

# The Bahrain Uprising, Seven Years Later

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In 2011, Bahraini citizens joined the regional fight for freedom. Thousands of Bahraini nationals came together, protesting the nation's unequal distributions of jobs, housing, and political power. They asked for a new constitution that would allow people to be more involved in their nation-state. Initially, the uprising consisted of Shia and non-Shia Bahrainis. The conflict in Bahrain was not religious at its core- it was a demand for equal human rights.

However, unlike other uprisings in the area, Bahraini dissent received no international support. Moreover, protesters were met with the utmost violence. Within months, 1,500 Saudi Arabian and Emirati troops flooded the country. Furthermore, Pakistani and British intelligence services were recruited to assist torture in prisons. Protesters, their families, doctors who treated them, lawyers who represented them, a journalist who reported their stories and even members of the parliament that hinted support for them were detained. Shia towns were isolated and restricted in the passage.

Soon it became apparent that the Bahraini folks were on their own in the fight for human rights. Although they had a lot to lose, Bahraini activists stood steadfast in their demand for change- what was once a call for equality became a campaign for identity recognition.

Since its inception, the struggle in Bahrain has led to cases of human rights violations. Violations are in the form of citizenship revocations, lack of due process, denial of freedom of expression and religion.

### **Systematic Discrimination**

Once the spark of revolution spread through the kingdom, the Bahraini

government took active steps to limit the citizenship of Shia Muslims. Not only was the Bahraini Constitution and recognized United Nations treaties ignored, but amendments were also made to justify the brutal denial of human rights in response to dissent.

Within the first years of the uprising, the Bahraini Parliament added 22 amendments to the “Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts” of 2006. The 2006 law defined “obstructing the public authorities [...] from doing their work” and “harm[ing] National Unity” as terrorism. The law further increased the power of the public prosecution, allowing them to detain and question without due-process.

The amendments, made in 2013, allowed “the security bodies all required and appropriate powers to protect society from terrorist incidents and prevent spreading them.” The changes allowed authorities the liberty of defining “terrorist crimes” and instigation of such activities even harsher than the original law. Protests against government injustice became identified as civil disobedience and were met with the utmost violence. With aims of limiting room for obloquy, trials were held behind closed doors without legal defense representation.

In 2013 alone, the government handed approximately 2450 years worth of prison sentences under the new laws.

So-called, “anti-terror” efforts became even more questionable when a royal decree amended juvenile delinquency to include participation in public gatherings and sit-ins, justifying the arrest of minors. Shia Rights Watch approximates over 450 minors were detained calling into question Bahrain’s ratification of the Convention of Rights of a child in 1992.

The changes in the government’s constitution after the Arab Spring systematically criminalized Shia Muslims. The anti-congregation laws fueled already existing anti-Shia sentiment and were used to limit Shia religious processions and congregations. Thus, what began as an aim to suppress dissent became an active targeting of Shia Muslims religious identity.

