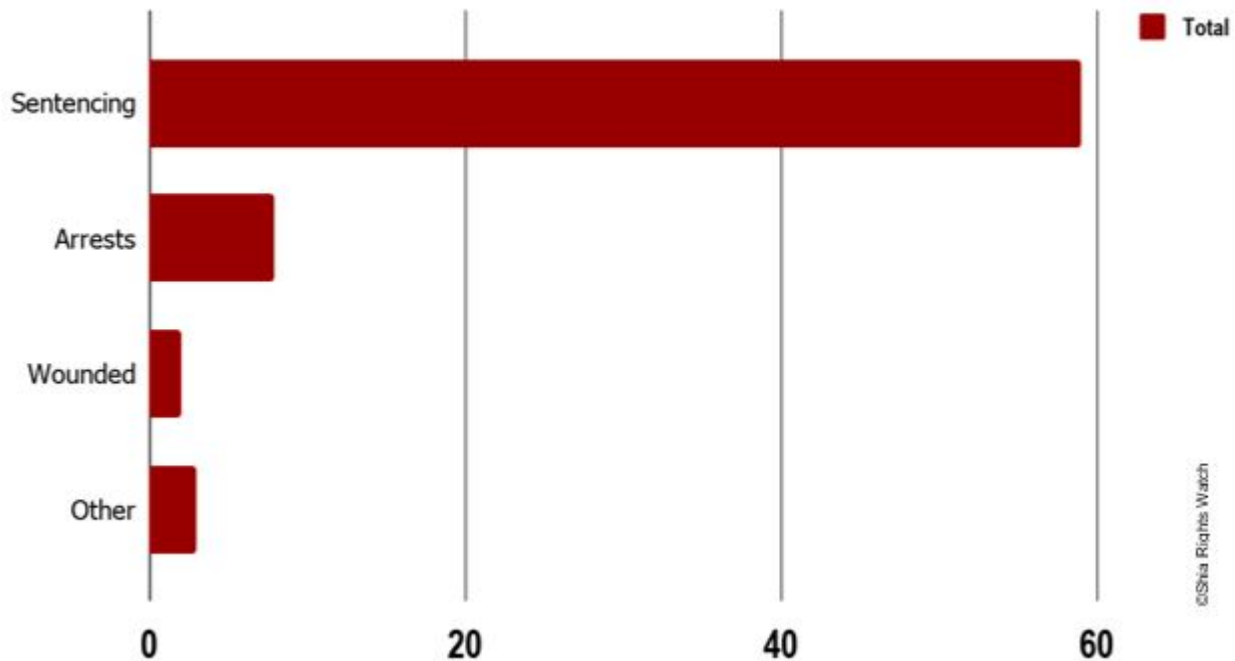
citizenship.

On the 1st of the month, 4 Bahraini citizens were also deported after the upholding of a 2012 sentencing that revoked their citizenship on the count of “damaging state security,” however, they were not informed as to what damage they imposed. Of the four deported were three brothers, Mohammed Ali, Abdul Amir, Abdalnabi Al-Mosawi and his wife, Maryam Redha. This deportation comes as the second half of 8 Bahraini citizens, 4 of which were deported two days prior on January 30<sup>th</sup>. This string of deportations shows an increasing abuse of power from the regime, as the generalization of what it means to be a “threat to state security” is unclear and leaves room for a significant amount of unfounded arrests and harsh sentences.

Ten others were sentenced by the court on February 6<sup>th</sup> and charged as anti-regime activists, guilty of multiple unfounded charges with, “forming “unlawful” gatherings of more than 5 people” among the few. 5 of the defendants were sentenced to 10 years in prison, and five were handed down five-year sentences.

President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Nabeel Rajab, was sentenced to an additional five years in prison over tweets that condemned the Saudi-led war in Yemen and Manama’s treatment of prisoners. He was arrested in 2016 and is currently serving a two-year sentence for “spreading rumors and false information” about the government in television interviews. His sentencing came after weeks of international condemnation of his imprisonment and calls for his release. The Manama court’s actions have been slammed by human rights organizations as a “mockery of justice.”

