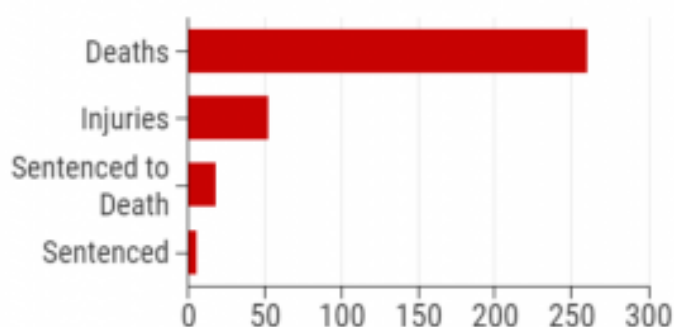


# Incidents of Anti-Shiism in July, 2017

## Monthly Analysis: July 2017

The 20 attacks that occurred in July left the Shia population in a position susceptible to human rights violations. Despite the overall decrease in casualties in July from June of 2017, 262 individuals were killed and 53 were wounded. These large numbers bare witness to the continued systematic targeting of the Shia Muslim population around the world. The violations of human rights range from arrest and detainment, to sexual abuse and torture in prisons, and as seen this month, mass execution.

### July 2017 Incidents



Shia Rights Watch (SRW) has compiled a list of the reported attacks that occurred in July, confirmed through extensive research and collaboration with Shia rights activists around the world. This report will detail the reported instances both physical and psychological, including deaths, injuries, sentencing, and tortures.

The cases detailed have occurred across several countries including: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Further attacks and human rights violations may have occurred in other places, however, this list consists of the cases recorded by SRW researchers. Incidents often go unreported due high risks and fear of attack and/or further social discrimination.

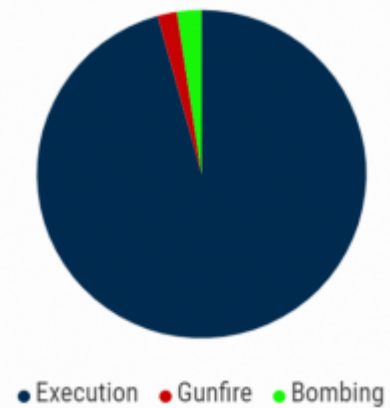
### Iraq

Fewer numbers of attacks and casualties have been reported in the month of July

in Iraq. However, the casualties are much larger due to isolated massacres conducted by ISIS in small pockets of power such as Tal Afar and Hawija. Tal Afar witnessed a systematic massacre of 200 civilians on July 5th. Such an attack can be explained as a way to reassert ISIS's dominance after their increasing losses in Mosul.

ISIS first declared Mosul its Islamic Caliphate in 2014, and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory in the city on July 9 after the strenuous three-year battle for control on. The Iraqi army forced the group to retreat from the city, and has pushed ISIS into cities like Tal Afar. The Islamic State is now consolidating power in Tal Afar and it remains the closest ISIS-controlled urban area the so-called caliphate that can be used to launch terror operations back into Mosul.

### Type of Violence in Iraq



To the southeast, the capital city of Baghdad witnessed seven attacks in July. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and adhesive explosive devices (AEDs) remain a reality in the city. This is a sharp decline from the twelve attacks in June which specifically targeted busy Shia areas. The cooling down of attack efforts may be attributed to the end of Ramadan, which ISIS claims to be the "holy month of Jihad."

The end of Ramadan, paired with the drastic decline in Islamic State power, may be the cause of the decreased number of attacks against the Shia population in July. However, the massacre at Tal Afar provides a grim portrayal of how ISIS might continue to operate as it loses control in areas throughout Iraq and maintains its control over its remaining footholds.

## Bahrain

The ethnic and religious backgrounds of Bahrain intertwine the political, economic, and social realms of influence. Bahrain is neighbored by the Middle East's most prominent Muslim nations: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the west, the Islamic Republic of Iran to the north and east, and the State of Qatar to the southeast. The influence from these powerful neighbors, along with the unique history of the region, explicate the ethnic and religious composition of the country. While the exact religious demographics are still unknown and a highly contentious issue, it is estimated that of the Muslim population, roughly 70% are Shia and 30% Sunni. Despite this uneven divide, the government is ruled by a Sunni royal family, and a human rights dilemma has emerged out of this power dynamic. The cases reported in July displayed the continuation of human rights violations against Bahraini Shia Muslims and the relentless government pushback against rising humanitarian concerns.

Prominent human rights activist Nabeel Rajab received a two-year sentence on July 10th after being accused of spreading 'fake news' about Bahraini authorities. This sentencing caused outrage by several human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and came shortly after the release of *Torture in Bahrain: A State Behavior & A Systematic Policy*, a report condemning the torture of prisoners by five human rights organizations within Bahrain.

