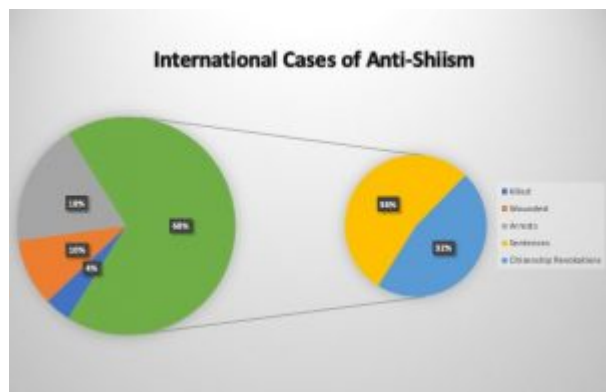


# Incidents of Anti-Shiism in May 2018

At 412 cases of violence against Shia Muslims, anti-Shiism continues to thrive in May. In the nations of Bahrain, Iraq and South Africa in particular, Shia Muslims face violence by their religious identity.



The month of May coincides with the holy month of Ramadan. Given trends of anti-Shiism in the past five years, Shia Muslims face great danger in the month of Ramadan as extremist organizations find fertile opportunities for targeting mass numbers of Shia individuals.

Incidents of anti-Shiism in May shed light on existing cultural discrimination and ostracization of Shia Muslims in different regions of the world, namely, the nations of Bahrain and South Africa.

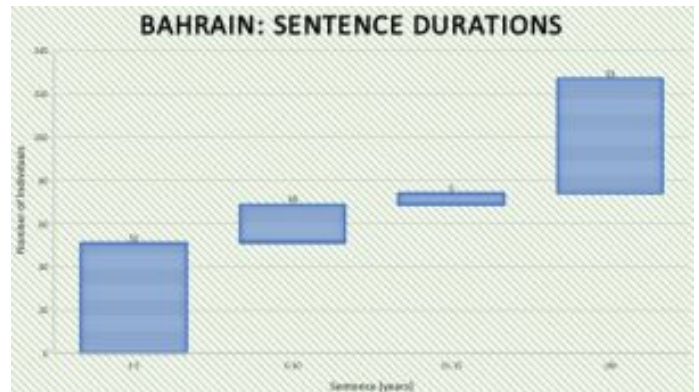
## **Bahrain**

In May, Taiba Darwish and Zainab Makki were released from detainment. Darwish was released after three years in Bahraini prison on charges of opposition. Makki's release comes after ten months- her case continues to be processed in the court system.

Despite the recent releases, the ever-prospering cultural and systematic discrimination that thrives in the Kingdom of Bahrain has caused an outcry in the Shia Muslim community. Seven years following the inception of the pro-democracy movement, sources report worsening living conditions for nationals. Both the conditions of activists and the conditions of civilians deteriorate in the wake of increased government anti-Shiism.

Ratification of new laws proves harsh sentencing for crimes only Shia Muslims

are accused of. Late in the month, the Bahraini Cabinet approved the change of punishment for possession and use of “flammable containers for threatening...” The punishment was increased to imprisonment for ten years. Shia Rights Watch notes a trend in increased harshness in punishment for charges mainly used against Shia Muslims, charges by which Bahraini officials have no evidence of.



Another restrictive measure taken in May is the approval of a bill preventing members of opposition groups from participating in elections by the Bahraini parliament. The bill awaits ratification by King Hammad bin Isa al-Khalifa.

Recruitment of foreign workers despite existing Bahraini workforce has not only changed the nation’s demographics, but it has also augmented unemployment rates. Late this month, the Ministry of Health announced employment of 70 medical doctors, a mere 18% of the total number of unemployed doctors reported by the ministry itself. It is important to note that unemployment rates among Shia Muslims are quadruple that among non-Shia Bahraini nationals.

Educated Bahraini elites report a severe lacking in job opportunities for them in the nation despite existing job positions. Some have settled for underpaid work positions while many have left Bahrain.

Changes in Bahraini immigration patterns and foreign worker enlistment serves not to better the Kingdom but to systematically limit the Shia population in the nation.

Shia Rights Watch raises concerns over growing restrictions that limit Shia Muslims from being active members in their homeland. Almost a decade after the strive for increased rights, life in Bahrain has yet to improve. Shia Rights Watch calls for increased international involvement in Bahrain can be found at [ShiaRightsWatch.org](http://ShiaRightsWatch.org).