## Methods of Oppression (February 2018)



On February 21st, five family members, Amal, Iman and Fatima Ali, and two of their husbands, Mohsen Al-A'li and Ali Al-Shagal, were sentenced to 3 years in prison, each on politically motivated charges of "covering up for a wanted person." Madina Ali was also sentenced to three years on the same charges. Death sentences were issued against three more civilians, and several other citizens were sentenced to 15 years in jail after coerced confessions.

A 7-year jail sentence was upheld for a 22-year-old citizen accused of participating in the February 14<sup>th</sup> Coalition, and the al-Wafi Islamic Party; both of which are groups that publicly oppose the Regime's exclusive and discriminatory policies.

Bahrain saw a total of 7 arrests this month. Three citizens were arrested in the early hours of February 3rd after a security raid took place orchestrated by the Ministry of the Interior. The arrests were made on the basis of political accusations, exemplifying the Kingdom's policies that thwart free speech and whistleblowers of human rights violations. Of those arrested in the raids were Ali Mohammad Hassan and Abbas Jassim Bu Hamid from al-Malikiya village, and Mohammad Al-A'am from A'ali.

On February 25th, four more men were arrested after their homes were raided by security forces. The reason for their arrests has still not been disclosed.

Sheikh Isa al-Moemen, Shia cleric and Imam of al-Kheif Mosque in al-Dair village, was also placed under arrest this month and sentenced to 3 months in jail after being accused of inciting hatred against the regime in a sermon he delivered on July 29th, 2016. Moemen has already served a sentence from the same accusation verdict over an address he gave on August 5th, 2016, having experienced the Regime's unruly policies multiple times.

Behind bars, reports surfaced this month that citizens in Bahraini prisons are being abused, beaten to false confessions, and fed through containers that previously held cleaning supplies, exploiting a massive human rights concern and furthering the mistreatment of the imprisoned Shia majority.

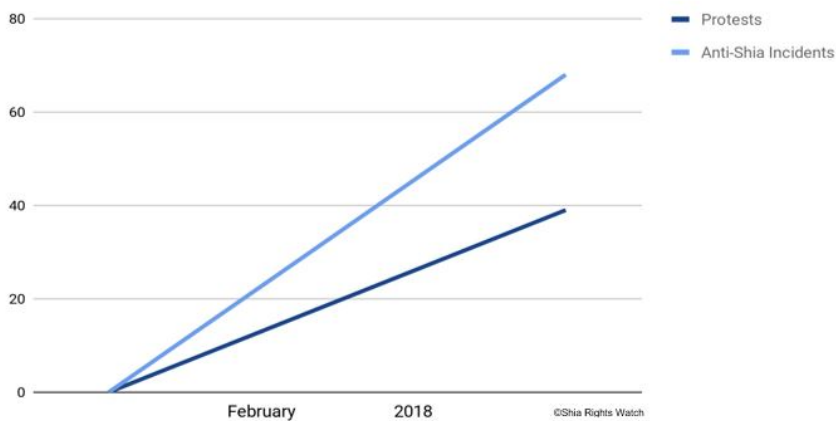
On the days before, and the days following the protests that marked the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2011 uprising, many demonstrations took place, and protesters were met with the brutal police force, used in an attempt to disperse those gathered to commemorate the ongoing battle for political justice and change. Police used tear gas to break up crowds resulting in injuries. However, the extent of these injuries is not known. Due to the lack of freely available medical attention to the Shia population, as well as the fear of Regime backlash, injured Shia protesters often go without medical care, allowing for the number of activists injured to remain unknown. Breaking up the peaceful protests to halt all public dissent against the regime is another way in which Shia Muslims are continually marginalized in Bahrain and denied their right to freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression was also halted this month in Bahrain as the ban on Friday prayer at the Imam Al Sadiq Mosque in Diraz, the largest Shia congregation, continued for the 85<sup>th</sup> consecutive week. Armored vehicles created a blockade outside of the building, along with concrete barricades and security checkpoints throughout the city.