Yousef Ali Riza reported sexual harassment by guards in his prison cell on July 3rd, the same day that Ebtisam al-Saegh was detained the second time for government criticism on social media. Al-Saegh was previously held in May where she reported torture and sexual assault. She started an open-ended hunger strike on July 11th, but by the 25th she was reported to have lost eleven kilos. Further diagnosis of her health showed a fracture in her right arm sustained from previous torture.

Continued reports of human rights infractions demonstrate the need for reform in Bahrain's treatment of prisoners and expose the need for global attention on this issue. The Bahraini authorities arrested Shia cleric Sheikh Hani al-Banaa' while he was visiting his detained son in Dry Dock Prison on July 3rd. Al-Banaa' was released after being held in the prison for nine days. Another prisoner, Hussein Mohamed Habib died on July 5th after being arrested and subjected to severe

torture and abuse in prison in March 2011.

Unfortunately, mistreatment of Bahraini citizens extends from what has occurred in prisons. On July 20th in the northwestern coastal town of al-Budaiya, state troopers stormed the house of Sheikh Bashar al-Aali and arrested the cleric without providing any reasons. Another situation occurred in July 28th, where Bahraini authorities charged 60 Shia for forming a group against the king. These individuals were accused of “forming a terrorist group,” and show the continued suppression of government opposition.

In addition to the reprehensible treatment of prisoners, many Bahrainis have lost their citizenship. By July 8th, 103 people had citizenship revoked or denied during 2017. On July 22, the wife of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Deqaq lost her citizenship after refusing to spy on her husband. The denial and revoking of citizenship has seemingly become the way in which the Bahraini government suppresses their critics. Loss of citizenship in combination with the growing detention of human rights advocates and their ill-treatment while in prison reinforces the regime’s systematic crackdown on minority populations and Shia Muslims in the country.

## **Pakistan**

Although less casualties have been reported in Pakistan since the end of Ramadan, the Shia minority feel no more secure. More than 2,000 Shia have been killed in Pakistan since 2002, and the incidents in July show this number continuing to rise. Groups like Lashkar-e-Jhagvi, an extremist Sunni militant group, have pledged: “all Shias are worthy of killing and the intention is to make Pakistan their graveyard,” according to an open letter they wrote to the Hazara people in Baluchistan.

Recently, two Shia brothers were arrested without declared charges, rendering the arrests illegal. There has yet to be a statement, but the two brothers are under “enforced disappearance,” according to local activist.

Also, just 25 miles south of Quetta, in Baluchistan, a group of Hazara Shia were on their way to the port city of Karachi on July 19. A drive-by shooter pulled up and riddled their vehicle with bullets. Three men and one woman were killed.

The fear generated by attacks similar to this one have caused some Shia to avoid traveling alone. Even the government fears that people of the Islamic sect travel

at their own peril. This July, around 1,000 Shia on their way back from pilgrimage from holy sites in Iran and Iraq found themselves unable to continue at the border between Iran and Pakistan in the border town of Taftan. The pilgrims found themselves with the option of having to continue through hostile territory that is extremely dangerous for Shia without protection. They refused, and the Pakistani government is currently rallying forces to send as escorts, but the effort is taking long. Conditions are breaking down, but the pilgrims would rather put up with the harsh environment than risk traveling through Pakistan unguarded.

Pakistan is growing increasingly dangerous to the livelihood of Shia Muslims. ISIS's growing influence in Afghanistan is emboldening Pakistani Deobandi groups to act in likeness with ISIS's cruelty. Their intention to annihilate the Shia population is daunting considering the Shia make up one third of Pakistan, but that's not discouraging some from picking them off little-by-little. The Pakistani government needs to further engage this issue by implementing special protection in Shia-dominated towns like Quetta in Baluchistan. If neglected, the issue can easily find its footing on a slippery slope to sectarian violence.

## **Saudi Arabia**

Al Awamiyah, in the Qatif region of eastern Saudi Arabia, remains a contentious town as Saudi forces maintain their siege. The town itself dates back to the Ottoman Empire 200 years ago, and the town's historic center is being demolished. The constant raids have injured large numbers of civilians, and Saudi forces have responded to protests with a tight crackdown against its opposition.

The Kingdom carried out four executions of Shia Muslims for their participation in protests in Al Awamiyah. This area has been under extreme lock-down since July 26th.

The Shia population has been promised safe conduct of leave. Before, however, soldiers milled the streets firing at anyone walking by. Vehicles packed with luggage exited the city hanging white T-shirts as white flags with hopes that soldiers won't fire upon said vehicle. A group of Asian migrants were forced to strip and lie on their stomachs in the middle of the street. Al-Musawarah, a neighborhood with structures dating back to the Ottoman Empire, is falling victim to Saudi bulldozers.