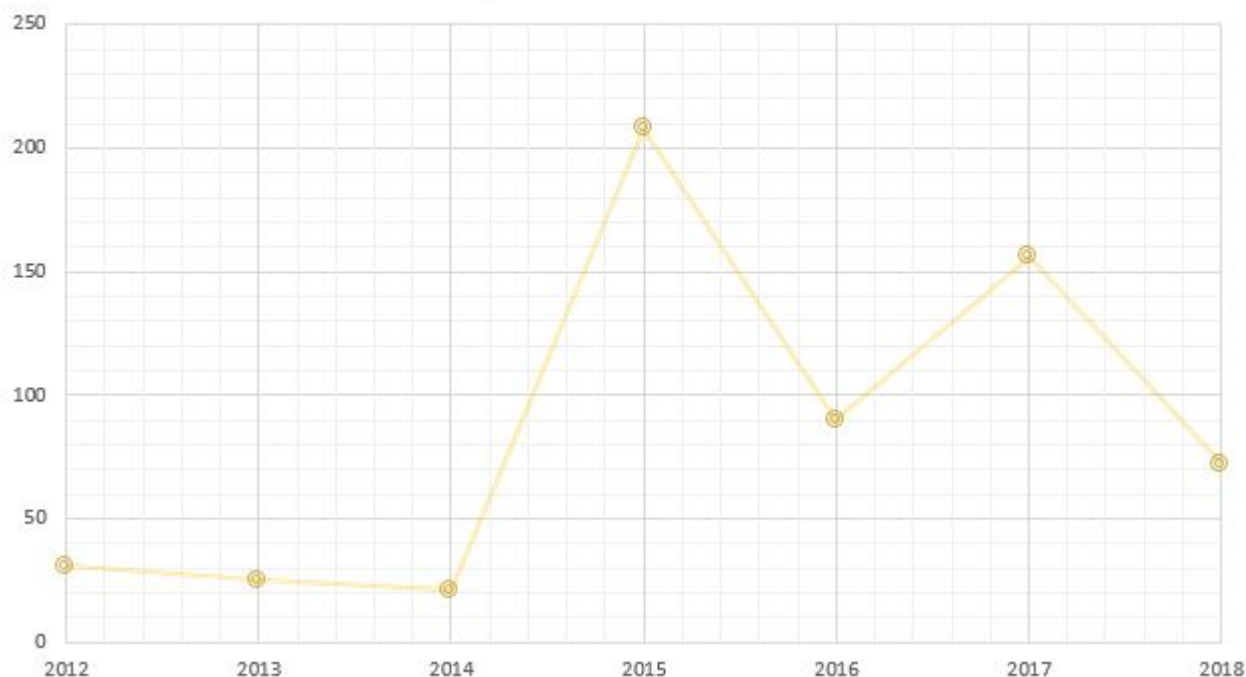
## **Citizenship Revocation**

Article 15 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to a nationality... no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality.” Nationality is critical in defining one’s identity. Recognized nationality in the form

of citizenship is a gateway for a diverse range of privileges. Such privileges can be as simple as the power to open bank accounts or as significant as healthcare.

Nationality by birth, to a certain degree, is hereditary. The national citizenship of a parent can influence the range of opportunities available to future generations.

Citizenship Revocation: 2012-2018



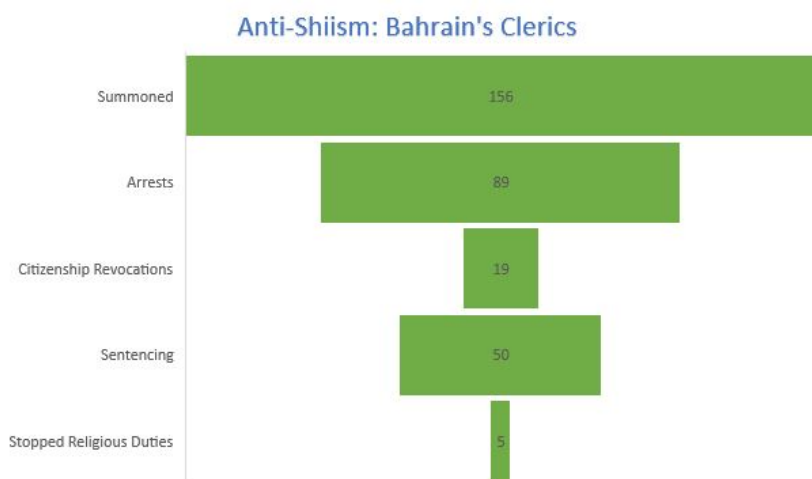
Despite it being recognized as a human right, citizenship is determined by State authorities. To limit dissent, the Bahraini government forced a total of 578 Shia citizens into statelessness by revoking their citizenship. The decision was justified by the Terrorism Act and a 2014 amendment to Article 10 of the Bahraini Citizenship law which grants the power to revoke citizenship to the Ministry of Interior on charges of “causing damage to the interests of the state,” “undermining state security,” and disloyalty. It must be mentioned that said changes in governance themselves undermine the Bahraini Constitution which states, “Bahraini nationality shall be determined by law. A person inherently enjoying his Bahraini nationality cannot be stripped of his nationality except in cases of treason and other cases as prescribed by law.”

Those stripped of their citizenship are ordered to turn in their legal identification such as passports to legal authorities. The lack of documentation dramatically affects the lives of these individuals and their families. Within the country, they cannot buy property, obtain jobs, or even apply for social services for their children. On the other hand, they are also restricted from moving out of the

country. They do not have a nationality to base visa applications upon, nor do they have documentation to travel with.