A total of 72 Anti-Shia incidents occurred this month in Bahrain alone, adding to the sum of 569 this year so far. As activists continue to stand up for their rights and their beliefs, the government crackdowns continue to get more vicious. Freedom of speech or expression, when used to speak against injustices carried out by the Regime, is seen as a terrorist activity, "threat to national security," and slander. Shia in Bahrain are continuously unable to speak out and advocate for their rights due to the threat of jail, deportations, and death.

# Pakistan

Correlation of Protests to Anti-Shia Incidents



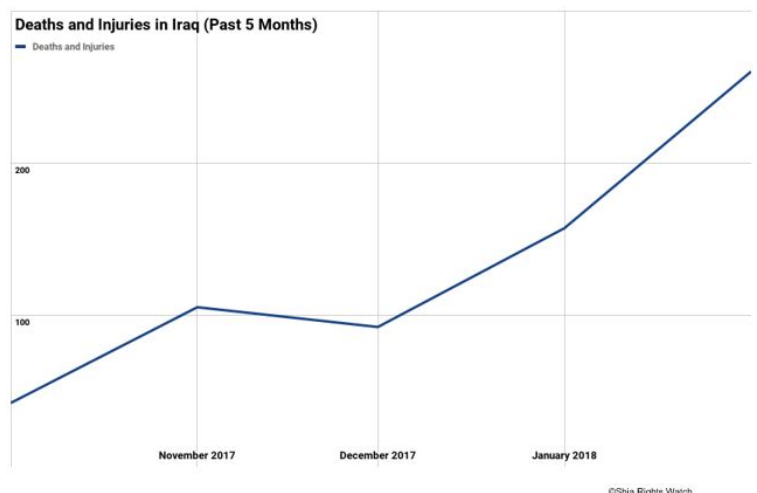
Pakistan's Shia Muslims are routinely the victims of anti-Shia extremist groups, which are met with a lack of government action, turning the situation into a free-for-all allowing anti-Shiism to flourish.

This pattern held true in February with two shootings; both carried out by takfiri terrorists belonging to the Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ; formerly Sipah-e-Sahaba) group, which resulted in the deaths of 2 civilians in the Dera Ismail region of Pakistan. Of the two men murdered were Iftikhar Hussain, and Motiullah, the custodian of Mohallah Shaheen Imam Bargah, a Shia place of congregation and ceremony.

The lack of government action to pursue and prosecute the terrorists involved in the attacks led to some massive, but peaceful, protests in the Dera Ismail region to draw attention to the injustices done by allowing the extremist cells to continue operating and targeting Shia Muslims without repercussion.

# Nigeria

Nigeria entered its second month of daily protests calling for the release of Sheikh Zakzaky, the head of Nigeria's Islamic movement who was arrested in 2015 and has been detained at an unknown location without charges since.



While the protests took place in a peaceful manner, some were still met with backlash and brutality leading to the arrest of some Shia protesters. Beyond arrests came the death of Sheikh Qaseem Umar Sokoto, who was shot by Nigerian Police while peacefully protesting for the release of Sheikh Zakzaky. Sokoto died two weeks later due to complications from his wound.

## **Iraq**

Iraq has seen a sudden jump in terror activity and strategic attacks in Shia-majority regions this year, stemming from a previously steady rise in civilian casualties and injuries as the efforts to push these groups out of the country grow stronger. Iraqi Shia were victims to some roadside bombings and other various attacks carried out by extremist groups this month, which caused 45 deaths and 198 injuries, averaging nine incidents per day.

Many bombings in Iraq target areas around the Shia-majority regions of Baghdad and the city of Ramadi, with militant groups typically targeting unsuspecting civilians at famous souqs or markets. This month, detonations of IED devices took the lives of 17 Shia Muslims and left an additional 73 severely wounded and hospitalized. Gunmen claimed the lives of 8, wounding 6, and targeted poisoning left 17 dead and 140 taken ill.