## **Nigeria**

Protests continue in response to the lack of justice for Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky,

one of Nigeria's most prominent Shia figures. Shia Muslims in Nigeria gathered meters away from the National Assembly outside the National Secretariat Complex to raise awareness for the arrest of Sheikh Zakzaky and the failing state of Shia in Nigeria. However, contrary to their peaceful demeanor, protestors were met with utmost violence as police forces arrested 60 individuals, injuring 20 others by using excessive force.

Those arrested face harsh conditions of Nigerian detainment centers. They are further met with discrimination, and unjustified limitations in rights as the nation are home to extreme anti-Shia sentiment.

Detainment of Sheikh Zakzaky continues. His arraignment has been adjourned to June 21.

## **South Africa**

On the tenth of May, two individuals attacked Imam Hussain Mosque close to Durban, South Africa with a machete killing the religious leader of the mosque and injuring two others. Four days later, a bomb was found underneath the religious speaker's chair. The device was a phone attached to a "capsule via two cables." The device was neutralized before its detonation. Sources report the attackers spent days surveying the mosque as they posed as a member of the community.

Shia Muslims make up 3% of the South African population. With over 200 non-Shia Muslims religious centers in the area, the targeting of the only Shia center and the extent of the violence used by the assailants note extreme anti-Shiism.

South African Shia note that anti-Shia sentiment in the area is not new but is exhibited prevalently. Local sources report entities announcing to boycott Shia lead businesses. Postings such as "If you kill a Shia you go straight to heaven" are put on Facebook accounts and aired on local radio talk shows.

Threats to Imam Hussain Mosque awakened outcry of Shia and non-Shia communities. Amid fears of sectarian violence, non-Shia entities in South Africa took to disown a media posting in circulation that encouraged targeting of Shia Muslims. The post began: "When walking in the street, or in public places, it's becoming increasingly important to become vigilant as to who may be a Shi'ah, and who may be not. Here are some general guidelines..."

Acknowledgment of anti-Shia posts points to the fact that non-Shia entities in the area were aware of propagation of hatred against the Shia community and yet they did not act to prevent escalation of anti-Shia sentiment into direct violence.

Recent events in South Africa point to a lack of preventative measures for anti-Shiism. Hate-driven sentiment such that of media posting calling for the identification of Shia Muslims creates fertile grounds for direct violence against this community. Given the mass reaction to attacks to Imam Hussain Mosque, Shia Rights Watch notes that anti-Shiism in this region has been recognized by all, yet no action to promote peace has been taken by community leaders.

Shia Rights Watch calls upon local South African leaders to initiate dialogue and peace - management opportunities in their area with aims of eliminating anti-Shiism.

## **Iraq**

May coincided with the start of the holy month of Ramadan. Trends of violence in Iraq continue as they have in previous years in that extremist organizations continue to target Shia Muslims. On May 23rd, a bomber detonated his explosive device at the entrance of Saqlawiyah park in Baghdad killing seven and injuring 16 others. The park is famous for post-Iftar (breaking of fast) outings. The analysis shows the placement of the bomb was strategically located in an area densely populated with Shia Muslims.

The explosion was similar to that of May 2017 in which as detonation in Karrada Baghdad, mid-Ramadan, in which 80 were killed.

Terror organizations such as ISIS continue to target Shia individuals



Ahmed Haseeb and Noor Behjat-  
ISIS Footage

traveling to and from Iraq. Ahmed Haseeb and his nephew Noor Behjat, two Swedish nationals of Iraqi ethnicity were beheaded by ISIS extremists in a video published by the group. The pair were kidnapped on their way to the airport in Baghdad in December while on pilgrimage.

In comparison to May 2017, Shia death in Iraq has reduced parallel to the overall violence in the nation. While widespread annihilation of Shia populations by extremist groups such as ISIS has diminished, isolated incidents of violence point to existing anti-Shia sentiment amongst extremist organizations active in the nation.

## **Conclusion**

The first five months of 2018 stood witness to 2,573 cases of anti-Shiism. Incidents include death, detention, discrimination, and denial of freedoms systematically or culturally. Anti-Shiism is a conflict at an international scale, affecting both political and grassroots dynamics. Further, the lack of justice for victims of violence have created opportunities for even more targeting of Shia Muslims. Shia Rights Watch calls upon grassroots organizations to work within local communities to battle hate-driven sentiment against all minority groups and invites international efforts to eliminate anti-Shiism worldwide.