

Bahrain

Ethnicity in Bahrain

Group selection

In 2005, the total population of Bahrain was estimated at about 800,000 inhabitants with a share of 485,000 Bahraini citizens. Among the latter, we identify the **Sunni Arabs** and the **Shi'a Arabs** as politically relevant groups. Relative population figures for the two relevant ethnic groups were given as follows: 70% Shiites and 30% Sunni (²⁰⁷), (²⁰⁸), (²⁰⁹). (Nasr put the estimate for Shiites at more than 70% (²¹⁰, 234-6).) In 2017, the total population was 1,4 mio. inhabitants. According to UN data of 2015, immigrants made up approximately 50% of the total population (²¹¹). This ratio is taken into account when coding the group sizes of the native Bahraini. Thus, the percentage of Bahraini Shi'a Arabs is given at 35% and the respective figure for Bahraini Sunni Arabs at 15%.

²⁰⁷ [International Crisis Group, 2007]

²⁰⁸ [Library of Congress, 1993]

²⁰⁹ [US Department of State, 2006]

²¹⁰ [Nasr, 2006]

²¹¹ [Central Intelligence Agency, 2017]

Power relations

Sunni Arabs

Bahrain was ruled by the the Sunni al-Khalifa family since independence in 1971. Since their conquest of the archipelago in 1783, the al-Khalifa family had established dynastic and absolute rule in Bahrain (²¹²). According to Freedom House (2010), “the king appoints all judges, and courts have been subject to government pressure. Members of the royal family hold all security-related offices” (²¹³). Despite some efforts to reform the political system in 1973 and again in 2001, the power of the royal family remained untouched until 2017. The Bahraini government and security apparatus were exclusively made up of Sunnis from Bahrain and from other countries. Reports suggested that the government conducted a “campaign of political naturalization of foreign Sunnis” to alter the country’s ethnodemographic balance in its favour (²¹⁴). Under the al-Khalifa regime, only Sunnis of the royal family could ever attain executive political power. Therefore, a Monopoly coding for this group is legitimate.

²¹² [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

²¹³ [Freedom House, 2010]

²¹⁴ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

Shi'a Arabs

Since access to executive political power is impossible for Shiites under the current political system, they are coded as discriminated. If anything, recent years saw a deterioration of the sectarian divide and repression against the mostly Shiite opposition (²¹⁵). Elections were held in 2014 but the Shi'a majority clearly remained under-represented in both the parliament and the cabinet (²¹⁶). Further, there were reports of discrimination against Shi'a Muslims such as arbitrary detention of political leaders or the crackdown of peaceful protests (²¹⁷). Some were even stripped of their citizenship, leaving them stateless (²¹⁸). Therefore, the coding for Shi'a remained Discriminated up to the current coding period.

²¹⁵ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

²¹⁶ [US Department of State, 2016]

²¹⁷ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

²¹⁸ [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Bahrain

From 1971 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Shi'a Arabs	0.35	DISCRIMINATED
Sunni Arabs	0.15	MONOPOLY



Figure 39: Political status of ethnic groups in Bahrain during 1971-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Bahrain

From 1971 until 2017



Figure 40: Map of ethnic groups in Bahrain during 1971-2017.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Shi'a Arabs	630	Statewide
■	Sunni Arabs	630	Statewide

Table 17: List of ethnic groups in Bahrain during 1971-2017.