The poisoning took place on February 13th, after members of an anti-Daesh, Shia PMF coalition ate at a restaurant in the Shia area of al-Khalis in the province of Diyala. All members were rushed to the local hospital, with the more critical cases being transferred to centralized medical centers in Baghdad. The details of the poisoning itself currently remain under investigation, as mayor of al-Khalis, Adi Alkhaddran, called for an in-depth analysis of what is anticipated to be deemed an intentional attack.

In addition to bombings, extremist groups like Daesh also take part in the kidnapping and murder of civilian Shia Muslims. In a series of kidnappings this month, two Shia men fell victim to takfiri tactics and were found dead a day after they were kidnapped by the group.

One of the more hopeful events of February took place in Iraq as well, as the college of Jurisprudence at the University of Kufa organized a symposium to discuss rapprochement of the Shia and non-Shia sects of Islam. Dean of the

college, Dr. Waleed Farajallah hoped to seek effective inter-faith dialogue to create unity and clarify the image of Shia Muslims. The occurrence of this seminar is a positive step for the advocacy of

Shia rights and non-discrimination in Iraq.

## **USA/UK**

In the United States and the United Kingdom, protesters gathered outside of the Bahrain Embassy on February 14th to stand in solidarity with Bahrain's Shia Muslims and to commemorate the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2011 uprising.

Additionally, on February 6<sup>th</sup> in the UK, a group of activists protested outside of the Bahrain Embassy in London to demand the release of activist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, who is serving a life sentence over his role in pro-democracy protests in 2011.

Protests outside of Bahrain's borders draw international attention and recognition to the human rights violations at hand carried out against Shia Muslims. Raising awareness for the injustices Shia Muslims have, and continue to face on the mainstream media of Western countries gives an amplified voice to the Shia in Bahrain, among other countries, whose voices are met with the threat of persecution and left unheard.

## **Italy**

Various religious leaders, academics, and policymakers met with Pope Francis after a seminar titled, "Violence in the Name of Religion," which was organized by the UK-based Wilton Park Institute in cooperation with Pontifical Council for Interfaith Dialogue at the Vatican.

Al-Khoei stated "The Seminary in Najaf and the Supreme Religious Authority have played an essential role in disseminating tolerance and moderation while focusing on social justice, human rights and dignity regardless of religion, sect, and nationalism," in his speech directed towards academics and religious leaders from around the world.

International religious recognition of Shia rights, and an understanding and aim



to secure and protect those rights in the religious community provides oppressed Shia with a world-renowned community of support and advocacy for their freedom from persecution. The increasing amount of global acknowledgment to the prejudice faced by Shia creates an increasing pressure on government and religious authorities to reconcile their beliefs and policies with Shia Muslims both in their countries and abroad.

## **Canada**

Canada experienced an unusual case of anti-Shiism this month when prayer stones in University of Toronto praying room were vandalized and a letter was left stating:

*“To the Shia’s: No such thing as following Imam Ali.*

*And no such thing as using a stone for praying.*

*- Kind Regards.”*

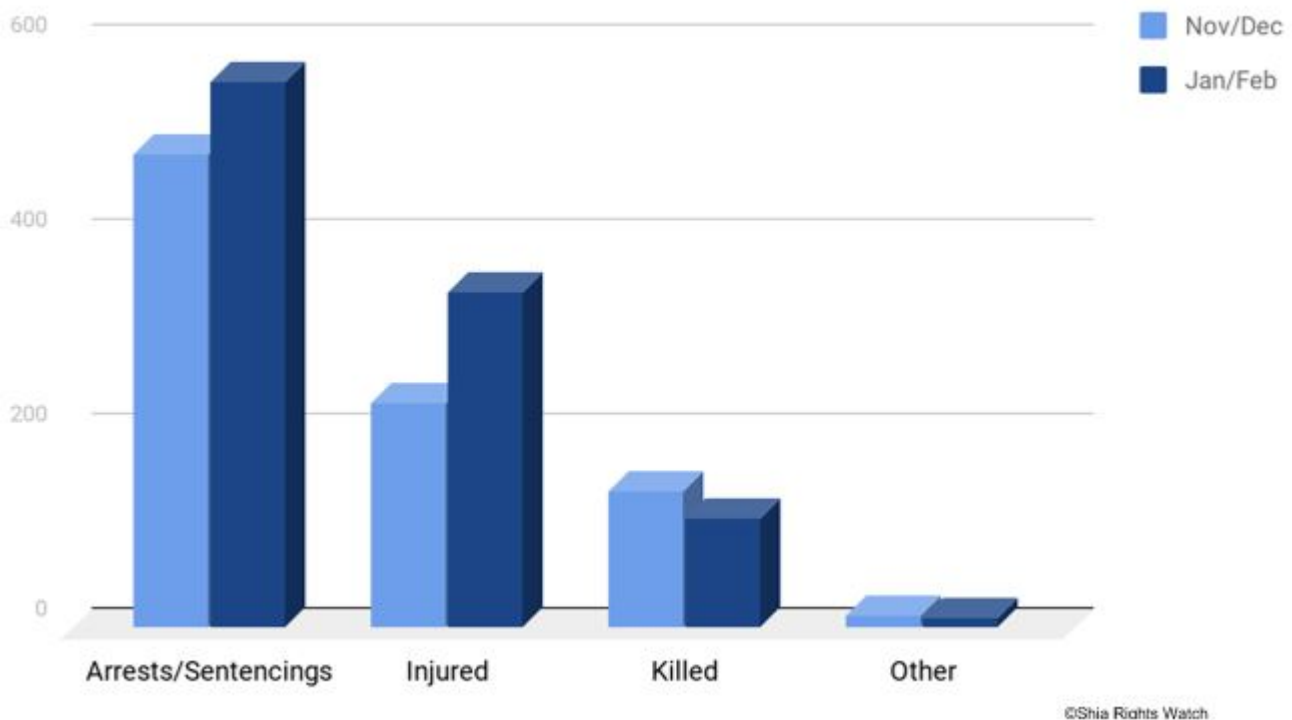
Aside from the hopeful international recognition of Shia Muslims, the public condemnations such as this are a constant reminder that there is much left to be done. While policies can be installed to lessen the suffering of Shia at the hands of government, and many governments do engage in non-discriminatory practices, ideology proves to be a much more difficult issue to tackle. Without a stress on religious tolerance, the mindsets that foster the poisonous thoughts of anti-Shia sentiments will continue to flourish. The problem of anti-Shia discrimination can not be solved unless the conversation of inclusive peace and acceptance is taught without fail in religious communities.

## **Conclusion**

The first two months of 2018 have seen a new spark in Anti-Shiism, seeing more incidents in January and February than the final two months of 2017, which were part of a steady decline of Anti-Shia episodes. This February, while significantly calmer than January, was riddled with twice as many injuries, and a similar number of deaths, giving way to the realities of repression and persecution that Shia Muslims experience on a daily basis. However, resiliently pursuing through

the hardships, Anti-Shia targeted acts were met by activists with peaceful protests against the injustices they face, using their voices and rising amid the threats of detainment and death.

### Anti-Shia Incidents



This new emergence of Anti-Shiism in 2018 exemplifies and emphasizes that there is still much work to be done to correct the systematic repression imposed by government institutions, as well as to correct the discriminatory mindsets and ideologies that inspire extremists to conduct attacks against Shia Muslims.

Freedom of expression is a key to lessen the suffering and discrimination endured by Shia Muslims, as silence creates complicity and complicity masks the issues at hand. Shia Rights Watch will continue to give a voice to those without, until every Shia Muslim has access to basic human rights and fair treatment.