Saudi raids continue in the region, as just days later, two men were shot and

wounded on 11 July. On July 13th, a court in Saudi Arabia has postponed the trial of Shia cleric Sheikh Hussein al-Radhi over his pro-democracy comments as Riyadh presses ahead with its heavy-handed crackdown on members of the Shia community. In another raid on July 15th, Hassan Abdullah, Ja'far Mubayrik and 'Saadiq Darwish were killed by Saudi forces.

Saudi troops, equipped with heavy weapons, attacked Al- Awamiyah town, damaging and destroying several homes, business and historical sites. Residents were asked to stay home while the government shut down their internet and phone lines. Two Shia reported killed during the attack on July 26th. Just four days later, three men were killed in a raid in a parking lot. On July 29th, Saudi snipers shot and killed Ali Mahdi al-Sobeiti and Hussain Abdullah al-Sobeiti on the road to an Awamiyah.

The Saudi Arabian Supreme Court upholds the death sentences of 14 Saudi Shia after an unfair mass trial and it is a worrisome reminder of the country's lethal crackdown on dissent. Fourteen Shia waiting to be executed are following:

1. Hussain Muhammd al-Muslim
2. Muhammad Mansur al- Mansure
3. Mustafa Ahmad Darwish
4. Fazil Hussain Labbad
5. Saeed Mihammad al-Sakafi
6. Salman Amin al-Quraish
7. Mujtaba'a al-Sweikat
8. Muneer Abdulah al-Adam
9. Abdulah Salman al-Sarih
10. AbdulAziz Hassan al-sahwi
11. Ahmad al-Rabia
12. Ahmad Feisal al-Darwish
13. Hussain Hassan al-Rabia
14. Abdula Hani al-Tarif

The lack of proof of serious allegation is a serious development, as SRW, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International point out a sharp rise of death sentences for Shia Muslims carried out by the Kingdom.

## **Syria**

The town of Hama was home to death of two Shia women and the injury of 11 others as a suicide bomber detonated his vest. Sources report the diffusion of two other bombs at the site. The bomb caused extensive damage to the Imam Muslim Mosque and a bus station nearby.

In 2017 alone, there have been over 240 deaths as a result of anti-Shiism. The attacks were propagated by anti-Shia extremists taking advantage of the social and political distress in the nation.

## **Nigeria**

On Friday, 7 July, the Federal High Court in Nigeria rejected the suit of Shia cleric

Ibrahim Zakzaky. Zakzaky brought forth a suit through which he meant to sue the Nigerian government for \$5.6 million in damages over a December 2015 attack in which the Nigerian government killed 347 Shia Muslims including Zakzaky's three children in the city of Zaria in the northern state of Kaduna. The dead were then buried in a mass grave.

The Shia population is a small minority of the Muslim population. The demographics of all Nigeria include 50% Christians and 50% Muslims.

## **Afghanistan**

A car filled with explosives rammed into a bus and detonated killing 24 people and wounding 40. The attack occurred near a prominent Shia cleric's house, so it is unclear whether the bus was the actual target. June saw two other attacks targeting the Shia population.

The Hazara ethnic group make up a large portion of Afghanistan's Shia population. For decades, the Hazara have been under attack by extremist organization and have lived a marginalized life. Increased attention is needed on the case of Hazara's when addressing anti-Shiism in Afghanistan.

## **Kuwait**

Late July, Kuwaiti officials suspended license for a locally operated Shia TV station, ceasing their operations. While Kuwait historically has displayed

acceptance and inclusion for their Shia population, a recent increase in targeting of Shia media and scholars can be seen.

Shia Rights Watch is concerned of increasing actions limiting the freedom of speech in Kuwait.

## Conclusion

The month of July stood witness to just over 260 deaths and with 53 injuries as a result of anti-Shiism. SRW estimates the death rate to increase as many of those injured were in critical condition and treated in areas with limited medical resources.

Shia Muslims continue to live in fear as they are ostracized in their home nations, and arrests of Shia activists and scholars continue in the Gulf states and the surrounding nations. The increased incidents of anti-Shiism are consistent with those estimated in previous reports. With arrests and ill-treatment of prominent activists such as Ibtissam al-Saegh and Nabeel Rajab, anti-shiism remains as strong as ever.

### Types of Sentences



In Saudi Arabia, the siege in al-Awamiya continues. Despite international efforts, the death count continues to rise. Many of those killed by government shootings are women, children, and immigrant workers. Activists and humanitarians are standing up to the injustice, but are facing the backlash from governments and other major actors. Shia Rights Watch calls for governments across the region to increase protections on Shia and other religious minorities, and to reverse and stop all ill-treatment of these populations. SRW urges the Saudi government to reverse their sentences condemning fourteen protesters of the al-Awamiya raids



to death. Shia Rights Watch demands the release of all pro-democracy activists and religious scholars in the Gulf nations. Further, Shia Rights Watch condemns the siege on Awamiya and warns of the dangers of continued marginalization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and across the region.