

**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 (<sup>238</sup>), (<sup>239</sup>), (<sup>240</sup>). (Nasr put the estimate for Shiites at more than 70% (<sup>241</sup>, 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 (<sup>242</sup>). 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%.

<sup>238</sup> [International Crisis Group, 2007]

<sup>239</sup> [Library of Congress, 1993]

<sup>240</sup> [US Department of State, 2006]

<sup>241</sup> [Nasr, 2006]

<sup>242</sup> [Central Intelligence Agency, 2017]

## *Power relations*

### *Sunni Arabs*

Bahrain has been ruled by the the Sunni Al-Khalifa family since independence in 1971. Since their conquest of the archipelago in 1783, the Al-Khalifa family established dynastic and absolute rule in Bahrain (<sup>243</sup>). 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” (<sup>244</sup>). Despite some efforts to reform the political system in 1973 and again in 2001, the power of the royal family has remained untouched. The Bahraini government and security apparatus are exclusively made up of Sunnis from Bahrain and other countries. Reports suggest that the government conducted a “campaign of political naturalization of foreign Sunnis” to alter the country’s ethno-demographic balance in its favour (<sup>245</sup>, <sup>246</sup>, <sup>247</sup>). 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.

<sup>243</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

<sup>244</sup> [Freedom House, 2010]

<sup>245</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014]

<sup>246</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

<sup>247</sup> [US Department of State, 2019]

### *Shi'a Arabs*

Since access to executive political power is impossible for Shiites under the current political system, they are coded as Discriminated. Elections were held in 2014 but the Shi'a majority clearly remained underrepresented in both the parliament and the cabinet (<sup>248</sup>). Fur-

<sup>248</sup> [US Department of State, 2016]

ther, there were reports of discrimination against Shi'a Muslims including the arbitrary detention of political leaders and the crackdown of peaceful protests (<sup>249</sup>). Some were even stripped of their citizenship, leaving them stateless (<sup>250</sup>). If anything, recent years saw a deterioration of the sectarian divide: “The dominant political role of the royal family, and political, economic and social inequality, most notably between Sunni and Shi'a groups, remain major catalysts for popular unrest. Due to the intense repression by the state, moderate voices among the Shi'a opposition have become weaker, while more radical forces, including ultra-conservative Sunnis, are on the rise” (<sup>251</sup>). Therefore, the coding for Shi'a has remained Discriminated.

<sup>249</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

<sup>250</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2017]

<sup>251</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

# *Bibliography*

- [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014] Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2014). Transformation Index BTI 2014. Bahrain. Retrieved on 29.05.2014 from: [www.bti-project.org/reports/country-reports/mena/bhr](http://www.bti-project.org/reports/country-reports/mena/bhr)
- [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016] Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2016). Transformation Index BTI 2016. Bahrain. Retrieved on 19.09.2017 from: <http://www.bti-project.org/de/berichte/laenderberichte/detail/itc/BHR/>
- [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020] Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2020). Transformation Index BTI 2020. Bahrain. Retrieved on 20.08.2020 from: <https://www.bti-project.org/de/berichte/country-report-BHR.html>
- [Central Intelligence Agency, 2017] Central Intelligence Agency. (2017). The World Factbook. Bahrain. Retrieved on 19.09.2017 from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html>
- [Freedom House, 2010] Freedom House. 2010. Freedom in the World 2010. Country Reports. Bahrain. Retrieved on 06.04.2011 from: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/bahrain>
- [International Crisis Group, 2007] International Crisis Group. (2007). Bahrain's sectarian challenge. Retrieved on 06.04.2011 from: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iran-gulf/bahrain/040-bahrains-sectarian-challenge.aspx>
- [Library of Congress, 1993] Library of Congress. (1993). Bahrain - a country study. Retrieved on 06.04.2011 from: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+bh0022\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+bh0022))
- [Minority Rights Group International, 2017] Minority Rights Group International. (2017). World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Groups. Bahrain. Retrieved on 20.09.2017 from: <http://minorityrights.org/country/bahrain/>
- [Nasr, 2006] Nasr, V. (2006). The Shia revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future. New York: W.W. Norton.

- [US Department of State, 2006] US Department of State. (2006). Bahrain - international religious freedom report 2006. Retrieved on 06.04.2011 from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71419.htm>
- [US Department of State, 2012] US Department of State. (2012). Bahrain - international religious freedom report 2012. Retrieved on 01.06.2014 from: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=208384>
- [US Department of State, 2016] US Department of State. (2016). Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016. Bahrain. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Retrieved on 19.09.2017 from: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=265492>
- [US Department of State, 2019] US Department of State. (2019). Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019. Bahrain. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Retrieved on 20.08.2020 from: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/bahrain/>

*Political status of ethnic groups in Bahrain*

*From 1971 until 2021*

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

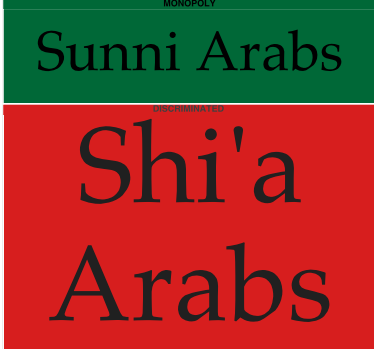


Figure 46: Political status of ethnic groups in Bahrain during 1971-2021.

# *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Bahrain*

*From 1971 until 2021*

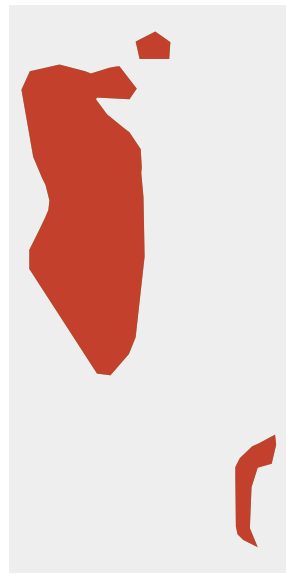


Figure 47: Map of ethnic groups in Bahrain during 1971-2021.

	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■	Sunni Arabs	629	Statewide
■	Shi'a Arabs	629	Statewide

Table 21: List of ethnic groups in Bahrain during 1971-2021.