Despite efforts, revoking citizenship has not silenced criticism of Bahrain's government. Not only has revocations increased momentum for humanitarian advocacy, but it has also created a spotlight for international attention.

## Lack of Due Process



Sources report, citizenship revocations are merely announced on state news. Those charged under alleged actions of "terrorism" or "disloyalty" are denied opportunities to refute or repeal such decisions. One such source states, "I do not even know

which of my activities led to such charges." Ambiguity in laws about citizenship and terrorism allow for a great deal of power for the government. Because revocations are mainly under the power of the Ministry of Interior, they are not "under judicial control," thus they cannot even be repealed.

The lack of due process is real for those who are arrested and detained. A significant portion of arrested occurs through unwarranted community raids. Those taken are detained unlawfully for long periods of times in which they undergo extensive torture. The Bahraini Constitution states "no persons shall be subjected to physical or mental torture or inducement, or undignified treatment..." and "any statement or confession proved to have been made under torture, inducement, or such treatment, or the threat thereof, shall be null and void." However, countless Shia Muslims have been charged with confessions made under extensive torture. Numerous detainees have died as a result of said tortures.

A systematic review of Bahrain's dissent cases shows high-level police brutality towards Shia protesters. Those arrested are met with great violence. One example of harsher than the usual due process is the trying of Shia civilians in

military courts. In early to mid-2017, a law was ratified allowing military tribunals to try and convict civilians charges with threatening of the Kingdoms safety.

Such conditions are void of age and gender restrictions. Time and time again have Bahraini officials arrested, detained and tortured minors on allegations of political involvement. In addition to physical violence, sources report incidents of sexual assault to male, female and minor detainees.

## Restriction of Basic Freedoms

While the conflict in Bahrain began in response to the demand for equality, ongoing violence sheds light on extensive anti-Shia sentiment within the Bahraini government. What started as a crackdown on dissent has advanced to restrictions

on the religious expression of religion. SRW reports over 320 incidents of anti-Shiism against Shia clerics or religious leaders. Incidents are inclusive of summonings,

arrests, citizenship revocations, life and death sentences and restrictions in religious duties. When summoned, numerous clerics report being questioned on the content of their speeches, ideological tendencies, political views.

Major religious leaders such as Shiekh Isa Qasim and Sheikh Hussein Najati have been subject to direct violence by authorities. Shiekh Qasim remains under house arrest despite deteriorating health.

## Bahrain: A Priority

One of the most prolonged Arab Spring revolutions, Bahrain has reached its 7th anniversary. Ongoing violence and the lack of international attention has shed light on the dissonance between humanitarian action and humanitarian belief. Nations who have stood for democracy in countries such as Libya, Tunisia, and Syria have ignored the struggle of Shia Muslims in the Gulf. It must be recognized



that the conflict in Bahrain has led to regional unrest that could have been prevented had the Shia Muslims of Bahrain been given a safe venue for self-expression. Instead, the lack of international support and the crackdown of the Bahraini government has riled conflict secondary to the original movement.

Shia Rights Watch calls for a spotlight on anti-Shiism in Bahrain. Pro-democracy initiatives in the nation must be empowered, and avenues of communication between the Bahraini government and Bahraini Shia must be bolstered. Reports from previous meetings between the government and its critics show a lack of legitimacy given to such efforts. Critics state low government participation and even lower levels of change post-dialogue. Increased international attention on peace-building endeavors hold parties accountable and drive palpable change.

Further, international organizations must establish a cohesive definition of terrorism that serves to protect all walks of life as opposed to being used to quell freedom of speech and target a determined few.

Reform in Bahrain must become a multi-industry, international dialogue. Bahrain's lack of stability reduces prosperity in regional business efforts. Deportations and citizenship revocations create changes in regional demographics and can even influence immigration statistics in the international community. Many of those under abuse in Bahrain are holders of dual-citizenships, yet they are detained and prevented from travel. In order to reduce the pervasion of conflict repercussions out of Bahrain, international entities must be actively engaged in monitoring ongoing violence in the nation.